

AR: Can you tell us in a few words who you are and what you have been doing over the last few years?

GL: My name is Geert Lovink and I am a media theorist and internet critic. I have been doing this work since the mid eighties but not always in the same context. From early on I have been involved in autonomous social movements such as squatting, free radio and no borders. In the beginning I was unemployed, then I was working in the cultural sector as an independent organizer and writer and over the last decade I have been in academia. Since 2004 I am leading the Institute of Network Cultures in Amsterdam, the city I was born. Our initiative, which is really only 1.8 jobs including me, has been focused on building decentralized research networks of artists, designers, activists and scholars that critically deal with emerging internet topics such as search, Wikipedia, online video and social media. We organize both workshops, conferences, online dialogues and (paper) publications. For us it is important to see that a critical attitude towards technology can be combined with a pragmatist-constructivist approach in which we see ourselves as active agents, and not as users or participants.

AR: You have been involved in network activities or net-based projects for many years. From an artistic perspective, what has happened in the field? What have you witnessed or found interesting about the internet since its beginning until now?

GL: Well... what has happened is, of course, the crisis in new media arts. Not everyone likes to talk about it, in such a way, but to me it is clear that the contemporary arts scene is still effectively boycotting new media. They have embraced video twenty years ago, and that's it. The digitization of visual culture has been more or less acceptable for them because the digital has not altered the nature of the image as representation: video is still video and photography is still photography. But as soon as artists allow technology to become explicit, make it visible, and enter the frame, then it is banned from museums, biennales and galleries. The same can be said of computers, smart phones etc. As long as they are tools that remain invisible, they are allowed to do their work, but we cannot make them explicit. This was again the case at Documenta 13, which I just visited. No internet works, and no digital photography either. Of course there were strong works on display in Kassel. I would particularly like to mention the work of the Libanese artist Rabih Mroue who spoke about the Syrian uprising videos which are being uploaded to YouTube. He makes a brilliant Virilio-type analysis how the witnessing

smart phone camera to logic of the gun that both look at each other (before the gun destroys the camera)

See:

http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/bien/documenta/2012/fast_tour/53_rabih_mrue.

AR: From a social, political, artistic or philosophical point of view, what is the impact of the concept of network? How has the Internet and the idea of network changed your attitude and practice, your relation to space and time and the way we behave, work, think, share, exchange, collaborate, create?

GL: In the age of social media networks have become more transparent and visible to the general audience but in general one could say that remain pretty abstract. Networks are at their best when they are informal, invisible and not too big. I see networks as contemporary forms of organization. I see them as alternatives to political parties, trade unions and even social movements that dominated the social imaginary of the 20th century. Of course we can say that networks are of all times and that social networks have always existed, also in the time of the ancient Greeks. That's a trueism. For me networks arise when Western individualism meets neo-liberal policies which in turn are accelerated by the computer networks and digital equipment. What's important here is that they undermine formal ties and promote 'weak links'. The question then becomes what we, as users, want to do with this new state of temporary informality. It is not very sustainable. What it installs is an unstable mood of permanent change (in which everything remains the same). I don't need to go into the ramifications for our perception of time and space. 20th century modern art has dealt with that sufficiently. The philosophers and writers have reflected on it. It is now up to us, 21st century dwellers, to not merely contemplate these conditions but to reverse them, bend their direction, cause black outs, ignore their proclaimed power and find new uses for the ongoing flood of techno-garbage that the System currently produces.

AR: In the future do you think internet will still be an interesting territory to explore? Do you think it will be a fertile space for creation? Do you think it will produce more interesting artistic mutations where the physical world and the virtual world become hybrid, mutate, merge, fuse or collide?

GL: Will we in the future explore the fascinating world of vacuum cleaner protocols? No, we will not mind, and we don't right now. The same goes for internet. At some point the development will stop and the technology will be

pushed in the background. We will then fight over other issues. But this is the media age, so we fight over the architecture of communication. The rise of smart phones already indicates that the age of the static PC machine, sitting out there on a desk, is nearly over and that we are entering a new stage in which the collective techno unconsciousness takes over. Finally we no longer have to discuss Facebook and Google and can devote our time to more urgent, and more pleasurable issues. One day we will wake up and realize that the media age is over. Farewell to all past and future media celebrities! Why didn't we move on earlier?