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By Geert Lovink

"Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened." Dr. Suess

In early 2018, social media criticism has reached a new stage. In past months, voices from deep inside the IT industry have made themselves heard. The suspicion against Google and Facebook started with Russia's alleged interference in the 2016 US presidential elections and social media manipulations through ads and changes in algorithms. Then founding president Sean Parker admitted that Facebook purposely gave users a short trigger, outed as "addiction by design". Parker: "It's a social-validation feedback loop… exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology." Next to come out was Justin Rosenstein, inventor of the Facebook 'like' button, who compared Snapchat with heroin. And Leah Pearlman, a member of the same team, who admitted that she too had grown disaffected with the 'like' button and similar addictive feedback loops. And then there was Chamath Palihapitiya, another former FB executive, who claimed that "social media is tearing society apart," recommending people to "take a hard break."

These developments lead to the founding of the Center for Humane Technology, a creation of early employees at Facebook and Google, "alarmed over the ill effects of social networks and smartphones, banding together to challenge the companies they helped build." (New York Times). The centre plans an "anti-tech addiction lobbying effort and an ad campaign at 55,000 public schools in the United States." In response Facebook itself announced a Community Leadership Programme. All this culminated in an unlikely place, not OT301 or Pakhuis de Zwijger, but the World Economic Forum in Davos, where billionaire-philanthropist George Soros attacked the "monopolistic behavior of the giant IT platform companies." According to Soros social media companies deceive their users "by manipulating their attention and directing it towards their own commercial purposes. They deliberately engineer addiction to the services they provide. This can be very harmful, particularly for adolescents." Soros sees similarities between Internet platforms and gambling companies: "Casinos have developed techniques to hook gamblers to the point where they gamble away all their money, even money they don't have." The most interesting prediction Soros made relates to the slow demise of the US tech giants from a global

perspective: "Internet monopolies have neither the will nor the inclination to protect society against the consequences of their actions. That turns them into a menace. The owners of the platform giants consider themselves the masters of the universe, but in fact they are slaves to preserving their dominant position. It is only a matter of time before the global dominance of the US IT monopolies is broken."

None of the above directly or indirectly refers to the earlier social media critiques. Over the past years many have expressed concerns about the violations of privacy, the silly 'friends' category, the absence of the 'dislike' button and the take-over of news. The discontent varied from the Europe Against Facebook campaign, to Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web who repeated warned against social media monopolies. The current uprising of former employees can also be related to the small library of critical voices, from Nicolas Carr (The Shallows), Evgeny Morozov (The Net Delusion), Andrew Keen (The Internet is not the Answer) or Shirley Turkle (Alone Together). Most academic research on social media seems to have virtually no impact on the overall sentiment. Why get upset about Silicon Valley geeks and investors displaying such arrogance, they are the cyber lords, after all? The engineering dissidents of today kept their mouth shut for years, and are still deeply involved in the business, together with new teams of investors and consultants. Why should we give precisely them credit to develop less harmful alternatives?

What should our next steps be? Are you still on Facebook? Would you consider taking part in a Facebook Farewell Party? So far, Western-European activists have shown not much interest in 'platform capitalism': they are tired because they are wired. Most NGOs and social movements no longer employ their own servers and infrastructure and have become completely dependent on cloud-based services and social media platforms. The independent infrastructure of bookstores, print shops, paper magazines and book publishers has all but disappeared. As a result we find dozens of Facebook-only websites of initiatives that fight racism, colonialism and gender inequality who remain silent about their own channel of distribution. It is mostly the under-20 age bracket that leave Facebook. We can analyse such inconsistencies in the autonomous worldview until we drop dead, the good news is that finally times are changing.

It's pointless to say: "We told you so." The fear of committing 'social suicide' may be irrational but for some of us loneliness and social isolation are all too

real. We need to take back our own responsibility to build and maintain networks, and not leave that task to centralized platforms. How can we scale up and democratize all the debates and proposals of the past 5-7 years of those that worked on alternative network architectures? Is the reasonable, noble and moral appeal, made by engineers, the only one on offer? Doing digital detox and going offline is in fact an option only elites can afford. Hipster-mindfulness and self-mastery suggested by the likes of Peter Sloterdijk is no more than a marginal reform effort from a hyper-individualistic neo-liberal perspective. If offline is the new luxury, as the VPRO Tegenlicht television documentary was called, how else can we politicize the 'social media question'? What's not yet explored are large-scale cool campaigns that give people an opportunity to delete Facebook accounts. This is in the end what Silicon Valley tries to prevent at all cost: mass resistance and mass exodus. The demand for working alternatives is being heard. The momentum is there. Migrate to Diaspora, create your own newsletters, let's organize our networks and create concrete ways out—together.

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