

*By Enrico de Angelis, conducted via email on November 15, 2025,  
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*Platform Butality* (Valiz, Amsterdam, 2025) is the latest book by Dutch theorist and critic of digital cultures Geert Lovink. It covers the post-COVID period, characterized by wars (the invasion of Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza, among others), climate change, inflation, but also, as the author puts it, “attention collapse and ideophobia.”

On the technological side, search engines are being replaced by Artificial Intelligence, the World Wide Web by social media apps, while cryptocurrencies keep rising.

The title of the book was inspired by Cameroonian political theorist Achille Mbembe’s work investigating the extractivist, destructive and world-threatening character of contemporary global capitalism. In this context, Lovink maintains that digital platforms and their owners (X, Meta, Google, Airbnb, Uber, just to mention a few) have reached a (predictable) point at which their logic of treating the world as “an immense reservoir” is ultimately translated directly into political violence.

We can see this in different forms: when data collection is used to control borders or target civilians, the trivialisation of violence to normalise it and disturb dissent, and deletion to destroy voices and entire communities.

**Enrico De Angelis: The book starts with a consideration: we have already lost the battle to change the techno-social aspects that you described in such detail in your previous work. You say there are no imaginative follow-ups on the horizon, no paradigm shift in sight: “The Universe ignores us”. And yet, while [Franco Berardi](#) (who is also included in this [dossier](#)) calls for a radical withdrawal to enable the emergence of a new horizon, you propose another approach. Also radical, but you say it is the moment to fight back. What should we do? Wait for the moment to leave the platforms ‘en masse’? Or, as you propose at the end of the book, are there other, smaller steps that can be implemented immediately, even by non-tech-savvy people?**

**Geert Lovink:** The exodus of social media platforms will have to happen together, as Team Human, for a reason, in an urgent setting. Sadly, this will only be done during a period of shock. Addiction and attachment are real. So far there are no effective strategies for the literally billions of users to voluntarily abandon Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, or Google. Ever since 2011, when we started our [Unlike Us](#) campaign, where we emphasized the unity of social media critique and alternatives, we have known that the individual guilt trip is going nowhere. Nudging is nonsense. We came to the conclusion that platform/app dependency can be overcome with the ‘tools’ approach. Tools that we use and then put aside. There will be an end to the techno-misery: “We want to see the sunshine after the rain.”

Attempts to reduce excessive smartphone time through awareness campaigns, offline weekends, and blocker apps that help you focus did not make a noticeable difference. The consumer behaviour approach is simply the wrong one. The addiction aspect cannot be ignored, but the medical ‘detox’ angle simply doesn’t work in this context. The desire for social connection in a time of loneliness, the growing travel time within urban sprawls, and the coordination issues of meeting others should not be ignored. Do we need Meta and Google for that? We don’t. Getting your phone out in the elevator is a habit. Uncooling the phone will be a task of the generation after Gen Z.

All the above has been known for years—that’s the sad part of this topic. Regression and stagnation are real. As we are still stuck on the platform, we need to be brave to question the exit strategies on offer so far.

I am confident that Gen Z will be able to revolt—not just to demand a return to access to social media, as was the case in Tibet and other places where authoritarian regimes, in a desperate attempt to remain in power, limited access to certain apps or even cut off the internet as a whole. But their demand was to get the apps back. They could not live without them. We need to leave our sorrow and open radical vibe labs and experiment. Just try stuff. Besides Signal, DuckDuckGo, cryptpad.fr, and more, get inspired by the [Facebook Museum](#) of the Utrecht media arts organisation SETUP, a temporary booth installed in the hall of Utrecht Central Station. Or think of Francesca Bria’s

[Eurostack](#) initiative that showcases the complexity of interrelated levels of tech, from apps to datacentres, when we demand ‘tech sovereignty’. Let’s add more to this list.

**EDA: You write that platform brutality is worse than any other media representation of violence because it is remote, invisible, and indirect.**

**GL:** So far, average users do not notice data extraction. We need to learn from the violence debate over the past decades and apply it to the internet field. The start here is the realization that the ‘free’ and innocent phase, in which we signed a social contract with Silicon Valley, exchanging free access to apps and online services in exchange for our data, is over. A violent turn has happened over the past five years.

The question is to what extent we will ‘feel’ the abstract and structural violence that is unleashed. This goes beyond the complaints over annoying ads. Many users, primarily young people, are suffering from mental health issues related to 24/7 use of social media. At what point will this damage have a real and physical impact?

We witness loneliness, depression, apathy and indifference and the rise of right-wing politics, especially among young people, but often this is still perceived as happening elsewhere, to others. Economic uncertainty, mental breakdown and cognitive poverty are such that it is perceived as cool to be conservative (as a virtual mask or psychic armour).

Platform brutality is the case when all this is no longer happening to others, and real consequences are no longer information that you swipe away.

What happens when structural violence excludes you, but you cannot find out, or do not even notice? You’re out. No carrier. What’s wrong with this app store? Information is made invisible, just for you. You have no access, but have no idea why, or for how long. You do not get a home loan, visa, job, fellowship or discount. It can be discrimination or just an inconvenience. Or getting worse tomorrow, with an impact only much later.

Randomness is often part of the tech exclusion logic. Search and you will not find; prompt and you will be offered the wrong information—all presented with the best of customer service intentions and impeccable UX design. I have pointed at the sliding scale of violence, from the creation of a profile, the categorization of one's identity, nationality, race, face, fingerprints and iris, genes, to the creation of confined groups, the selection and isolation of them, ultimately to the point of expulsion, removal, extradition or even extermination.

The inflation of the term 'genocide' doesn't help here, as it is solely focused on that very last part, not on the sliding scale we're all already part of. Social media databases are the most incredible self-created data repositories of one's preferences, opinions, and social network ever created—and are immediately at the disposal of authoritarian forces, assisted by the Californian Big Brother.

Take this example that passed by recently: As 404 Media [reports](#), Google has chosen a side in Trump's mass deportation effort. "Google is hosting an app that uses facial recognition to identify immigrants, and tell local cops whether to contact ICE about the person, while simultaneously removing apps designed to warn local communities about the presence of ICE officials."

**EDA: From the perspective of social and political movements from the global south, the issue with the platforms can be even more problematic. Let's take the example of Gaza. On the one hand, as you also remind us, platforms have become directly entangled with the exercise of violence, including their role in deleting content and spreading fake news and bias. At the same time, since mainstream media coverage was also extremely biased, dissent was mainly circulated on those platforms ("TikTok is the problem"). Or, to quote you: "Can event-driven social movements afford to leave behind Big Tech, knowing they own the heads and minds of millennials and Gen Z?" How to respond to this urgency, to the paradox we are all facing?**

**GL:** Let's not be moralistic and judge others from a distance. I have and will advocate for decentralized alternatives, but shy away from any suggestion on how people in hardship should communicate. You

mention 'content moderation,' the infamous US 'freedom of speech,' and the censorship by Meta and Google, but the underlying problem there is the tech's linking of content to IDs. There cannot be dissident content without an encrypted, anonymous delivery mechanism. We need to communicate more and leave less online. A tech renaissance of store-forward? The sky is the limit.

Throughout history, people have given their lives to deliver messages. Please read Georges Didi-Huberman's *Images despite All* about four photographs from Auschwitz. As a teenager, my mother smuggled resistance newspapers on her bike in Nazi-occupied Breda. That defined my upbringing. The lesson taught was to fight registration, ID cards and centralized databases (see the chapter on this in [Sad by Design](#)).

The question I have to ask myself is how my generation of what some call 'internet pioneers' was allowed to move from pseudonyms and anonymous users to Web 2.0 profiles and rigid 'real names' policies (with Google as 'identity provider'). This is a collective sin, or defeat, if you like. It compromised the word 'privacy' for good, which is a travesty on the internet. All this is bad, but it affects people in crisis and war zones the most. What's evident is the power of the message, regardless of all the petabytes that are collected to be used against us. There's never an indifference against the signs of life that matter.

**EDA: You dedicate the longest chapter to dreams. You say we cannot dream anymore because of social media overstimulation, which crowds our brains and deprives us of the time to 'digest' dreams. But dreaming, as you remind us, is crucial when it comes to creating new imaginaries and, therefore, to planning for political change. You launched the "dreamful computing" project, which explicitly tackles this issue. Can you explain what you mean by this expression and how it can be translated into specific practices?**

**GL:** 'Access to dreams' is going to be vital for any substantive change. This will be a new era for the interpretation of dreams, that is, no doubt, post-Freudian. However, there is a dark, technological side to this renaissance: the capture and manipulation possibilities that future digital neuroscience will provide.

To me, the corporate move to enter dreams is summarized in this awful, boring image: their ability to advertise in our dreams. The more material my Sydney friend Ned Rossiter and I collect, the clearer it becomes to us that the dream space will be one of the next Big Tech battlefields. It will be interesting to push the current psychedelic research further – and democratize that field, as it has to be taken back from the pharmaceutical establishment, time and again.

I follow Erik Davis here, in this context. It is also important to stress the potential of (collective) dreaming that goes beyond the necessary reproduction of the imaginary labour force, and all we have to process during our busy, noisy days. How do you see we can Reclaim the Dream? This is a sincere, open question, as we're into this not that long. The psychedelic winter was a long one, with generations destroyed by destructive neo-liberal investments into the (online) Self. As Yasha Levine [puts it](#) on his Substack in media terms: "The parasocial technology took over from where television left off and pushed society even more radically into an atomised configuration".

We need to move away from the narcissistic preoccupation, embodied by King Trump. The psycho-political situation even worsens as we enter the phase of techno-fascism, aka techno-feudalism, if you look at it from a political economy perspective. The mental health situation deteriorates so fast that many start to act together. Common tools with real-life gatherings are the answer to this planned isolation. Our dream computing project is part of that movement. "I am dreamin' man, yes, that's my problem. I'll always be a dreaming man, and I don't have to understand, I know it's alright." Neil Young sings while I write this. The helpless state of this dreamin' man will soon be a thing of the past—that's for sure.

**EDA: At the Institute for Network Cultures you dedicate a lot of attention to tactical media, which for many can appear as almost an obsolete term. How can tactical media be relevant today, in the face of all the techno-social aspects and the invasiveness of the platforms that you describe?**

**GL:** I am not emotionally attached to any term. I believe in the speculative potential of the concepts we design to make a difference, to become machines, to cause long-lasting techno-social effects. When we use the term tactical media today, we do so to strengthen

collaborations among hackers, designers, artists, and researchers in social movements. The tactical media approach reminds us to be open to migrating 'Killroy was here' aesthetics that wander from one medium to the next, from one locality to the next. This is so powerful today because, most of all, we are stuck on platforms that narrow our visual language, close down dialogue and discussion, and are utterly impossible as mobilization tools.

I admit that the guerrilla mode of tactical media makes it hard for resistance to scale up. The tactical media approach believes in the power of sparks, memes, stickers on traffic light poles: subversive signs that give strength to make it through the day. They are known today as *copium*, which is the opening essay of *Platform Brutality*. The more depressed a situation, the more powerful humour and irony can become. The more we experiment with the reversal of signs and concepts, the better. Come together and set up spaces. The emphasis should be less on aesthetics and more on tactical forms of organisation outside of platforms. This could be irritating about fluid, non-committing tactics in a time when sustainable self-organisation is needed most.

Geert Lovink, *Platform Brutality, Closing Down Internet Toxicity*, Valiz, Amsterdam, 2025. Information how to order the book you can find [here](#).

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Enrico De Angelis holds a PhD in Political Communication. He mainly works on new media and public sphere in Syria and Egypt, but also on grassroots media, political communication, and journalism in the MENA region. He did a post-doc at Cedej, Cairo, between 2012 and 2014 analysing the networked public sphere in Egypt. He is one of the co-founders of the Syrian media platform UntoldStories and co-founder of the Italian version of Orient XXI. He currently works as a media researcher consultant for organizations such as Free Press Unlimited, UNESCO, International Media Support, Hivos, Deutsche Welle, and Canal France International. He has held teaching positions at the American University of Cairo, Roberto Ruffilli Faculty and the Political Science Faculty at University of Bologna. He published a

monograph on media and conflict and several articles on media in the MENA region. He is particularly interested in critical approaches to internet studies and the networked public sphere in the Arab world. He has lived in Berlin since October 2016.