

What would crime be without anonymity and conspiracy? The Barbie Liberation Organization (B.L.O.), Bureau of Inverse Technology (B.I.T.), and the Institute for Applied Autonomy (I.I.A.) have all taken the form of anonymous cadres in creating media and technology-driven art with a subversive edge.

In 1993 the B.L.O. purchased hundreds of Teen Talk Barbie and Talking GI Joe dolls from toy stores across the U.S. Switching the voice boxes of these two dolls, the group then (to use their jargon) committed "shopgiving," surreptitiously returning the altered dolls to store shelves. The resulting media coverage along with the organization's own TV news parody of the caper was subsequently edited into a video project. The spirit of the B.L.O. went on to influence the subversive web-based critical media group e-toy (not to be confused with the online toy marketing venture e-toys that recently went bankrupt). E-toy expanded its activities to include projects such as subverting Blockbuster Video's controversial policy of removing sections from films that they deem offensive without telling the customer. E-toy "operatives" rented the edited movies, replaced the missing footage, and then quietly returned them to Blockbuster's shelves.

As with many revolutionary groups, e-toy itself has fractured into a number of competing factions. One of these, [V]ote-Auction.com (now administered by the German-based artist collective ubermorgen) has tackled the issue of corruption in political campaign financing by creating a website where average citizens can buy and sell votes. Beginning with the 2000 U.S. Presidential contest, [V]ote-Auction provided a credible vehicle for "the little guy" to compete just like special interest groups and big business does for political favoritism. Created to make a point more than to meaningfully sway the election, the legal system took their perceived threat at face value, illegally shutting down their website without due process, and threatening criminal prosecution unless they ceased their activities. Working in a similar vein as Gregory Green and Negativland, ubermorgen has incorporated ephemera from their legal proceedings into their project, expanding the meaning of the work through its legal content.

With projects like [V]ote-Auction, the Internet provides an opportunity for individuals to have a voice in a world where media access is increasingly controlled by government and corporate interests. But in the era of electronic and computer communication, what has happened to one of the oldest unauthorized forms of free speech?