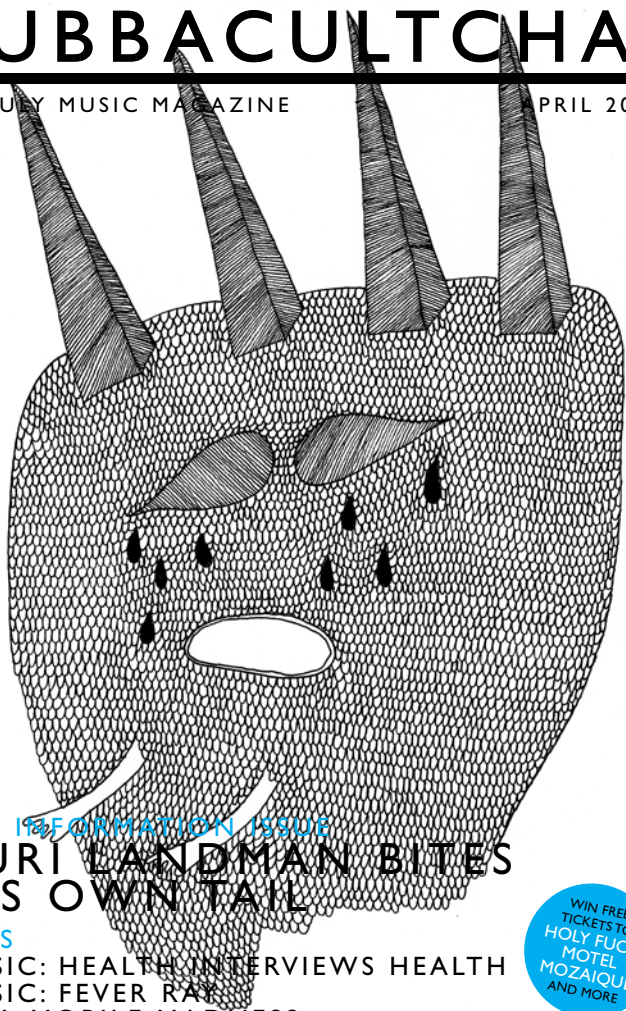


SUBBACULTCHA!

UNRULY MUSIC MAGAZINE

APRIL 2009



THE INFORMATION ISSUE

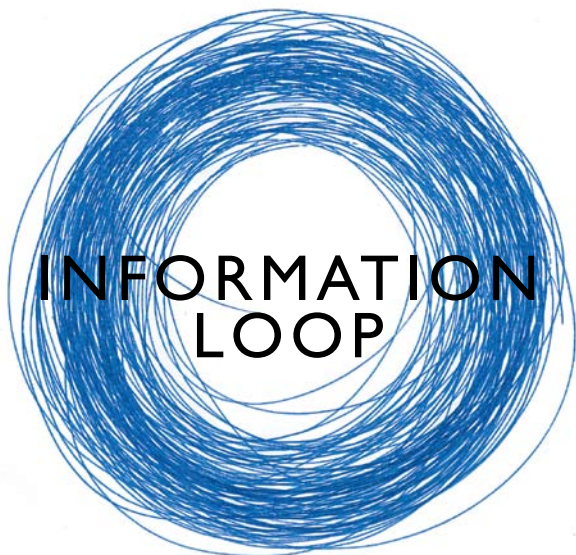
YURI LANDMAN BITES HIS OWN TAIL

PLUS

MUSIC: HEALTH INTERVIEWS HEALTH
MUSIC: FEVER RAY
FILM: MOBILE MADNESS

WIN FREE
TICKETS TO
HOLY FUCK,
MOTEL
MOZAIQUE
AND MORE

WWW.SUBBACULTCHA.NL



Yuri Landman builds guitars for bands like Sonic Youth, Blood Red Shoes, dEUS and Liars. In this article Landman explains how he uses Wikipedia as an important tool in the success of his business. He has created an information structure that on several occasions has pleasantly bitten him in the tail. Not only his guitars feedback... his writings as well.

By Yuri Landman. Edited by Steven McCarron
Circles by Bas Morsch

Everyone knows you should never blindly trust in the content of online encyclopaedia Wikipedia. But due to the newness of the medium, not many people have directly experienced the full effect it has on the valuation of importance.

Its misleading impact lies within its popularity. Wikipedia consists of millions of articles about almost everything. It is the world's fifth most visited website and following many web searches, typically it's the first information source offered about a subject. Roughly speaking: Google and Yahoo tell you where to look, Wikipedia tells you what something is.

If you're seeking an in-depth piece of knowledge, the tail of any article, complete with references and links, is a great jump-off point. If there's no additional sources in the tail of the Wikipedia article, chances are you'll stop searching for more info. But this is a minority of usage anyway. In general, users stop after being convinced by Wikipedia. Amongst a web of millions of websites, it enjoys a monopoly

position as an information centre.

In the past, much debate has taken place discussing whether an encyclopaedia written by diletante volunteers could become better than the acclaimed Britannica. Comparison tests were carried out and in terms of accuracy, Wikipedia scored slightly better, with fewer errors detected. In terms of quantity of articles and knowledge depth, Wikipedia won hands down. Although Wikipedia was generally regarded the best from then on, the test results are misleading. Tests can only quantify falsifiable facts (calculations, formulas, scientific facts, sports data, language errors, birth dates, etc.). Non falsifiable values about politics, social economics, religion, art and other inexact subjects can't be examined neutrally and Wikipedia contains a huge amount of normative, biased and subjective information. Besides, Wikipedia is based on consensus and consensus is not necessarily the truth.

Trained as a chemical analyst, I learned in my studies how to

structure academic and scientific texts in a suitable manner. Sources are always obligatorily in scientific texts. This quality valuation is also desired on Wikipedia. Oddly enough this is its most underestimated disrupting aspect, because it leads to an indirect paradox called information loop or information feedback.

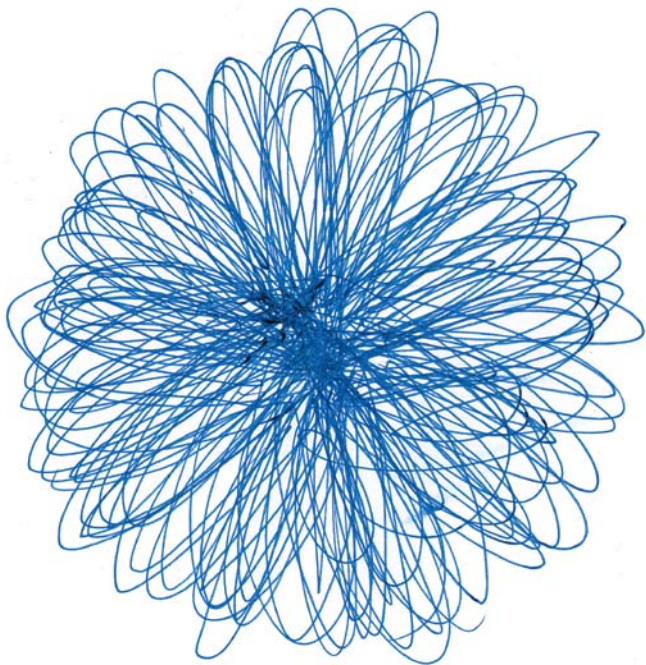
Initially not familiar with the inner world of Wikipedia, I started an article about my Moodswinger guitar design in January 2007. The website captured my imagination because I could immediately see what a powerful promotional tool it is. I understood promotion was an unpopular motive for usage, however, and because my instrument looks odd for people not familiar with prepared guitar playing, I took a second step to prevent the article from being deleted by officious monitors: I created a HOAX page. It was an article with the self-made-up term '3rd bridge guitar' about several instruments working with string division resonance, summarising Harry Partch's Kitara, Prepared Guitar, Glenn Branca's Mallet

Guitars, Sonic Youth's screwdriver playing technique, Bradford Reed's Pencilina and closing with the Moodswinger. To hide my conflict of interest and to avoid hunting restrictive moderators reverting my edits, I also added much information about Leo Fender, Sonic Youth, Liars, Bradford Reed, Glenn Branca, et al, all alongside the information about my instruments.

Another trick I used is called 'coatracking'. I added information about my work and related topics in as many neighbouring articles as possible. I created a spider web of maybe a few hundred articles, referencing my Moodswinger, Moonlander and Springtime guitars, as well as related acts and techniques such as Enon, Liars, Half Japanese, 3rd Bridge, Prepared Guitar, String Resonance, or whatever other suitable interlink. The aim was to prevent deletion, but it also laid the foundations for a huge promotional platform.

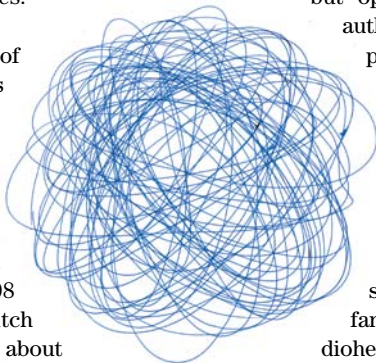
In short: an article about the Moonlander guitar could be deleted for lack of relevance. Starting an article about Lee Ranaldo,

The power of Wikipedia as a promotional tool spiralled further than I could ever expect.



with the notification he was listed number 33 in Rolling Stone's Top 500 Best Guitar Players of All Time will prevent a deletion, because the guitar player is regarded as highly influential by an authority, thus the acceptance of the article about the guitar increases.

The power of Wikipedia as a promotional tool spiralled further than I could ever expect. An illustrative personal example: In 2008 I started a Dutch coatrack article about Rhys Chatham, considering it might be a useful connection between contemporary classical music, minimal music, Glenn Branca, Sonic Youth, 3rd Bridge, experimental rock and my own work as a guitar luthier. It was a pretty objective article with one slip of the tongue, mentioning enthusiastically: '...is one of the most prominent composers of this age.' It was



a subjective observation other contributors didn't recognise. Art related articles have a tendency to contain biased information, often not sourced or sometimes based on externally published reviews by critics, which are not facts

but opinions from an authority. Not many people care about this enough to erase these notifications. Besides, you'll never win an editing contest against the massive volume of fans of Queen, Radiohead and U2 who contribute always way too profusely about their beloved act.

Eight months later I was asked to give a presentation at the State-X Festival in Den Haag. When I met with the programmers they were considering booking Glenn Branca. Now I'm not sure... it could be that programmer Jan Borchers remembered Rhys Chatham doing something simi-

lar with guitar orchestras, but my gut instinct was that he had read Branca's biography on Wikipedia (translated to Dutch by me) and then remembered Rhys Chatham, because he's mentioned in the Branca article (coauthored by me). Chatham's G3 set-up utilises a smaller number of guitars and for that reason is easier to arrange for a festival. It's suggestive but coincidental because the festival then approached Chatham to perform there instead of Branca. It immediately seemed strange to me, in that Chatham was not very known in Holland.

After they had booked Chatham I then received an invitation to be one of the guitar players for the performance. I was excited and felt honoured to be asked, so, unsurprisingly, I confirmed to join. When I then received a press release

about the festival, I was confronted with this text about Chatham: '...is one of the most prominent composers of this age.'

They had copied the Wikipedia article for a press release! This was all feeding my superstition they had read the article before booking. And then a journalist from *De Volkskrant* mailed me: 'You are participating on Chatham's G3. His musical composition is considered a masterpiece. Do you agree and do you want to give an interview about it explaining why this musical piece is so unique?'

I was giggling. This was getting a bit embarrassing.

Before being misunderstood as a Wikipedia fraud or corrupter, my story is not made up at all. There are many very positive reviews about the composition, so the journalist wasn't technically at fault. But

Wikipedia is based on a huge amount of normative, biased and subjective information.

what becomes apparent with this example is that this particular co-track article functioned as a promotion catalyst and led to myself and Chatham receiving column inches in a leading Dutch cultural newspaper. This reaffirmed my conviction that Wikipedia is such an efficient promo tool. All other reviews about the G3 are found in niche publications read by an inner core of fans. Wikipedia is a mass medium, and therefore another level of importance is felt, giving a distorted perception of valuation.

All explained before is pretty innocent. I hope adding information about my work is culturally and musically informative, and also helpful and not solely commercial. The fact that I'm becoming better at the art of promotion doesn't disrupt the overall content of this pseudo-encyclopaedia. Some bitter contributors without a strong affinity towards noise rock will regard

my motive as contemptible, but that's their problem.

Yet this information loop effect is something to wonder much more about. Journalists often grab information from Wikipedia as their primary source. The majority will try to find a bit of additional information, but when there is none I'm pretty sure some will use only the Wikipedia article as their source.

***So be careful
of information
you take for
granted.***

Journalists are also very keen on rewriting the Wikipedia text in their own words, leading to alternate versions of the story. After publication, Wikipedia contributors use these media articles as a reliable source and add it to the reference section in the article to fundement the bias. From then on, it becomes a sourced fact instead of a hollow opinion. That's a circular reference feeding untruth and an unrealistic balance of what's very important and what's not so important. So be careful of information you take for granted.