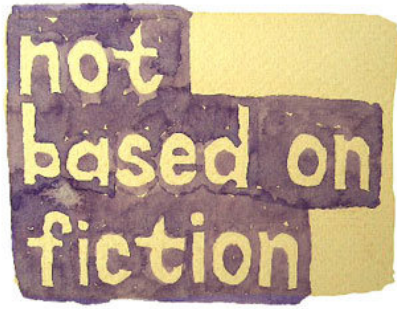


Story for performance #166
webcast from Canberra at 08:05PM, 03 Dec 05



Source: Mark Mazzetti, 'White House in a spin over Iraq news doctored', *LA Times* in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 03/12/05.

Tags: art, politics, security, world events
Writer/s: Susan Charlton

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

Australian Federal Police are seeking information from performance artist Barbara Campbell about a secret art collaboration with so-called 'revolutionary' brandChe. The project allowed him to plant positive stories about his philosophies and exploits on her website, and so reach a global online audience under the cover of the arts. The Leader of the Opposition, Kim Beazley, met with officials today to receive a briefing about brandChe's propaganda offensive. 'We are as one with the government on this', he assured reporters at a press conference shortly after the briefing.

The Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, warned that every Australian should be 'very concerned' about reports that brandChe was using Campbell to 'glamorise his insidious brand of evil'. In a speech to parliament yesterday, he claimed that 'brandChe's toxic cocktail of artspeak and irony appealed to artists who were unnecessarily alarmist about the government's proposed sedition laws'. What they didn't realise, Mr Downer said, was that brandChe's contributions to Campbell's online writing project contained within them 'a rallying call to violence'. 'Let me assure the Member for Griffith [Labor Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kevin Rudd], that terrorism is not in the slightest bit ironic'.

Barbara Campbell remains in seclusion with friends in the northern suburbs of Canberra and was not available for comment today. Her website, *1001 nights cast*, was reportedly shut down yesterday by Australian Federal Police, although the official explanation was technical difficulties due to a violent thunderstorm in Canberra last night. Artist hackers have been engaged in a cat-and-mouse game with authorities in an attempt to keep *1001 nights* online via a constantly changing series of host web addresses. The offices of the Federal Liberal party refused to comment on a report that Campbell's writing project had briefly resided on the party's own website earlier today.

Sydney Morning Herald art critic John McDonald, expressed concern that 'naïve funding bodies', such as the Australia Council and the Power Institute, were inadvertently paying Campbell to 'make contact with terrorists' when she was based at the Cité des Arts studios in Paris earlier this year. 'Arts bureaucracies in this country are paying artists to run stories by publicists for global terror', Mr McDonald said.

The *1001 nights cast* website contains the words: 'She travels across continents looking for a reason to keep living. Every night at sunset she is greeted by a stranger who gives her a story'. 'I think we need to ask, just what countries did she visit, in which continents?' said McDonald. 'What is the link between the sunset of her performance and the Islamic calls to prayer? And what are the true identities of these strangers and the true

meaning of these stories?'

A spokeswoman from the Australia Council, which helped fund Campbell's project with a two-year fellowship, said they were scrambling to get information from officials in Canberra about the arrangement between Campbell and brandChe. The spokeswoman said the council was shocked to learn that brandChe specialises in 'strategic communications in combat zones'. Campbell's fellowship application had only referred to 'art interventions in sites of difference', she said. 'We respect freedom of speech and the rights of artists to comment on world events, but we cannot support anything that might be described as seditious under the new laws.'

There has been feverish online speculation about the true identity of brandChe, since his 'strategic communications' first emerged in 2000. The website *RevolutionaryIdol.com* has been hosting a competition to attempt to solve the mystery. The final two candidates to survive the competition are theorist Slavoj Zizek and the Basquiat Liberation Front, set up in memory of Jean-Michel Basquiat who died in 1988.

Biographical details for Zizek state that he 'uses popular culture to explain the theory of Jacques Lacan and the theory of Jacques Lacan to explain politics and popular culture. He has considerable energy and charisma and is a spellbinding lecturer in the tradition of Lacan. He was politically active during the 1980s, even becoming a candidate for the presidency of his home country of the Republic of Slovenia in 1990.'

The entry for Basquiat states that the artist was born in Brooklyn in 1960 to a Haitian father and a Puerto Rican mother. 'In 1981, he catapulted from being an unknown 19 year-old graffiti writer to becoming one of the most successful, controversial, glamorous artists in the world. At his death at the age of 27, he was described by *The New York Times* as "the art world's closest equivalent to James Dean".'

Whether the grand final of *Revolutionary Idol* in two weeks time will actually reveal the true identity of brandChe remains to be seen. Though Zizek has always been competition favourite, he has steadfastly refused to be drawn on the subject.

When asked to comment on brandChe's possible involvement in Barbara Campbell's project, pop cultural commentator Professor Catharine Lumby seemed to defend the practice. Quoting Osama bin Laden's top deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri, she said 'Remember, half the battlefield is the battlefield of the media'.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Susan Charlton.