Lesley Wright: Today, club promoters, festival booking agents, artist managers and even specific electronic dance media are more focused on an artist's social media numbers than the music they make or play. If visibility becomes the dominant currency, what risks do we face in terms of cultural flattening or homogenization?

Geert Lovink: The critique of 'retromania' in pop music goes way back and precedes the social media era. Simon Reynolds already summarized it, back in 2011. The issue at stake here is an economic one. The 'flattening' of the sound and 'taste' you refer to is related to the shift in economic models. We all know that musicians can no longer make an income from selling records, CDs and streaming services like Spotify, even when they are perceived 'popular'. This is where social media marketing comes in. The dominant social media channels that only push the known such as Insta, Facebook and TikTok are considered the only realistic option to reach audiences that will have to turn up at live events. I do not need to explain here what the 'flattening' aspect of the Spotify algorithm is. Financially, the social media marketing is key in order to survive. To leave 'social media' in such a precarious situation would be suicide. This is not a decision an artist is making him or herself anyway.

There is a swarm of influencers and social media marketing managers situated around the aura of the artist/DJ: sometimes in their personal team, as part of their booking office, one-off tour managers, the ones working for labels and, last but not least, those attached to the local club or concert venues where they perform. On top of that there are social media managers inside the 'traditional' media such as (online) radio, podcasting, TV, YouTube video producers, the list goes on and on. All this makes a focus on a radical re-invention of one's style, rhythm and vibe hard. Groovy unheard sounds that creates its own subculture and language will not be delivered by the toxic mix of social media and AI. This is not because future sounds will be anti-tech or Luddite; it lacks shadow spaces to shelter,

LW: If this trajectory continues, how do you see the relationship between skill and visibility evolving over the next decade? Do you anticipate a correction or a deeper entrenchment of metric-driven cultural value?

GL: The question is: which group or subculture would be identified as

revolutionary agents of change? Fuck the phone, delete all the socials and do you thing. Who will have the guts? Working closely together with Gen Z, I honestly do not see them ready to take up this challenge. They are aware of it all but are still implicated. Gen Z is the first generation that was fully exposed to the extractivist logic of Silicon Valley. Millennials still see possibilities and their organized optimism can easily be ignored. Gen Z, on the other hand, have faced the full force of the mental health implications of their Covid and post-Covid 24/7 exposure to platforms. Many believe that only societal collapse will produce the necessary rebellion of next gen youngsters? This is hard to predict. We've been waiting in vain for a rebellion against the corporate depression. Instead, artists are still more than willing to participate in this self-promotion game. The metric-driven culture, to get more and more followers, is poorly understood. The whole add-economy and resale of personal data remains in a black box—both the artists and their audience. Still, it is entirely possible to set up networks, communities and communication outside of social media and the platform logic. Who says that you can only reach others through social media? This is entire nonsense.

Link of the day:
https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2026/apr/15/viral-artists-social-media-videos-stewart-lee-werner-herzog.