

Interview conducted by Bernardo Parrella, the translator of my new book *Social Media Abyss* in Italian (Egea, Milan, 2016).

<http://www.lavoroculturale.org/geert-lovink-interattivita-cooperativa/>

BP: Recent controversy about Facebook Trends/Newsfeed: Given that similar issues about its internal mechanisms (and “neutral” algorithms) are flaring up again and again, can we expect a more general backlash against FB in terms of popularity, credibility, user-base—or one more time this is something that media, investors and even its users will forget quickly and we’ll go back to “business as usual”?

GL: Since 2011 our Institute of Network Cultures in Amsterdam has been coordinating a network of researchers, coders, designers and activists in search for ‘alternatives in social media’ called Unlike Us. The initiative has had its ups and downs but it refused to die. There are still around a 1000 people on a mailing list discussing these issues. As you mentioned, there is still a lot going on. There was for instance Facebook’s failed attempt with internet.org in India to bypass net neutrality and give hundreds of millions of India’s poor access to Facebook (only). This is what happens with monopolies this seize, in a political climate that can neither close down services like this (because of the mass addiction) nor is capable to develop alternatives.

To be honest, I was more optimistic in 2011 that Facebook would fade away, in a similar way as Bebo, Myspace, StudiVZ and Hyves did. Nowadays, too many people have been locked-in. Platform capitalism is here to stay. We better get used to the next phase of market consolidation—and boredom. No more disruption., You can’t disrupt Silicon Valley, that’s the message here, and our European politician class have learned to live with this new reality. It is questionable whether populist politicians such as Wilders, Erdogan and Orban will do much about it. Brussels bureaucrats won’t, unless they are pressed—by us. Let’s make this happen. It is time to organize 1, 2, many Facebook Farewell Parties. It is important to make this gesture and not do it by ourselves. Social media addicts should come together. Waiting for alternatives was in vain.

BP: Cooperative Interactivity: how is this field moving on, any good recent example? Is this a path that could actually contrast (defeat?) today’s social media ideology (see above) or the common click-tivism? Some best practices and good examples to follow?

GL: It's still too early, I find. Trebor Scholz and Nathan Schneider are the experts here, but also the P2P foundation. Cooperativism is yet another example where alternatives are around, and have been there for decades (if not centuries). The workers cooperatives are ancient, right? The problem here is not a legal one. Everything is in place. The issue is one of technical connectivity. The cooperative practices so far have operated on an entirely different level. The question we're facing is one of 'scaling up'. If we refuse this logic—and we do—others will do it for us. How can we resist the start-up logic and still do interest stuff, begin cooperatives, peer-to-peer structures, with new forms of payments for the actual work people do, and find alternative forms of financing? There is a historical obligation for us to create jobs. If we don't Europe is lost and war is immanent. This is serious stuff. Jobs will not come to us, they will not be created by others. We need to stop the default option of the free, and turn around the digital revolution into an truly decentralized economy that benefit all.

BP: Online revenue/economy models: given Bitcoin demise and flaws, do you see any progress about mobile money for supporting creative, independent content right now? Something that facilitates direct exchanges between users, with no bank or other intermediaries involved? Any chance to replicate in the West some sort of M-Pesa model? New experiments/research on the way by the MoneyLab people (and upcoming #3 event)?

GL: Sure, we're optimistic. There are many experiments going on. It's a pity that we leave the definition of financial architectures to right-wing libertarians. We need to stand up and become explicit. From bitcoin and the blockchain to the DAO, we need to make sure that the end result will be decentralized structures, in the hands of the commons and rise up against data centres, big banks and monopolies. This is a unique chance to demand financial protocols that redistribute value, that consciously flow against the current, and become aware about the built-in neo-liberal policies that merely create inequality and monopolies (and not markets, as the official ideology states). The MoneyLab #3 slogan is "Failing Better". We're not pretending to know all the answers, but the urgency is there, and will only become bigger. We need internet-based revenue models, based on peer-to-peer principles, with as little intermediaries as possible, that operate with transparent models, if possible as public utilities. I don't think nationalization of essential services is the answer, but who knows. One thing is sure: the current models is only beneficial for the 1% and we need to sabotage these principles on all levels, starting with Facebook and Google,

then Uber and AirBnb, while being aware that the same logic is also being implemented in less likely sectors such as logistics and infrastructure, agriculture and health care. We need to wake up and understand that the a-social operators have gone well beyond the 'media' sphere. This means that we have to stop staring at the social media question and see the larger picture where everything will be "disrupted". It is time to disrupt the disrupters and a first, important step is to go on strike, together, and delete all those profiles. Goodbye app!