

This interview was done in preparation of Geert Lovink's lecture in Vienna on September 29 2010 for the [twenty.twenty event](#) on Identity 2.0 by [Die Presse](#). [Here](#) you can find the German version.

Die Presse: You deleted your facebook account for the May 30 "Quit Facebook Day". Why did you do this?

Geert Lovink: I am not so concerned about privacy, as in my case, I was already Facebook in a cynical way, namely as megaphone, a marketing tool. This is, of course, not the way one should use social networking sites. Rather quickly I found myself having to manage 2000 'friends' and this became a very time consuming job with little rewards. I really had the idea I was 'feeding' a machine. But apart of the scaling issue, I was very happy to find out about the upcoming decentralized alternatives like Diaspora, GNUSocial, Appleseed and Cabgrass.

DP: Do you think "Diaspora" has a chance to compete with Facebook? Why do we even need something like Diaspora?

GL: Many people would feel uncomfortable to share their private information on a massive site with half a billion users. Social networks are, by definition, small. We all know the numbers. The max. size is 150. One can manage a network with 70 active members quite well. We're all bored with the idea of 'friends'. This is a deeply American idea. We're not all friends. We're lovers, colleagues, family, enemies, unknowns. The world of social relationships is complex and nothing of that we can find on Facebook. Whether Diaspora is going to make it or not is irrelevant. Decay and fragmentation is a natural process. The internet is still in revolutionary stage. Platforms are constantly changing. Do you remember Friendster, Orkut, MySpace? One doesn't have to believe in doomsday scenarios to predict the stagnation, and disappearance of Facebook. Decentralized, distributed, autonomous social networks are the future. There is nothing shocking about that. If we translate that in Web terms we have seen the development from blogger.com to the stand-alone WordPress, and now we're back again with the centralized, easy-to-use Tumblr platform. These things go back and forth. The next wave will be decentralized Twitter services. So what?

DP: What exactly is the problem with sharing personal data online?

GL: Nothing, as long as it is done with the consent of two parties without a third party involved that acts like a 'parasite'. So far, the internet has made

it possible to define your settings and design your network architecture. I know this is not God-given. If you fight for it users can be in charge. This is not the case in dictatorships and authoritarian countries. There is no 'natural law' which says that companies like Google or Facebook have to be this big. Users can easily do without them-and the corporate world is well aware of this. That's is why there is a big fight over these issues-and why we are lured with these fancy 'free' services.

DP: Where do you see the advantages of sharing personal information or photos online?

GL: [I don't see any advantages outside of the direct parties involved. The question here is: some info is private, others is public. Why is this so hard to understand? There is the open internet. If you want to exhibit your entire life there, no problem. There are many who do this. The same with Flickr. If you want to show your pictures to the entire world, go ahead. But that's not the point. There are companies that offer all these services for free so that they can 'sneak' into our private lives, and sell these data to third parties. People need to be aware of that. If you are, go and do whatever you like!

DP: Do you like the idea of an expiration date for any kind of data? How could it be implemented?

GL: [I read Victor Mayer-Schoenberger's book Delete, in which this proposal is also made. I wouldn't mind if it is going to be an additional option when you are going to create or store a file. I am not in favour of introducing it as a default setting.

DP: What does the "real-time" trend mean for news media and communication?

GL: A lot. We thought we already lived in a global 'real-time' society twenty or thirty years ago with CNN, mobile phone and rise of the internet. The point about the current developments is that it is now becoming part of our everyday life. It is built-in your browser. You look at a page and it's updated. You search for something and the results change while you like at the results of your query.

DP: What do you think is the future of the internet - is it social media or is there anything else to come? why do you think could or will social media fail?

GL: □Social media is just the latest term, pushed by IT consultants and internet evangelists. It would be good to 'deconstruct' their position first, before answering such questions. The future is an collective obsession of corporate marketing departments, but you never hear any surprising scenario coming from these circles. For kids these days the internet is boring. Why should they embrace the gadgets of their parents? I would like to see the future as a truck that incidentally drives into your front room: something that is very unlikely, sparking off all sorts of events. I know this is already included in the 'scenarios' of large corporations. We just do not hear enough about the unlikely paths we as humankind can wander off on. History is speeding up, that's for sure. But is the future as well?