

Questions: Julia Rehfeldt-Answers: Geert Lovink

1. What topics are you currently concerned with in your work or research?

GL: Apart from the ongoing issues around Wikileaks, Anonymous and Snowden, which I consider a continuum, and net activist stuff that also always somehow goes on (everything post-Occupy) that question whether and how we can build alternatives really bothers me. It is one thing to criticise Silicon Valley and its Californian Ideology, or techno-solutionism as Morozov has recently coined it. But I come from an autonomous tradition where it is not enough to consistently bring home radical negativity. Critique without a purpose can easily slide into cynicism when it has no base in the living experiences of social movements. Because our Institute of Network Cultures is based inside an ultra pragmatic hands-on 'applied science' school we need to be very aware that our critique is 'grounded' in specific platforms and issues such as search engines, social media etc. For me this means working on bitcoin and money theory at the moment. That's the current project called MoneyLab. The urgency to work on revenue models for the arts is there-and growing.

The INC project which is related to conference you're organizing would be the Hybrid Publishing Toolkit. The toolkit itself will become available in December 2014. This is a techno-cultural manual how to deal with the proliferating standards and platforms for digital publishing. Just think of pdf, epub, the Kindle, iPads, iPhones, Android smart phones and tablets and whatever Microsoft or the Chinese will come up with next, not to mention the open source alternatives from Ubuntu and others. This will only get worse and is a nightmare for authors, publishers, designers and programmers, and do not forget: for all of us readers. While this is happening the overall usage is growing exponentially. We can't speak of 'convergence' and 'normalization'. The publishing world is going through its Napster moment and everything seems to be upside down. Most interesting player to watch remains Amazon.

2.The Institute of Network Cultures (INC) covers an impressive range of topics within digital cultures. But you also are quite experienced when it comes to work with traditional publishers - your (English) books have been published by MIT Press, Routledge and Polity Press. How would you describe the difficulties of traditional publishers dealing with digital topics, and where do you see the advantage in the way INC is operating combining conferences and blogs with book publishing?

GL: The traditional book publishers that I deal with a handful of countries do not treat 'new media' or 'digital culture' as a particularly hot or interesting topic. They are forced to deal with it, but have no particular interest in it. For them it is a topic like an other, dealt with within the category of 'mediastudies' and comparable to television, film and the music industries, though much smaller. New media has mostly been seen as a hype, a somewhat cheap topic, very commercial and not all that serious. Like any fashion, big for a while but not worth a thorough study. It certainly does not have a similar intellectual reputation in comparison to, for instance, cultural studies. That the digital would revolutionize publishing itself has been known since the 1980s. I got used to the fact that the publishing industry is so slow, and so resistant when it comes to changing their production schedules and distribution. This is even more conservative in the US where the production of a book can still take 1-2 years. This might be different in the case of commercial trade presses but nonetheless... That's the first thing you can do if you have the resources and will to publish in alternative ways: the turnover at our centre is a good three months. It is deadly easy to start your own press now, much like in the seventies with the proliferation of small offset presses, electronic typesetting and networks of alternative bookstores and selling points such as cafes and festivals. These days the PR and distribution has shifted to a mix of social media, email and blogs. Maybe the problem isn't so much technical but a lack of belief in one's own ideas. People all too easily believe in the mainstream. There you will find the force of hegemonic thinking. The system you grow up in doesn't like you go your own way. Western societies are not individualistic when it comes to idea production. It's all highly ritual and conformistic. The idea that the digital might give entire new ways of production and the internet different way to distribute them seem so alien, so not of this planet in most cultures... We have to go back to Nietzsche in order to get a full understanding of the herd mentality within academia.

3. What has made the most impact regarding your personal insights on the future of writing?

GL: I have not yet published my personal insights on this matter □ I have only expressed my public opinions. Yes, I do wish to liberate writing from the current rigid formats. I would love to discover new forms of collaborative writing. Wikipedia remains a fantastic experience in this respect, and still motivates me to further investigate its ideological biases and barriers. However, Wikipedia is restricted to the text genre of the encyclopaedia and I

am not sure if we can blame its geek core constituency for that. Instead of neglecting and rejecting (while secretly using) Wikipedia we should see it as a social experiment on a massive scale. In a similar I was attracted to hyper cards, gopher and other forms of 'electronic literature' (a field where not much has happened over the past decades). I am interested in how we find new ways to produce theory, one that fits into, and responds to our digital, networked, mobile environment. That cannot possibly be Twitter as the platform it own by a corporation. I consider the 140 character hostile to ideas and only fit to spread news and rumours. Blog culture in the early days had interesting features, as did email list cultures and online forums. Can we invent a collaborative text culture of our times? It all depends on the centrifugal forces of the communities that run such platforms: will they be kept together or fall apart? Right now the times simply goes too fast. Real-time events come and go whereas communities need time in order to evolve. It is not hard to predict that printed books will be around for a long time. But will the novel? How about poetry as it has been around for centuries? The experiments of the 20th century remain fascinating. I am a real modernist in that sense. But we all know that the radical experiments, be it in theatre, writing or painting have all lost their spirit to continue. We read them as historical artifacts, expressions of their time. Will we do the same with the digital network culture of our time? There must be a way to go beyond the chronology of video art in the 70s and 80s, interactive installations and net.art of the 90s etc.

4. Which book will you always have as an analog copy in your bookshelf?

GL: Elias Canetti, Masse und Macht. My alltime favorite that I have been going back for the last thirty years.