

Unlike Us #3

Social Media: Design or Decline

March 22 - 23, 2013

TrouwAmsterdam

Conference, Workshops,
Party and Hackathon

networkcultures.org/unlikeus

Unlike Us #3 Conference Report, June 2013
Institute of Network Cultures
Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences
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1. Unlike Us #3 Social Media: Design or Decline

Project Name: Unlike Us #3, Social Media: Design or Decline

Submitter: Institute of Network Cultures

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Link: <http://networkcultures/unlikeus>

Contact: Margreet Riphagen – [margreet\[@\]networkcultures.org](mailto:margreet[@]networkcultures.org)

Location: TrouwAmsterdam, Amsterdam and Studio HvA, Amsterdam

Co-funded: Mondriaan Fund, Creat-IT Applied Research Centre, Stichting Democratie en Media, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences and Domain Media, Creatie en Informatie of Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences

Design: BoerboomIKicurosvka

1.1 Key Results:

- Two days of conference with workshops, a networking party and performances of several (international) speakers, artists and hackers. The conference was held on March 22nd and March 23rd 2013;
- A public hackaton held on March 24th 2013;
- Unlike Us #3 program booklet: includes an overview of all participants and all workshops, a description per session, and a short biography of each participant and employee;
- <http://networkcultures.org/unlikeus/>: the website/weblog of the project. The aim of the weblog is to create a fixed space where information about the topic can be gathered, actualized and elaborated on. Moreover, information about the previous Unlike Us conferences that took place in Cyprus and Amsterdam can be found here. It is also the place where people can order the Unlike Us Reader and download the Unlike Us App;
- Recordings of all performances during the conference. They can be found on: <http://vimeo.com/channels/unlikeus3>
- About 200 visitors a day during the conference;
- Several blog posts, see chapter 3. Next to live reports of the conference, there are also blog posts concerning research, reviews, information about events, and current affairs;
- New contacts amongst the speakers; the network is enlarged and knowledge is shared;
- An extensive overview of resources used for Unlike Us, see <http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/unlikeus/resources/>;
- The INC online media archive is enlarged, including pictures, flyers and posters of the event;
- A coordination meeting about the future of Unlike Us with all involved and interested people;
- A report about the future of Unlike Us and the role of the INC: 'Unlike Us: Looking Ahead';

- An evaluation about the conference and advise for future conferences: 'Unlike Us: Looking Back';
- Active mailing list with around 250 subscribers:
<http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/unlikeus/maillinglist/>.
- Online discussions during and around the Unlike Us event: people used Facebook and Twitter to comment and engage with the topics.

1.2 The Blog: networkcultures.org/unlikeus

The blog is the main portal to the target audience and all updates about the project can be found here. The blog had a lot of visitors, for example in March 2013 almost 2.000. This is mainly due to the number of (research) blogs that are posted on a regular basis and the available content on the blog, like resources and links to relevant information. Moreover, the blog functions as a digital archive: pictures, video's, posters, flyers, research articles and interviews are stored and accessible to the public. The blog will continue to exist after the conference.

□

Unlike Social Media: Us#3 Design or Decline

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Unlike Us: Looking Ahead

Posted: April 25, 2013 at 9:18 am | By: Andrew Erlanger | [Edit](#)

It's been an exciting few years for the Unlike Us initiative, with three conferences, a published reader, an iPad magazine and countless blog posts. Adopting a unique perspective that combines artistic, academic and activist elements, both social media monopolies and their decentralized alternatives have been analysed in great detail. With Unlike Us #3 having drawn to a close, now is a good time to consider the future of the project. For this reason, the Institute of Network Cultures has put together 'Unlike Us: Looking Ahead', which addresses Unlike Us #4 and the 'bigger picture' along with key themes and workshop ideas. You can check it out for yourself here: [UU#3 Looking Ahead](#)

Unlike Us #3 – The Videos

Posted: April 24, 2013 at 3:32 pm | By: Andrew Erlanger | [Edit](#)

Unlike Us #3 is now online! If you missed out on this year's conference or would like to experience it again, be sure to check out our Vimeo channel, where each presentation can be viewed in its entirety:

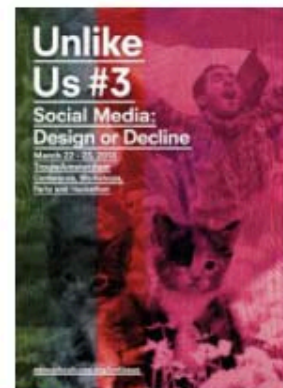
<https://vimeo.com/channels/unlikeus3>

Taking place in Amsterdam from the 22nd to the 23rd of March, Unlike Us #3 featured the following speakers:

Friday, March 22

Session #1 – Theory and Critique of 'the Social'

- Bernard Stiegler: From Neupower to Noopolitics
<https://vimeo.com/channels/unlikeus3/63803603>
- Petra Löffler: A History of Distraction From a Media-Archaeological Perspective



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[Unlike Us: Looking Ahead](#)
[Unlike Us #3 – The Videos](#)
[Social-R-Us – Unlike Us #3 Party](#)
[Bernard Stiegler – From](#)

Figure 1: Screenshot van de Unlike Us blog, May 2013

2. Program of Unlike Us #3

The Unlike Us #3 conference was held on Friday 22nd, Saturday 23rd and Sunday 24th of March 2012 in TrouwAmsterdam (Wibautstraat 127, 1091 GL Amsterdam, The Netherlands) and in the MediaLAB Amsterdam (Studio HvA, Wibastraat 2-4, 1091 GM Amsterdam, The Netherlands).

Friday, March 22

09:30 – 10:00 | **Doors open, coffee and tea** | TrouwAmsterdam

10:00 – 12:15 | **Session 1** | TrouwAmsterdam

1. Theory and Critique of 'Social'

What is the meaning of 'social' when social media like Facebook and Twitter are structured around the individual from the start? Social seems to require a form of collective that isn't to be found in these networks. Let's take the theory and critique of 'social' a step further, towards rethinking the power relations between the social and the technical in what are essentially software systems and platforms. We are more and more aware that social media aren't just happy-go-lucky neutral platforms; while at the same time it's too easy to dismiss them as the bad boys of capitalism. How to understand the social networking logic? Even if Twitter and Facebook implode overnight, the logic of befriending, liking and ranking will further spread across all aspects of life.

Moderator: Geert Lovink (NL)

Speakers:

Bernard Stiegler (FR)

Social Networking As a Stage of Grammatization and the New Political Question

Social networking and engineering are dimensions of the digital stage of a process of grammatization that began thirty thousand years ago. With the advent of digitization, psychic and collective memory as well as social relations have all become objects of exchange value. What this means is that, given digital technologies are organs of publishing, that is, of the production of public space and time, digitization is a process of privatization of the public thing – of the *res publica*. Privatization here means: commodification. In short, what is occurring is the destruction of the psychic and collective process of individuation that began with the Greek polis. Furthermore, the domination by those giants that are Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon is possible above all because very little genuine work is being done on the stakes of digitization by either the academic sphere or the political sphere.

Petra Löffler (DE)

A History of Distraction From a Media-Archaeological Perspective

Petra Löffler will reconstruct the rise of a notion of distraction as distributed attention and the role it has played in articulating modern modes of perception, especially the reception of

modern mass media like cinema. In doing so, she will focus on the gawker or gazer as a figuration of a mass audience which has to distribute attention in order to react on different stimuli almost simultaneously. Such a media-archaeological perspective can help to understand why nowadays distraction again has become a hotspot of cultural criticism.

Tristan Thielmann (DE)

Account-Able Networking: Harold Garfinkel's Contribution Towards a Theory of Social Media

Tristan Thielmann draws paradigmatic parallels between the development of ethnomethodology and media studies by outlining Harold Garfinkel's theoretical and praxeological contributions to social media research. Based on the analysis of his "Sociological Theory of Information", Thielmann demonstrates how the thingification of information within accounts determines the agency of communicative nets. Social media are, therefore, distinguishable from other document-based media mainly through their increased accountability. Taking this into account, it is possible to expose patterned socio-techniques already described by Garfinkel in the 1950s that remain characteristic of the web today.

12:15 – 12:30 | **Launch: Unlike Us Reader Launch** | TrouwAmsterdam

The **Institute of Network Cultures** is proud to be launching its first-ever **Unlike Us Reader**, the eighth reader in its collection. It offers a critical examination of social media, bringing together theoretical essays, personal discussions and artistic manifestos. How can we understand the social media we use everyday, or consciously choose not to use? We know very well that monopolies control social media, but what are the alternatives? While Facebook continues to increase its user population and combine loose privacy restrictions with control over data, many researchers, programmers, and activists turn towards designing a decentralized future. Through understanding the big networks from within, be it by philosophy or art, new perspectives emerge. Contributors include Bernard Stiegler, Leighton Evans, Seda Gürses, Spideralex, Harry Halpin, Ippolita, Vincent Toubiana, Simona Lodi, Marc Stumpel and Lonneke van der Velden.

12:30-13:30 | **Lunch** | TrouwAmsterdam

13:30-15:15 | **Session 2** | TrouwAmsterdam

2. Are you distributed? The Federated Web Show

The best way to criticize platform monopolies is to support alternative free and open source software that can be locally installed. In the Federated Web Show we are setting the terms of decentralization. A lot of alternative social networks are being developed with the aim to give users greater power, for example over their data. Just think of Lorea or Diaspora. Which choices have to be made for a decentralized design and what are the traps? Is it necessary to take the sharing individual as a starting point of the network? A different kind of social networking is possible, but there are many questions to attend to. Are you ready for constant decision-making? How deeply does your trust in the community you share your data with reach? In a lively talk show, guests on stage or participating on screen discuss the

possible future of decentralization and concepts for alternatives. Open or closed, commercial or anarchistic, distributed or centralized: join the Federated Web Show.

Moderator: Seda Gürses (BE)

Participants:

Capo (Cyberspace) and Spideralex (ES) from Lorea

The Lorea project creates secure social cybernetic systems, in which a network of humans will become simultaneously represented in a virtual shared world. Its aim is to create a distributed and federated nodal organization of entities with no geophysical territory, interlacing their multiple relationships through binary codes and languages. Lorea.org

George Danezis (UK)

George Danezis is a researcher and advocate of online privacy. His interests include anonymous communications and peer-to-peer and social network security. On the design side, he has worked on the traffic analysis of deployed protocols such as [Tor](#) and is a lead designer of [Mixminion](#), an anonymous remailer.

Harry Halpin (US)

Harry Halpin is a World Wide Web Consortium (W3C/MIT) Team member, under the direction of Tim Berners-Lee, where he leads efforts in social standardization and cryptography. His work is aimed at evolving the web into a secure platform for free communication in order to enable collective intelligence. Halpin contributed to the article “Collective Individuation: The Future of the Social Web” in INC’s Unlike Us Reader (2013).

Reni Hofmüller (AT)

Reni Hofmüller is an artist and activist in the areas of new media, free software, open hardware, technology and politics in general. She is a member of the Institute for Media Archeology.

Vincent Toubiana (US)

Vincent Toubiana is an engineer at the IT expert department of the Commission Nationale de l’Informatique et des Libertés (CNIL). His PhD research focused on web search privacy and privacy preserving behavioral targeting.

VIDEO:

Arvind Narayanan (IN/US)

Arvind Narayanan is an Assistant Professor in Computer Science at Princeton. He studies information privacy and his research has shown that data anonymization is broken in fundamental ways. Narayanan contributed to the article “Unlikely Outcomes? A Distributed Discussion on the Prospects and Promise of Decentralized Personal Data Architectures” in INC’s Unlike Us Reader (2013).

15:15 – 15:30 | **Q&A with Peter Olsthoorn** | TrouwAmsterdam

Peter Olsthoorn (NL)

Interviewed by Geert Lovink

With *The Power of Facebook*, Dutch IT journalist Peter Olsthoorn wrote a ‘journalistic bible’ about many aspects of the 1 billion-person empire and areas of tension on Facebook: its kitchen secrets, privacy and marketing, crime and surveillance, terrorism and revolution, sociology and philosophy, ICT principles, Mark Zuckerberg and the money. His book was published in a long and short edition in Dutch last year and will soon be released in English. Olsthoorn is both a fan and critic of Facebook, as he is of the Unlike Us movement. He argues for the possibilities of Facebook to become a real social network and an extension of the open internet, with open trade in privacy as an asset. Geert Lovink will discuss his views in a short interview.

15:30 – 15:45 | **Coffee and tea break** | TrouwAmsterdam

15.45 – 17.30 | **Session 3** | TrouwAmsterdam

3. Political Economy of Social Networks: Art & Practice

What better way to counter political economical issues than by art and creativity? Artists play a crucial role in visualizing power relationships and disrupting the daily routines of social media usage. Artistic practice is also a tool for analysis, as artists are often first to deconstruct the familiar and present an alternative vision. How can we imagine the political economy of the social – whether on the big and closed platforms or on newly arising alternatives? Artists and researchers talk about creative projects questioning and criticizing the commercial side of social media. What alternative visions do the arts present towards free labor, commodification, alienation and the like? And how do they manage to keep out of the web of economics themselves?

Moderator: Miriam Rasch (NL)

Speakers:

Simona Lodi (IT)

Art as Networked Machinery: When Art Becomes Anti-Social for Being More Social

An inquiry into the assumption that artists are not just aesthetic mediators, but also social mediators who use networks to redefine relational and media space. Simona Lodi gives a process-oriented analysis that relies mostly on a set of common-sense terms, such as ‘networks’, ‘users’, ‘people’, ‘artists’ and ‘connections’, in social and political performances. By uncovering the artists’ methods, she delves into the multifaceted levels of human activities, their networked machinery and the actions of art. The underlying question concerns the relationship between technology and art. Technology does not invent new art forms by itself; rather it opens up new possibilities for artists. In this sense, the artist’s function is no longer that of conveying traditional values and thoughts. Instead, artists are intermediaries who offer audiences new values and perceptions based on their

interaction with an original approach to networked technology as an alternative economy and common system.

Benjamin Grosser (US)

Facebook Demetricator and the Easing of Prescribed Sociality

The Facebook interface is filled with numbers. These numbers, or metrics, measure and present our social value and activity, enumerating friends, likes, comments and more. Benjamin Grosser presents his software intervention called Facebook Demetricator. Demetricator allows Facebook's users to hide these metrics. The focus is no longer on how many friends one has or on how much people like their status, but on who they are and what they said. Friend counts disappear. '16 people like this' becomes 'people like this'. Through changes like these, Demetricator invites Facebook's users to try the system without the numbers, to see how the experience is changed by their absence. This open source browser add-on thus aims to disrupt the prescribed sociality these metrics produce, enabling a network society that isn't dependent on quantification.

Karlessi from Ippolita (IT)

Minds Without Bodies: The Rites of Religions 2.0

In performance societies, we need help to be at the level of our online identities. Social networks are caregivers, through a series of rituals that make us feel part of the people networks. The good shepherds of the digital 'good news' automatically lead us to the green pastures of freedom. Priests, gurus and martyrs of online sociality instruct us on what tools to use, how many times, where and with whom. They warn us against viruses; they protect us from the bad guys, at reasonable prices: we just have to say always, here and now, what we think, believe, want. Who our friends are. This feeds Big Data's algocracy that makes us obedient sheep to the radical transparency, the key-value of performance societies. Others are: emotional pornography, the cult of ephemeral creativity, the holy war for the extension of connectivity everywhere, moral panic against net-wolves threatening children online. How to imagine self-managed, immanent rituals?

VIDEO:

Interview with Richard Metzger (US)

When Richard Metzger published his article "Facebook: I Want My Friends Back" on DangerousMinds.net, it quickly went viral. The article outlined how Dangerous Minds' Facebook reach suffered after the introduction of Promoted Posts. Metzger shares his experience and critique in a short video interview.

Hester Scheurwater (NL)

Shooting Back

"The mirrored self-images encompass my private fantasies. They are my way of reacting on the imitated and fake media images, which are constantly calling upon our imagination, without intending to be taken too seriously. I try to deconstruct this call's effect with my

reactions by switching the 'subject-object' relationship, without being victimized by it. My self-images show I am not a victim of an imposed sexually charged visual culture, instead I give a self-aware answer, in which I try to show my feelings and/or views on the unreal and fake imagery, which is forced upon us daily. This series of photos emerged from a collection of daily uploads on Facebook and my personal blog. In the digital public space, I try to reinforce the exhibitionist nature by presenting them in the context of a living room or a living room setting. In this context exhibitionism and voyeurism come together.”

Tobias Leingruber (DE)

The Future of Identity in a Digital World

With more than 1 billion (monthly active) users Facebook is the dominant identity system on the web. When signing up for new services around the open web it's quite common and sometimes mandatory these days to use 'Facebook Connect' instead of creating a new and independent user account. People stop ranting on blog comments because those only allow comments connected to a 'real name' or 'Facebook identity'—'til the end of time. For the good or bad we are losing anonymity and Facebook Inc. is establishing order in our digital world. The project "Social ID Bureau" draws a possible near future of Facebook Inc. actually giving-out 'real life' passports (<http://socialidbureau.com>). Leingruber will give an overview on this project, the vision and where we are today. How is Facebook Inc. already controlling our digital identities and influencing our everyday lives? Where are the issues and what are the opportunities?

20:00 – 22:00 | **Facebook Resistance** | MediaLAB Amsterdam

Workshop with Tobias Leingruber and Marc Stumpel

Facebook Resistance is a creative intervention and research initiative that focuses on the ways to change Facebook's rules and functionality from inside the system. Its aim is to investigate and instigate modification of the platform to make it better suited to the users' needs and desires, e.g. changing Facebook's colour. In this workshop we gather to reflexively resist hierarchical decisions in the programming of the software with browser hacks. The participants are given the opportunity to experiment with browser hacks in order to go beyond the 'default freedom' that restrains users in customizing the Facebook interface and features. Join us to modify your Facebook profile and experience it like never before! Bring your laptop. No programming knowledge required. Please RSVP to [larissa\[at\]networkcultures\[dot\]org](mailto:larissa@networkcultures.org).

[vimeo]<http://vimeo.com/19628826>[/vimeo]

20:00 – 22:00 | **Hackathon Catalyst** | MediaLAB Amsterdam

Hackathon with proposals by: Spideralex (Lorea), Vesna Manojlovic (Technologia Incognita), Eleanor Saitta (Briar) and others

The Hackathon Catalyst aims to explore alternative social media trajectories. We get together, pitch projects and provide the conditions to start working. The discussions at the Catalyst will provide a basis for Sunday's hackathon. Proposals will be pitched by Vesna Manojlovic from Technologia Incognita (the Amsterdam Hackerspace), Spideralex from Lorea

(an alternative social network), Eleanor Saitta from the Briar project (a secure news and discussion platform) and others. Lonneke van der Velden will moderate. Please RSVP to larissa@networkcultures.org.

Saturday, March 23

11:00 – 12:30 | **Social ID Bureau** | MediaLAB Amsterdam

Presented by Tobias Leingruber

Next time someone needs to “see your ID” – How about showing a Facebook ID card instead of the documents your government gave you? On the web this is common practice for millions of people already. The Social ID Bureau is handing-out personal identification cards for a limited number of Facebook Social Network citizens, interested in alpha testing. Be the first among your friends to pick-up your social identification card and explore the future. Please RSVP to larissa@networkcultures.org.

[vimeo]<http://vimeo.com/41183364>[/vimeo]

11:00 – 12:30 | **Unlike Us Coordination Meeting** | MediaLAB Amsterdam

Everyone is invited to this town hall-style meeting to help plan the next Unlike Us conference and the future of the Unlike Us initiative. Topics for discussion include the location for the next conference and areas of research to be explored.

12:30-13:30 | **Lunch** | TrouwAmsterdam

13:30 – 15:15 | **Session 4** | TrouwAmsterdam

4. Mobile Use of Social Media

Everyone agrees: mobile is the next big upheaval, changing what we know about social media all around. Location matters. Tagging space and time and adding location information and context prolongs data value into new complexities. Users are embracing Facebook with their smartphones, causing trouble to revenue streams and thereby making it even more apparent that the user is the commodity. Meanwhile Facebook has developed a clever strategy to lock-in new users in the emerging markets in Africa, Asia and Latin America by inventing the Facebook SIM Card and free apps for feature phones. You can now make friends on a black and white 200-character screen. For many first-time connected users Facebook becomes the default. Tracking mobile data streams in real time provides a gold mine that has only just been discovered. Who are the key players in the mobile data business and what are their practices?

Moderator: Oliver Leistert (DE)

Speakers:

[Leighton Evans \(UK\)](#)

Buying and Selling People and Places: The Political Economy of Mobile Social Media

The emergence of mobile phones in society has provoked theoretical and popular debate for three decades. As phone technology improves in developed markets and gains footholds in others, the possibility of a political economy of mobile phone usage becomes clearer, and while there are technological differences in the phones used, there are similarities in the commoditization of people and places. In the West, smartphone technology with GPS capability allows for databases of place to be constructed and data sold based on user generated content. In the developing world, 'dumbphone' technology allows for less sophisticated but equally effective commoditization of usage and location. The commoditization of place through user – generated content demands an examination of emerging power relations in light of ubiquitous mobile computational technology, and how social capital and commoditization intersect in the new media world to reconfigure the experience of place and the visibility of places to users.

Marion Walton (ZA)

Prepaid Social Media and the Mobile Internet in South Africa: Patterns in Young People's Mobile Discourse

Mass appropriation of mobile messaging by young people in South Africa has placed texting and (more recently) many-to-many communication via the internet within the reach of many. Marion Walton tackles ongoing issues of differentiated access to and use of mobile communication, and particularly the specificities of mobile-centric access to the internet. These differences have important implications for the mediatization of talk in general and political talk in particular, via new interfaces to political discourse. Examples come from some recent qualitative studies of youth mobile participation in South Africa, highlighting the specific local patterns of adoption and participation, in particular the influence of differential commodification of mobile communication, the tiered functionality of phones and local preferences for Bluetooth over more costly forms of online media sharing, and case studies of participation via messaging on Mig33 and MXit profiles, comparing them to participation in a popular Facebook group.

Nathan Freitas (US)

'Checking-In' for the Greater Good

What secret power of mobile technology is it that has such a profound effect on reducing the inhibition of those that come in contact with it? Why is it that acts which no one would perform in view of a CCTV security camera (which would only be seen by a few), are commonly done in front of a higher resolution mobile phone camera that can instantly broadcast to millions? There is something intoxicating about the real human connections made through these devices, that dramatically changes risk tolerance of the participants. Our task is to figure out how to harness this behavior to have a net positive impact on the world, as opposed to just scoffing at its narcissism. Can 'check-ins' be transformed into 'sit-ins'? Can an instagram of your dinner be used to battle Genetically Modified foods? Can we find a balance between security and social? Join us to find out!

15:15 – 15:30 | **Coffee and tea break** | TrouwAmsterdam

5. Facebook Riot: Join or Decline

The tendency to praise Twitter and Facebook for their revolutionary powers has mostly passed. We might even think first about the London riots and Project X when it comes to the mobilizing qualities of these networks. Still, the concept of ‘liberation technology’—information and communication technologies that empower grassroots movements—continues to influence our ideas about networked participation. Could there even be something like #Occupy without social media? Activists use social media to further their goals, but in that way are also dependent on the platform. Is a non-commercial, free and open network essential in that respect? But then, how do you reach as many people as possible? How do social media and the control issues of internet influence the practice of protest? Governments can use the same social media tools for surveillance, propaganda or detection. We need to envision organized networks based on strong ties, yet open enough to grow quickly if the time is right.

Moderator: Mirko Tobias Schäfer (NL)

Speakers:

Miriyam Aouragh (UK)

Social Media as Damocles Sword: The Internet for Arab Activists

The Arab revolutions were based on people-power rather than imperial regime-change. With the help of the internet this unique bravery had global ramifications as it transcended the local, thereby inspiring activists in Wisconsin, Barcelona, Athens and Amsterdam alike. But the role of the internet during political change balances between its empowering and disempowering implications. There are two difficulties with the ‘liberation technology’ approach: first, a peculiar fascination with technology (‘Facebook Revolution’) that echoes previous civilization narratives (Arabs awaking by the availability of non-native modern technologies); second, the celebratory projections overlook other (offline) dynamics and consequences and little emphasis is given to the negative impact of neo-liberalism, such as the geo-political interests in the distribution of counter-revolutionary internet tools. The highly contentious case of Syria demonstrates that local activists have gained some but also suffered a lot from the internet. Surveillance tools and extensive counter-revolutionary social media pages are two of the venue points that help to indicate the power structures.

Simone Halink (NL)

Dutch Data Requests: Fighting for Transparency

Over the last couple of years, Bits of Freedom has been fighting for transparency of communications surveillance. Such transparency is required to ensure that this measure is only used if provided by law, necessary, and proportionate to a legitimate aim. Until now, the Dutch government has provided very little information on communications surveillance—despite repeated requests for more transparency. This refusal as well as the Dutch careless attitude towards wiretapping, is reason for grave concern. Simone Halink of Bits of Freedom

will share experiences and strategy in fighting for transparency of communications surveillance in the Netherlands.

Thomas Boeschoten (NL)

Project X Haren: Participation and Mobilization on Facebook

Prior to the 21st of September 2012, media speculated about the possible outcome of a party that was originally proposed on Facebook and had virtually grown to epic proportions. After what seemed an innocent invitation at first, it turned out that thousands of people turned up and finally the evening ended in riots. Thomas Boeschoten discusses the role of Facebook and its design elements in a broader context of youth culture, media attention and the authorities to gain insight into how this could have happened.

Simona Levi (ES)

TACTICS 2.0: Learn in the Net, Act Everywhere

Some practical notes about the type of struggle that has been constructed over the past few years in Spain. The previous struggle—for the defence of the internet and sharing—has been crucial for arriving at the #15M movement. Firstly for the maturity it has created, which cuts right across all layers of public opinion, both in terms of defending something that belongs to it and is in danger of being snatched away—the neutral internet—and secondly in terms of ethical ways of relating to others. Now, thanks to those skills we have learned on the net, we are evolving to a highly effective way of fighting back and to constructively hacking the system. Simona Levi will show some examples to explain why something new is really happening.

21:00 – 01:00 | **Social-R-Us Party** | Op de Valreep

On Saturday night, we can relax and enjoy visuals by Freyja van den Boom and background music by the Unlikables. The finishing touch will be provided by Eindbaas, a DJ duo that will be playing nostalgic “chip tunes” from game consoles favourites like Nintendo, Atari and Sega. The venue is a former animal shelter-turned squat and creative space. Join us for a unique night out in Amsterdam! Entrance is free.

Sunday, March 24

12:00 – 19:00 | **Hackathon** | MediaLAB Amsterdam

The Amsterdam Hackerspace, Techologia Incognita, will present a full day hackathon in the MediaLAB Amsterdam. The hackathon will build on the proposals presented at Friday night's Hackathon Catalyst. Please RSVP to [larissa\[at\]networkcultures\[dot\]org](mailto:larissa@networkcultures.org).

3. Blogposts

A team of bloggers has been very active with posting blogs in the run up to the conference, during the conference and after the conference. In-depth interviews and research blog posts are written by employees of the Institute of Network Cultures: Larissa Hildebrandt, Andrew Erlanger, Stijn Peeters and Serena Westra. They have written live reports of all performances together with a team of students affiliated to the courses New Media and Digital Culture of the University of Amsterdam and the University Utrecht: Katia Truijen, Michelle Oosthuyzen, Therese Schedifka, Kimberly Walbillig en Freyja van den Boom.

In addition, all blog posts about Unlike Us #3 are listed in this report, starting with the most recent one. The first part consists of conference reports and the second part of research and informational blog posts. The interviews, research blogs and conference reports form a beautiful overview of everything that happened during the Unlike Us #3 project. Most blog posts are English.

4.1 Conference Reports

Bernard Stiegler – From Neuropower to Noopolitics

Posted: March 26, 2013 at 4:15 pm | By: Katia Truijen

Unlike Us #3 has begun, and we start immediately with the very essence of social media, namely the conception of 'the social', and how this is transformed by social media today. Before we will zoom in to the practices of e.g. the Facebook Demetricator and Anti-Social Media later today, we are now still zoomed out, we see the bigger picture. Bernard Stiegler gives us a lecture about how neuropower is involved in social networks, and how we should use these kind of networks for a new knowledge politics. Hold on!

First of all, I highly encourage you to read the article of Bernard Stiegler in the [Unlike Us Reader](#): "The Most Precious Good in the Era of Social Technologies". In this article, he launches the concepts that he uses in his argument today.



Reversing the pharmacological direction of social networks

In this essay, Stiegler starts with the conception of *philia*, the fundament of the social. It exists because we are by necessity bound to others. *Philia* exists between individuals, but also between communities. In fact, it is the most precious good of individual human beings. Without it, life is not worth living. It is also the most precious good for societies, because *philia* constitutes linking power, which is also the power to create social networks. It constitutes a process of individuation, because one desires the other. Technical individuation both augments and diminishes psychic and collective individuation, as Stiegler explains later on.

In a social network like Facebook, one's network of friends is explicitly declared and described. This description causes an alteration of what used to be understood as social

networks such as a family or a school. (In fact, we were already included in these social networks, without really realizing it so much...)

So 'friendship' is formalized and publicized in a social network like Facebook. But doesn't friendship essentially escapes formalization because it is informal? Or is friendship always declared and made public?

Trans-individuation

Facebook both allows to create a profile (by self-description) and allows for dialogue. Self-indexication (profiling) is used by advertisers for 'surgical marketing' and causes a renewal of social life according to Stiegler. Some would argue that social networks are intensifying individuation, others would argue that the formalization of friendship destroys it. According to Stiegler, social networks could actually lead under certain conditions to reflexive individuation. It is through science that we should arrive at a kind of reflexive philia, which can be understood as the hallmark for political societies.

The descriptive grammatization of social relationships (making your network explicit on Facebook) is a process of trans-individuation. This written script intensifies individuation, but it can also lead to subjectivication and disindividuation.

By documenting the lives of people, they are also controlled (Foucault's biopower). Stiegler warns us that in the information society of today, digitization and traceability, especially through social networks and "surgical marketing", could lead to something that is greater than biopower, namely psycho-socio-power.



In short, social networks represent a stage within a process of grammatization of social relations. Social networks are a pharmacologic phenomenon. They are a cure and a poison, they allow for both individuation and disindividuation. However, this potential disindividuation

can be countered, when one is able to reverse the pharmacologic direction of social networks.

In fact, Bernard Stieglers asks for nothing less than inventing the future of social networks. This is only possible when we understand these networks as technological and social, and make these networks capable of becoming agents of reflexivity.

Trans-individuation, whilst it also creates processes of disindividuation, is also the only road towards the invention of new forms of individuation.

The challenge lies in the arrangement of social networks with social groups. For such networks, we need to create politicized communities of friends in the social networks. They should take a critical stance regarding the conditions of their individuation. So, it is necessary to develop communities of theoretical and practical knowledge on and in the networks, to establish spaces of critique.

From Neuropower to Noopolitics

We are now zooming in to the brain. The audience in Trouw at *Unlike Us #3*, is listening to Bernard Stiegler, but everyone will hear something different in his story, based on past experiences, and therefore making a certain selection. Stiegler makes a distinction between primary, secondary and tertiary retention.

Secondary retentions are former primary retentions that constitute the fabric of a memory. These secondary retentions then, function as filters, that decide again on the selection of primary retentions. The play between secondary retention and primary retention is conditioned and constituted by what Stiegler calls tertiary retention.

We are now beginning to see the development of neuropower, Stiegler states. Trans-individuation is transforming by the constant and systematic control of the relations between members of a social network and through the production of digital tertiary retentions by the members.

According to Stiegler, the only way to turn the pharmacological situation of social networks like Facebook around, so to establish the spaces of critique as mentioned before, is to invest in digital reticulation by setting up a process of academic publication, both from academic institutions as referring to the knowledge that emerges in the 'republic of letters'.



Social networks must become contributive spaces, founded on the critical production of (meta)data by trans-individuation. This then leads to a international new republic, that can only occur together with rules that must be explicit and constantly criticized and debated. According to Stiegler, we will see the third age of the web: after the age of the hyperlink and the search engine, the age of collaborative and social networks.

The challenge of social networks is thus to transform the neuropower that operates on brains and on societies, into a noopower of societies, by politically reimagining individuation. According to Stiegler, this requires the implementation of new annotational languages for the Web. He is working on this at the [Institute for Research and Innovation](#).

Petra Löffler – A History of Distraction From a Media-Archaeological Perspective

Michelle Oosthuizen

Discussing the theory and critique of 'social' during the first session of Unlike Us #3, Petra Löffler provides us with a media-archaeological perspective on the rise of the concept of distraction; an important source of critique when it comes to mass media. By leading us through the history of distraction, Löffler shows how some of the questions we are struggling with today can be traced back into history. Her insights lead to a better understanding of the tension and relationship between attention and distraction.



Distraction has its own genealogy. In the 18th century we see how the notion of distraction becomes the subject of different discourses and disciplines. Within philosophical discourse, distraction was traditionally regarded as the opposite of attention and concentration. Being distracted was a synonym for being inattentive. In 1720 Jean Pierre Crousaz wrote:

Distraction is a special kind of the obstacle of attention (Crousaz 1720)

Within these discourses distraction was considered a dangerous mental force that could not be controlled. On the other hand we see how by the end of the 18th century distraction regains a more positive meaning as a way to restore mental health and to create a healthy balance between work and leisure. An entertainment that provokes interest and distracts one from worries and vexations. Löffler refers here to the concept of 'taking care of oneself', introduced by the French philosopher Michel Foucault.

Distraction as distributed attention

At the beginning of the 19th century the question arises: Can one be attentive to different things in the same moment of time? The answer: Yes. People came to believe that the human mind is able to switch between different objects and attention is able to split. If attention can be distributed, then attention and distraction can no longer be regarded as two distinguishable mental states: they collapse. This way of thinking about attention resulted in new insights of investigating the faculties of the human senses and capacities of the human mind.

German philosopher Immanuel Kant contributed to the notion of distraction as distributed attention by distinguishing between two modes: voluntary and involuntary distraction (Kant

1798). If distraction is involuntary it is regarded absent-mindedness. If on the other hand a distraction is intentional, it is called dissipation. In the last case distraction is an art of living, a way to achieve a certain balance between leisure and labour. Following this line of thought, intentional distraction (dissipation) is distributed attention.

The human mind is mostly active in several sections of the brain and several streams of attention move in different directions, continues Löffler. Furthermore mental activities are never complete and many separate mental acts are always combined. Switching attention has become normal to us: it is 'natural' human behaviour. Research has also found that the division of consciousness is a normal state of mind because it acts as a protective shield against excessive stimuli. It was French philosopher Théodule Ribot who referred to attention as "un état exceptionell," because attention is in contradiction with the basic condition of psychic life: change (Ribot 1889). This means that attention is actually an 'abnormal' state of mind, concludes Löffler.

Metropolitan mass audience searching for distraction

In the age industrialization, different sites of distraction arise such as big cities, mobility, traffic and leisure. Furthermore, the search for entertainment and the urge to alter the body's state resulted in new bodies of distraction. Löffler introduces the gawker or gazer as a metaphor for the modern spectator as a member of a mass audience that has to distribute attention in order to react to different stimuli at the same time.

Within this context, the arrival of cinema marks a climax: the aesthetic of astonishment. It was Sigried Kracauer who combined the concepts of distraction and cinema in *The Cult of Distraction* (1926). Kracauer analyzed the rise of cinema as an apparatus of mass distraction and theorized distraction as a specific mode of cinematic perception.

Disorienting the senses can be a source of happiness and one can even feel liberated from the forces of capitalist economy. Besides a way to provide entertainment, distraction can also be regarded a precondition for sanity as mental activities that acquire concentration have to be disrupted. Some physical therapists argue that muscular movements, like drumming the fingers, help release stress.

Age of distraction

Having glanced at its history, what body of distraction do we inhabit today? In our modern information society we are required to multi-task on a daily basis. We use information technology such as mobile media to check our e-mails, phone and text with our friends and listen to music – preferably all at the same time. As a result it has become normal to distribute our attention at all times.

There is however a fine line between multitasking, which is temporal and focused on achieving certain goals, and falling into a permanent state of distributed attention, which forms an important source for stress. In our current information society we are in fact in a continuous state of what Löffler calls partial attention. We are currently recognizing the negative effects of the age of distraction. According to for example the high numbers of

ADHD, our low attention spans and the undisciplined behavior of school children, we can see how “distraction becomes a problem of the whole society,” concludes Löffler.

A transformation of our everyday life and a disruption of the balance between work and leisure is facilitated by for example the widespread use of mobile media. We need to act upon this trend by reorganizing our physical and professional life and creating space for leisure and relaxation. In our current technological age of distraction, a new balance between stress and relaxation will need to be found. Every generation has found its own ways to deal with these problems. Therefore “I will not speak of pathology of attention”, claims Löffler. But we do need to understand it is a question of power relation and of what we regard as ‘normal’.

Tristan Thielmann – Account-Able Networking: Harold Garfinkel’s Contribution Towards a Theory of Social Media

Michelle Oosthuyzen

Tristan Thielmann writes about the American sociologist Harold Garfinkel and his ethnomethodologic approach to make traces back into the history of cybernetic theory. Today at Unlike Us #3, Thielmann argues that the socio-techniques that Garfinkel described in the 1950s remain relevant for exploring contemporary social media. As an introduction into a praxeological perspective on social media, Thielmann commented on an [article](#) from the Unlike Us mailing list from Douglas Rushkoff in which he explains why he quit Facebook.

Facebook has never been merely a social platform. Rather, it exploits our social interactions the way a Tupperware party does. Facebook does not exist to help us make friends, but to turn our network of connections, brand preferences and activities over time — our “social graphs” — into money for others” (Rushkoff 2013)



Although Thielmann agrees that Facebook, like any other network media, exploits our social interaction and actively misrepresents us, he also argues that this doesn't make it into an "anti-social social network". It was an illusion to associate social media with participatory or democratic media in the first place. It's sociality works rather differently...

The problem lies in the misunderstanding (and this is inscribed into social media) that there should be a synthesis of social and technical networks. We must therefore not be misled by the term 'social' but rather ask ourselves: what, from an ethnomethodological perspective, is new in social media? Ethnomethodology studies the everyday methods that people use for the production of social order. Ethnomethodology's "central recommendation is that the activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organized everyday affairs are identical with members procedures for making those settings account-able." (Garfinkel 1967: 1). Account- able refers to:

- Able to give an account of
- Able to give an account for
- To be accountable
- Able to be allocated to an account

In this context, accountability means the social actions are already rendered mutually observable, allocatable, describable and explicable through their occurrence. Because social networks are constructed around gathering personal data and self-documentation, they are characterized by an increased accountability, concludes Thielmann. As self documentation enters into the public sphere, the predictability increases. We see how algorithms start initiating communication exchange.

This however, is not something new. In the 1950s Garfinkel already thought about how members of social groups represent themselves within their social configurations. Garfinkel emphasized the methodological relevance of ethnomethodology to media studies by connecting information, communication and interaction theories with social actions. Garfinkel for example used medical files in his search for documented representations that reflect and simultaneously define contractual relationships. However, documenting and self-reporting becomes part of everyday life and it is within these practices that media emerge. We also notice that users of these social networks are mostly unaware of the costs of these apparently 'free' self-documentation platforms.

Thielmann explains that we could view a Facebook account as a document that files the exchanges between friends and between the user and the platform provider in a relationship account. The accounts here actually normalize a relationship instead of providing a clear description. Documented representations are about expectations, and expectations of expectation: how to act in certain situations. This phenomenon was already connected to communicative networks in 1951 by Garfinkel and is no less characteristic for the social networks of today.

- Social media uncover a series of sociotechniques that are also characteristic for communication networks:
- Member's accounts: practices of looking and telling that reflect a result of an agreement.
- Contractual form of communication: contract of a relationship.
- Necessary vagueness of a contract or a situation.
- Retrospective-prospective interpretation; new interpretation of sequences and facts under changes present conditions. E.g. the current reframing of Wikileaks.
- Ad hocing: media are only created ad hoc once they are used and cannot claim a function beforehand due to their structural transparency.
- Ongoing accomplishment: in social interaction, objectivity is 'created'
- Media of accountability: the conveying of meaning is an active public event and is no an internal mental activity.

According to Thielman, the social network thus becomes a "breaching experiment" where the rules of the game are reorganized on a daily basis. Because the internet has increased the number member accounts, more people are entering into more contractual relationships. On the other hand, we notice breaching as people negotiate new social rules that no longer correspond with rules in the past.

The sociotechniques described by Garfinkel can certainly make a contribution to current media theory. They outline a normative social order of interaction that has been rendered visible by the internet and allows it to be called a social medium. Thielman emphasizes that social media are an example of what counts for all media: their actuality is only revealed in actuality and their cultural relevance is only rendered visible in their social practice.

The Federated Web Show – Rethinking Decentralization

Therese Schedifka & Katia Truijen

The best way to criticize platform monopolies is to support alternative free and open source software that can be locally installed. A lot of alternative social networks are being developed with the aim to give users greater power, for example over their data.



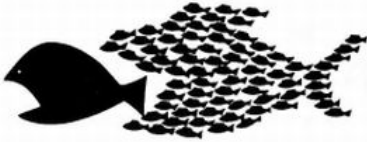
During The Federated Web Show, five speakers from different backgrounds discussed the notion of decentralization and concepts for alternatives: [Seda Gürses](#), [Spideralex](#), [Capo](#), [Reni Hofmüller](#), [Vincent Toubiana](#) and [George Danzesis](#). Do we need open or closed, commercial or anarchistic, distributed or centralized networks. What will the future of social networks look like?

Is decentralization really decentralized?

Moderator of the discussion Seda Gürses explains that the basic services we use today are centralized. Decentralized platforms such as [Diaspora](#) and [Lorea](#) form an alternative, but most of them still have little attention. Apart from that, are decentralized platforms intrinsically better? Do decentralized networks actually have inherently positive values? Two parties appeared in the debate that are representing the perspectives of the more corporate (centralized) and alternative (decentralized) network.



George Danezis, researcher at Microsoft, starts off with the metaphor of a big fish eating many small ones, and the alternative of the united school of small fish that together are able to eat the big fish. (This is the idea of the occupy movement of the 1% of the population that has the power).



Here, the big fish represents economic power (or Facebook) and the small fishes are the users (or alternative projects like Diaspora and Lorea). The question remains: how will power be distributed in the future?

According to George Danezis, a collective of people that act together against corporate power is not going to appear magically. Some sort of centralization has to be involved. Danezis questions the future organization of our data and privacy. Facebook is just a temporal platform, he states. "Facebook is not a marriage for life, there were social networks before and after Facebook. It's only here for a few years." Nevertheless, alternatives should really think of how to organize their networks.



Between idealism and realism

Spideralex states that Lorea operates in the in-between space of the the two images of the fishes. As a platform, Lorea tries to make it easier to make decisions with a collective. According to Spideralex, social networks are so important now, that we have to allow ourselves to dream about how we want to communicate. She argues that Lorea wants to reach technological sovereignty and autonomy, and use this technology to be in contact with others. "We simply do not want to be dependent on commercial systems." This makes it quite hard to survive, she must admit. Hopefully the conditions will improve in the future.



This idea of autonomy also inspired media artist Reni Hofmüller. She started art projects in the nineties that experiment with our surroundings through technology, setting up networks of servers. “At this moment, we are in a situation of ‘solutionism’”, she states. “We only think about systems in terms of whether they work or not. When something is not working, we immediately want a solution. This idea has to do with a particular understanding of ourselves, in the rich part of the world. However, we should ask ourselves whether Facebook is not just an illusion of what we want. What do you actually wish for?” According to Reni Hofmüller, the solution in the end might not be in a technical interface at all.

In a video interview, [Arvind Narayanan](#) states that it is most unlikely that alternative social media will overcome the power of the market. Even if alternative networks would be successful, this does not mean that decentralized networks are a better solution per se. For example, privacy remains a very big issue.

Discussion on the distribution of power and decentralized social networks will continue. How do we balance between idealism and realism? You can decide for yourself. Will decentralization be the future for social media? Will we keep to centralized networks, or will we opt for decentralized alternative in the end? Join the discussion!

Simona Lodi – Art as Networked Machinery: When Art Becomes Anti-Social for Being More Social

Serena Westra

Simona Lodi took the stage for the third session of UnlikeUs #3 – Political Economy of Social Networks: Art & Practice. Lodi is an Italian art critic and curator and she is interested in the relationship between art and technology. In her work she is focusing on methods and language, and the relation between social and political dynamics. For Unlike Us she talked about anti-social art and showed different interesting art projects. The collection consists of illegal art, social media processes and social and political performances. Lodi argues that the point of anti-social art is primarily political.



1. The Anti-Social app

For how many minutes would you like to be anti-social? With this app you can block yourself from being social on the internet, or at least from being social on Facebook, Twitter and other sites you specify. Lodi wants to show with this app that you can become more socially compatible when being anti-social at the same time. By anti-social Lodi does not mean unfriendly; the application is meant more in the tradition of negative dialectics which stand in contrast to projects like Hate-book. The anti-social is just an artistic example, nevertheless, Lodi emphasizes that there is a growing need for regular people to be anti-social in daily life.



<http://anti-social.cc/>

2. Crystal Pillars – by Constant Dullaart

What happens when everyone can access your login details of your Facebook account? This is what **Constant Dullaart** wanted to find out when giving his details at a **live performance** in the New Museum in New York. He allowed other people to wear his public identity to the extreme point of not having his own details anymore, which is in strike with Facebook’s ideology. Facebook believes we are our Facebook profile, as such we are expected to carefully protect our password because it enables access to ourselves. Moreover, it also allows easy profiling for marketers.

3. Persecuting.us

The website **persecuting.us** shows one million U.S. citizens sorted by political affiliation. Months leading up to the election, **Paolo Cirio** privately stole data from Twitter from over one million Americans tweeting about the election, systematically determining the political affiliation of each user. All of their information, including first and last names, locations, and pictures, can now be found on **Persecuting.us**, Cirio’s massive citizen-sorting database¹. This work exposed personal data instead of protecting it. Lodi sees this as an example of anti-social media for being social and a way of looking at prosecution as art.



<http://persecuting.us/>

¹ <http://www.eyebam.org/events/persecutingus>

4. unCloud

UnCloud is an application created by Rui Guerra and David Jonas that enables anyone with a laptop to create an open wireless network and distribute their own information. Once it is launched, a passerby using a mobile Internet device can connect to this open wireless network. The person running the application can decide what information is shown in any web address. Users can access information wirelessly while at the same time remain disconnected from the Internet². For Simona Lodi this project is about the energy of sharing and free copying, and it is reminding us that the internet can exist without centralized control. What becomes clear is that our experience of the web is bound to inherent paradoxes that are reflected in its technical organization.

5. IOCOSE

The last example Lodi shows during the Unlike Us conference is **IOCOSE**. She calls it a crowded apocalypse; a simulation of a global conspiracy. Participants of the project are informing people on the street of a conspiracy, which actually does not exist but is generated by the crowd. The project was meant to be completely meaningless, but it created a lot of paranoia. According to Lodi, projects like IOCOSE reveal the paradox between the invisible force of conspiracy and crowdsourcing. It is an anti-social network.



<http://www.iocose.org/>

In sum, Simona Lodi showed us that artists are not just aesthetic mediators, but also social mediators who use networks to redefine relational and media space.

² <http://www.intk.com/uncloud>

Benjamin Grosser – Facebook Demetricator and the Easing of Prescribed Sociality

Michelle Oosthuizen

During the last session of Unlike Us #3 on the 22th of March, the focus turned to the relevant role of art in providing a critical response to the socio-political implications of social media monopolies and their centralized software. In this context, new media artist Benjamin Grosser introduced the Demetricator: a free web browser extension that hides all the metrics on Facebook.



We all recognize the ‘desire for more’ that is embedded in our capitalist society and cultivated on social media such as Facebook. As a result, most of us are obsessed with numbers, explains Grosser. “We are more interested in how many likes and friends we have, than in what our friends say and who they are. In this ‘social’ system the exchange value becomes your personal worth.

Facebook thrives on the distribution of its users ‘private’ data and is therefore highly dependent on a gratification system and competitive sphere that ensures user engagement on the platform. Furthermore, Facebook relies on the fear of missing out, which can only be relieved by boosting statistics related to our social value and activity. Grosser also considers time stamps as metrics – they present the news feed as a running and never-ending conversation. If we leave, we get the sense that we will be missing out. In this way, the focus on metrics that is woven into the architecture of Facebook becomes a powerful tool of control that disciplines its users and cultivates their need for consumption.

With this in mind, Grosser wondered how the focus on metrics influenced what people were sharing and saying on Facebook. At present, people only seem to share that which they think

will result in the most 'likes'. In an attempt to create a different experience of Facebook, Grosser created the Facebook Demetricator which makes all the metrics on Facebook disappear. "You still know that 'people' like it, that your post is shared and that there are comments, but not how many", explains Grosser. For example; if the text under someone's photo says 'You and 4 other people like this' Demetricator will change it to 'You and other people like this'. In the same way, under an ad '18.485 people like this' changes to 'people like this'. The time stamps are also turned into two categories: 'recently' (up to a few days) and 'a while ago' (week or two ago).



Grosser categorized the feedback from people who tried out the Demetricator as follows:

- Removes addictive behavior: numbers are like drugs, and users are looking for certain kind of reaction.
- Blunts competition
- Calms
- Lessens emotional manipulation
- Relaxes (self- imposed) rules

For those who are interested to try the Facebook Demetricator, don't hesitate to share your personal experience and thoughts via [e-mail](#). Below is a video by Grosser about the Facebook Demetricator on Vimeo:

<https://vimeo.com/51487572>

Karlessi from Ippolita – Minds Without Bodies: Rites of Religions 2.0

Kimberly Waldbillig

Ippolita is an international research and writing collective for convivial research and writings based in Italy. It's born of hackers that corroborate with media and media technologies as a terrain of struggles for power and control³. Investigations and workshop topics include: (reality) hacking, free software, and philosophy and anthropology of technologies. Representing a heteronomous⁴ identity of converging intellectual minds, Ippolita's Karlessi sought to connect ancient truths to modern day problems with a call to action: Imagine and Play Your Own Rites.



Unconscious rites or rituals that are technologically mediated in today's performance society create precarious terms of social control. Any act of sociality is becoming mechanized⁵. To

³ Ippolita published *Open is not Free* (2005, it); *The Dark Side of Google* (2007, it-fr-es-en); Ippolita's independent server provides their copyleft works, exploring the cutting edge "technologies of domination" with their social effects. Forthcoming project: Rites and beliefs in tech everyday practices. www.ippolita.net / [info\[at\]ippolita\[dot\]net](mailto:info[at]ippolita[dot]net)

⁴ a heteronomous identity refers to Kantian debates of desire over moral duty, heteronomy being acting in obligation to external forces rather than internal desires.

⁵ In the *Facebook Aquarium: The resistible rise of anarcho-capitalism: "No conspiracy, no paranoia: this is only the Digital Far West"*. The Ippolita work chronicles how sociality has becoming increasingly mechanised. 159 – 165 of the *Unlike Us #3 Reader* cite the likes of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley to describe the 'Freedoms of the Web'. Their text contrasts the authors accordingly: "the keys for understanding this virtual 'freedom' between Orwell and Huxley – the negation of privacy fostered by the Big Brother dystopia and the technological maximization of (passive) pleasure described in *Brave New World*. Control on the web is justified by the fear of

begin, Karlessi prompted the audience to consider the very personal rite of introduction to those who are seated nearby. The performative nature of this act of introduction serves as a stark contrast to the performative nature of constructing an online identity. The more time that is spent creating and maintaining these digital selves, the more that digital life begins to supersede traces of identity in other “real” spheres.

The statement that public and private spheres are converging is brought about in part by the more frequent collection and analysis of data relations – the data itself as well as the meta-layer of the act of creating the data⁶. The ideology proffered by this performance measurement discards adequacy for a pervasive mantra of “more”, instilling the wisdom that bigger is better. The systems that exist to measure the performance of the greater public at large is in fact based on expertly agglomerated data, or metrics.

The mere truth that individuals are spending more time creating this data in the porous private sphere implies that they are participating in unconscious rituals. It becomes a “micro-unconscious rituals” one that doesn’t require much effort and one that is created from the habit of using technology to enter into a relationship with others. The state of unconsciousness is inherent to these habits, and the data that they record is not only useful for surveillance but for caretaking. The cliché “ignorance is bliss” is prompted by Karlessi’s assertion that habitual contributions to Big Data are used for control – guidance towards that greater good made possible by the belief in the doctrine of “more”⁷.

These rituals are addictive by design – making things happen in a predictable way is a means to control the crowd. The issue with the fact that these rituals happen unconsciously is that can’t be altered, adjusted, or given up altogether. Acquiescence and addiction to these rituals feeds their power - the transformation of these rites from habits to addictions prompts Ippolita to produce a re-definition: Rituals 2.0. Corroboration with these social

terror, the need to defend society from threats to stability: terrorists, subversives, pornographers, and so on.” (INC Reader #8, 163)

⁶ This proffers a handy connection to *David M. Berry’s claims* of a highly enmediated existence, where contextual computing is enabled by five forces; “computationality” (INC Reader #8, 37). Computer programming code that is sewn into visuals covertly collects data and “secretes cookies” – prompting a return to Ippolita’s words: “our everyday unconscious behaviours, a simple click of a mouse, without any thought of the consequences of the action, can have social and political effects” (181). In the words of *Geert Lovink*: “Sustainability is connected to scalability. Here, we see lessons from the major social movements over the last 50 years. The force of accumulated social-political desires manifest, eventually, in national and global forums that permeate back into policy discourse and social practice...Let’s kill the click and unleash a thousand million tiny tinkerers!”

⁷ In the Lens of the Facebook Aquarium explores how *Foucauldian biopower* is embodied in posthuman society – private lives become commodities. Live feeds and data become commodities; “users become passively dependent on the tools or algorithms of power: technologies can not save you.” The authors describe “an in vitro culture” – one that Foucault scholar *Mika Ojakangas* suggests is an interpretation characteristic of postmodernity: “Instead of death, the focus of bio-power is on the birth and life of individuals and populations”. *Ganaele Langlois* also explores Foucault’s definition of power as productive rather than entirely repressive: “the subject, in this case, the social media user, has to conform to some rules and ways of doing this in order to have the possibility to enrich his or her self. The influence of autonomist thought is key to understanding the new form of capitalism that is developed through social media: one that feeds directly off the subjective life of users in order to create the ideal conditions of consumption” (56).

networks as religious figures, followership of them, as “obedient sheep” only feeds the “algocracy” of Big Data⁸. Freedom of expression isn’t free – it requires time, energy, and training.



These unconscious algorithmic rituals practiced en masse become the form and function of online liturgy, or public worship, to the unconscious – presumably leading to the title of today’s talk “Minds Without Bodies”. The various forms of interaction that are becoming increasingly technologically mediated that are devoted to and developed by algorithms are carried out via directed social networks⁹. Karlessi characterizes the body of Ippolita’s work as a “post-laic” perspective, one that could be described as that of the “post-secular” society. No more priests, but there is Facebook! You can confess yourself there, and you feel better then. In fact, Ippolita even went so far as to produce a new set of ‘Commandments’ for the post-laic performance society of social network users:

⁸ As artist Hester Scheurwater followed Karlessi to describe, “we must comply to standards of behavior to remain part of the community”. The speech discusses algocracy – borrowing a suffix from Greek: “to govern, to rule” to express the idea of existing under the authority of algorithms.

⁹ Although LBSN (Location-Based Social Networks) offer a bottom-up generation of database qualities based on everyday users, Leighton Evans would say that today the technology has in turn informed the interaction; top-down direction of users social network activities determine the effect of the collective power of these activities in other spheres. In fact, “the radical change of production in one sphere is mirrored in others” (citing Marx, *INC Reader #8*, 194).

- Control – compulsively. Micro-unconscious actions on social networks occur to avoid Fear-Of-Missing-Out (what Karlessi says is aptly described by John Grohol as **FOMO addiction**)
- Share – compulsively. ‘Things’, bits of data, acquire new meanings through sharing.
- Participate – compulsively. Through this, any contributor becomes part of something larger than himself, like being a member of the army, or perhaps more adroitly like being part of a church. Contribution, consciously or unconsciously, is positively reinforcing to the act of contribution.
- Verify – compulsively. Querying the digital oracle rather than relying on sensory data from the body (what Karlessi says Jacques **Derrida describes** as the pharmakon).

Using creativity and art to disrupt the politico-economical system and the doctrine of Radical Transparency means that business processes as well as processes of cultural production are in flux. Succumbing to the need to demonstrate and present one’s identity through a continued series of torpid acts leads to the commodification of self. To incite a shift against the status quo of the Big Data algocracy, individuals must transmogrify their demarcated everyday rituals into something new and original¹⁰.

Richard Metzger – Promoted Posts and the Economics of Facebook

Kimberly Waldbillig

With the presentation of a Skype interview, moderator **Miriam Rasch** introduced Richard Metzger’s commentary in light of his article **”I Want My Friends Back”** on **DangerousMinds.Net** [**Twitter**, **Facebook**] As practice against the political economy of social networks, a protest of sorts, it went viral.

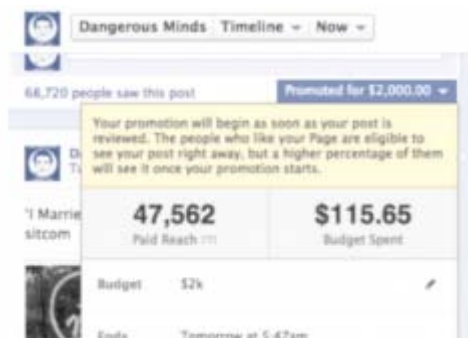


¹⁰ Ippolita sounds off from Groningen in 2010 about “the situation on social media” on nettime: “There we see the exact opposite of ‘making public’, as everything that gets posted becomes the exclusive property of the Facebook enterprise – just read (again) the terms of use. But how is that possible? What does mean “all what is published does not automatically become public”? Well indeed so. In almost all instances, anything happening on a ‘Web 2.0’ site turns into a multinational corporation’s private ownership. What happened is that you have actually worked, for free, for companies which seek to make money without you knowing about it, using personalized adds which contaminate you more and more. Don’t any longer complain you didn’t know!”

Metzger’s beef with Facebook is that they initiated algorithm changes without consideration of the trickle-down effects¹¹. A major theme of the conference as well as Metzger’s segment is when personal or political parties make use of these corporatized technologies, they’re reinforcing the vicissitudes of mainstream social media.

Beginning, Metzger prompts ‘technology should be natural, it shouldn’t imply an agenda’, but acknowledges that people literally used to see AOL as the Internet because that’s how they “got on”. He compares Facebook: “a necessary curated RSS feed...people leave it open all day long and that’s how they get their information. If you’re kept out of that for whatever reason, it becomes a free speech issue. It’s one company with **a lot** of control, that’s a serious chokehold that they have on information.”

He describes the effects of algorithms operating “behind the scenes” in the fallout of May 2012 when the administrators of DangerousMinds.net started noticing an abrupt drop in traffic without any plausible explanation: “Naturally, as anyone who has worked with datasets knows that’s just doesn’t work that way, unless there’s been outside monkeying around”. [read: exasperatedly]. As a small business with limited information about how the situation would play out, Metzger and his group started brainstorming – “what do we do?” He proverbializes as a Facebook Fan Page manager, a warehouse filled with an inventory of pageviews, and the next morning going turning the lights on 43% of the inventory was gone. Overnight.



Richard admits that certain entities could get ‘good value’ out of paying for Promoted Posts. However, “specifically newspapers, HuffPost, or a medium-sized blog like my own suffer greatly – it’s not just cost prohibitive, it’s murder.” Both large and small publishers and companies, even brands worldwide are affected as rates fluctuate and relationship statuses become erratic. Richard imparted that for any one platform, this presents a unique problem. Existing as a middleman to content, Facebook is unpredictable for someone who needs to rely on the ability to be able to sell viewership and depends on referral traffic from Facebook. As a digital publishing venture – “this caused a great degree of consternation.”¹²

¹¹ Similar occurrences can be [tacked on] to Google’s Panda Update, leaving those who had tried combinations of black-hat SEO tactics to watch their referral traffic plummet. There are definitely others who think that Facebook Pages are a bad investment for small businesses, like Elan Dekel in [Forbes](#)

¹² The context of the circumstances of online publication as a business setting has arguably been a hostile one. The con of social media enables some media platforms to posting sensational stories for the sake of traffic, according to the previously mentioned article by Ryan Holiday.

Facebook's problem is a problem that scales – “FB” is literally one of ‘those’ situations; You can post something on the Internet, but until you post it on Facebook, “no one has looked at it”. Metzger explains: “It’s the proverbial tree falling in the forest, if no one decided to share it through social media. That’s the conundrum of sharing in social media.” NOT EXACTLY A MONOPOLY BUT, HEY, CLOSE ENOUGH! The New York Observer on 9/11/12 featured Ryan Holiday’s rant on the woes Facebook fan page managers, which Metzger says in the interview contained “the smoking gun I was looking for”; the admission of advertising executive Gokul Rajaram that the changes were in fact due to new ‘features’¹³.

“How can they think this is a good idea? To antagonize the writers of Huffpost, to antagonize Rupert Murdoch, for that matter.” There’s no doubt that the new generations seeking and consuming journalism online as opposed to within other physical channels. Metzger generalizes to say that Facebook’s attempts to optimize the organic experience of sharing is going to affect any media operation profoundly negatively. Albeit dramatic, he does have a point when he sets the stage at a meta level. In fact, the billion who use the service are subjugated by bad decisions in boardroom: “it’s the mindset that allowed those changes to be made at a corporate level that I think has to be questioned. Unless they get their shit together and do some kind of soul searching, self-governing things, there are going to be countries that are going to regulate this, or demand that they be regulated in some way.”

Metzger believes that the act of silently streamlining changes that have a major impact (like this specific instance of Promoted Fan Pages on medium-sized digital publishing businesses) will help people realize that Facebook is becoming a less effective way of doing things and there will be a shift away from the medium. Especially as alternatives are built and once-popular platforms fade away – and inasmuch as we do this, we can make Facebook decidedly Unlike a “greatly walled garden”. As if he heard it from the horse’s mouth, Richard says “The problem that Facebook is going to find itself is when people start putting less energy into it. The people who actually built Facebook as a community are the fish that want to leap out of that pond and go someplace else.”

Hester Scheurwater – Shooting back

Therese Schedifka

“They are my ways of reacting on the imitated and fake media images of woman.”

Hester Scheurwater presents herself as a very critical and reflective speaker with an artistic approach at the third Unlike Us conference.

¹³ Holiday’s “Broken on Purpose” in NYO. Metzger chronicles this as well, in a *Dangerous Minds* post on January 9th. Holiday himself explains that Facebook is broken on purpose, and there is other evidence that these Sponsored Stories are “raking in over \$1 million per day”.



By speaking about her high heels daily diary she reflects on the boundaries of Facebook as a state with its own rules and administration. Bored by and angry about the mass medias perception of a woman's body as a fake and photoshopped image, she started her provocative project on Facebook.

On a daily basis she posted pictures of herself that stress the boundaries of the network as well as the users. While the setting of the pictures remind the viewer of a living room atmosphere her body was highly sexualized due to her pose and her high heels. For Hester Scheurwater, the pictures are a medium to investigate the issue of privacy and public and of voyeurism and exhibitionism. On Facebook there is the attitude of looking and being looked at at the same time. Personally her role as a maker and a receiver is an important aspect of her work which amplifies the critical idea behind the pictures.

The two goals of her project are the process of becoming aware of the fake media images of the mass media as well as the searching of boundaries of social control. The reaction of Facebook was to block her and stop the publishing of more provocative images. Her friends and supporters on Facebook who continued to distribute her photos in the network could not escape being blocked too.

What becomes quiet clear here is the existence of certain rules. To be socially accepted on Facebook means presenting yourself in a specific acceptable way. Users must comply with standards of their self-presentation in order to remain part of the network. In other words, members are forced to the globalization of their identities.

For more information, see [Shooting back](#).

Tobias Leingruber – The Future of Identity in a Digital World

Andrew Erlanger

Tobias Leingruber is part of the **Free Art and Technology Lab**, a diverse collection of artists, engineers, scientists, lawyers and musicians who strive to enrich the public domain ‘one mutha-fuckin LOL at a time’. Embracing this spirit, the Munich-based communication designer spent years remixing the web with various hacks before turning his attention to Mark Zuckerberg’s global empire. Leingruber rounded out an incisive session on the political economy of social networks by discussing his Facebook **Social Network ID** cards and the forces that inspired their development.



‘What’s your name on Facebook?’

This common question was once asked of Leingruber in the most uncommon of contexts – a customs desk on the Canada-United States border. But while the officer may have only jokingly insinuated that such information was more useful than an actual passport, there is of course a deeper stratum of truth behind every gag. As we increasingly divulge personal data within the ‘blue book’, it becomes increasingly apparent that traditional forms of identification are no longer the most informative. As Leingruber explained, ‘Facebook has become our passport in this new digital world’.

The prominence of Facebook Connect throughout the internet is such that some websites now impose it as the only means of registration. This cedes vast quantities of power and control to the social media giant, which Leingruber argues has ‘taken over’ in a certain sense. Rather than programming their own systems of identification, web developers are lured by Facebook’s easy service and thus willingly and inextricably bind their sites to Facebook itself.

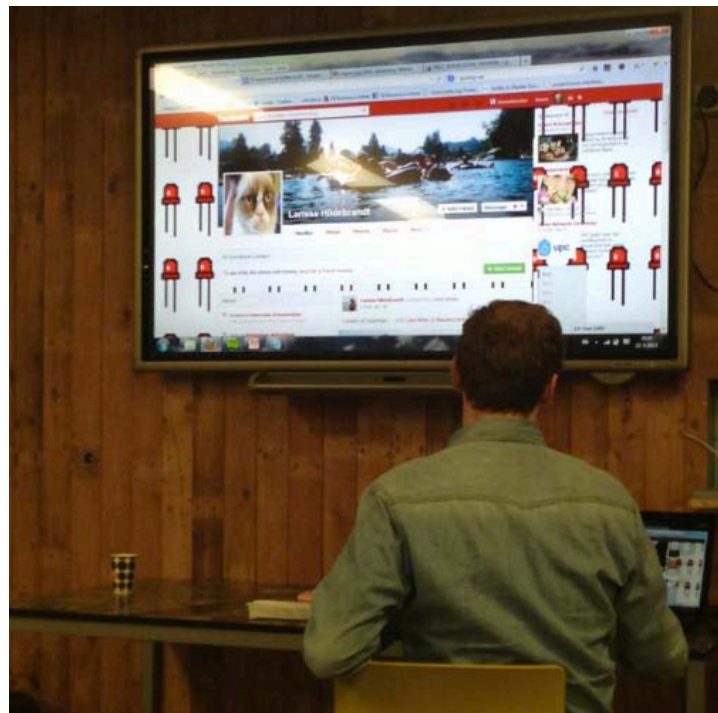
Playing with this development, Leingruber invested 800 euros in an ID card printer in 2012 and scheduled its premiere performance for May of that year. The actual announcement of the event was intentionally made at short notice, yet Facebook's legal team apparently only required 48 hours to nip this artistic endeavour in the bud. In one of the more comical sections of his presentation, Leingruber recounted his disbelief at receiving an unexpected phone call from a Facebook lawyer very soon after unveiling his latest project. A cease and desist letter followed shortly after but by this stage the media had already taken an interest to his novel form of identification.

The title of the cards may now read 'Social Network' as opposed any specific corporation, but the underlying message remains the same. As Facebook progressively pervades our lives away from the screen, it is important that we think more critically about its broader social, political and economic impact. Leingruber's project invites us to do just this.

Marc Stumpel & Tobias Leingruber – Facebook Resistance Workshop

Serena Westra

Marc Stumpel and Tobias Leingruber organized the Facebook Resistance workshop for Unlike Us on Friday evening at the Studio HvA. Marc Stumpel is a new media researcher from Amsterdam and has been involved with Unlike Us from the outset. He is part of the Facebook Resistance project and has written about Facebook Resistance for the Unlike Us reader. Tobias Leingruber is a German designer and artist and is known for his Facebook Identity card project, which he talked about earlier in the day. The Facebook Resistance workshop was a very interactive and practical workshop and many participants ended up with a completely new (and sometimes even unreadable) version of Facebook – including moving gifs.



So how can you change your Facebook?

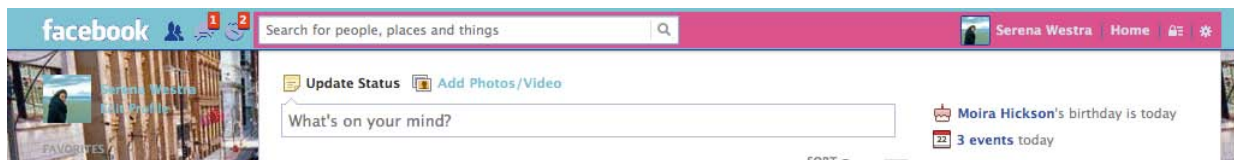
First of all, it is good to know that Facebook won't even notice the changes you make; you will only change how the browser will process Facebook's code with the tools provided by Marc and Tobias. This is called **augmented browsing** and can be performed with browser add-ons like **Greasemonkey**, a Firefox add-on that allows end-users to install scripts that make on-the-fly changes to HTML-based web pages. Marc and Tobias are not that interested in 'pimping' their profiles to just make them more aesthetically appealing, they prefer changing Facebook to make enhancements to the user experience.

A way to perform live hacking is by using the Firefox add-on **Firebug**. After you installed it you can hover over Facebook and it will point out how the HTML works. You can change the code, for example to change the color of the header, to change someone's profile picture (like in the picture above) and to remove ads. However, Firebug does not allow you to save the changes you made to Facebook.

Fortunately, Greasemonkey does allow you to save the changes in your browser. You can install user scripts that change the layout and some functions of Facebook. However, Marc and Tobias warn that you should be really careful with this and you should review a script before use and not trust any script blindly. Actually, two of the participants of the workshop ended up with a bad userscript. One of them started up liking random pages and automatically created groups and events, another participant automatically followed developers he did not know and unpurposely removed all his educational history.

Which userscript should you use?

A good example is **Facebook Colour Changer**. This script allows you to change the header and the search bar on the top of the Facebook page.



This is how it works:

1. Go to <http://userscripts.org/scripts/show/9475/>
2. Copy the code (or click on install)
3. Open Firefox and start Greasemonkey. Click on the button on the upper left and create a new userscript.
4. Enter a name and paste your code from the userscript
5. Refresh Facebook
6. Click on the Greasemonkey menu again, make sure the Facebook Colour Changer is selected and start playing around!

Another add-on I personally like is [Adblock Plus](#). This userscripts removes all the advertisements from Facebook, what a delight! Also, [Webmarker](#) allows user to make web graffiti on any webpage, see the picture below.

More safe userscripts and tips & tricks can be found on the Facebook page of [FB Resistance Artists](#). Have fun!



Marc Stumpel and Tobias Leingruber at the workshop

Leighton Evans – Buying and Selling People and Places: The Political Economy of Mobile Social Media

Stijn Peeters

Leighton Evans, a research associate at Cardiff University with a PhD from Swansea University under his belt, is as a researcher chiefly interested in location-based social media services. His article *How to Build a Map for Nothing: Immaterial Labor and Location-Based Social Networking* dealing with this topic appeared in the *Unlike Us Reader*, and at the *Unlike Us #3* conference he spoke on the ever increasing worldwide adoption of mobile devices, the location tracking that goes along with it and the implications this has.



Evans' main point was that when dealing with mobile services and devices, one should always be aware of the materiality of the software and hardware involved. A huge volume of user data is tracked when using online services, for example, and much of it location-based. Following that, location data constitutes an important aspect of the data gathered about us and tells a great deal about our lives. It is therefore important to pay attention to this material nature of the data that's collected.

This is all the more important as our telephones often are no longer just phones, but fully-fledged computers; continually connected to the internet, able to track your location using GPS and perpetually collecting this data about your whereabouts and activities. This "locational layer" of user data can then be utilized by, for example, advertising campaigns.

Evans used the location-based social network FourSquare as an example. FourSquare records all kinds of data related to location; not just where you are, but also what you're doing, who you're with, when you're there and whether you've been at a place before or not. This allows for very precisely targeted advertising. Evans used his weekly visits to a nearby football ground as an example; FourSquare could use this data to offer him a discount at a local StarBucks around the corner. In this sense, it is not just the user that is a commodity (through their value for advertisers); the places themselves become commoditized as well.

Though there have been other social networks offering this kind of functionality, FourSquare is by far the most successful. Evans pointed out that a big factor in FourSquare's success was its gamification of "checking-in" to a place. Facebook had originally introduced a system of checking-in at places around the same time as FourSquare launched, but was less successful; it lacked the points system that made checking-in to FourSquare rewarding.

While Evans has not focused on Facebook specifically in his work, it is of course still a big player in the field of location-based user data collection, even in spite of its comparatively limited success. Through Facebook's acquisition of FourSquare competitor GoWalla in 2011, the company not only acquired a software platform but also a huge amount of location data. This data, collected by users checking in at places through mobile devices, allows Facebook to make its services tailored to a user's location.

While such acquisitions are a way for companies to gather location-based user information, 'live' data collection through smart phones are still the bigger method. This requires the users to own a smartphone to begin with, though; an obvious problem in markets like Africa where smartphones are far less commonplace than in the western world. On the other hand, in Africa but also in developing countries in other parts of the world, 'dumbphone' penetration is usually very good. Even in countries like Somalia, where there has been no functioning government for over a decade, there's good telecom coverage and relatively low tariffs. In countries like Indonesia and Vietnam and several Central American countries, mobile phone penetration is around 100%. This often goes together with air time becoming a commodity in itself; companies run marketing campaigns where buying a certain brand of product gives free air time.



Facebook has capitalized on this and introduced Facebook Zero, a version of the social network that can be used through dumbphones and over the normal telephone network. This allows them to collect data from dumbphone users as well. These people are as mentioned earlier often well-adjusted to the combination of marketing campaigns and mobile devices, as it's often a major source of air time.

This all means that more and more locational data is gathered in any context where a phone, smart or dumb, is used, and this practice is closely tied to marketing and economy in general. The question then, argued Evans, is whether this increased commoditization of not just users but also places changes our perception of these places and influences our everyday behavior. While an answer to this question is hard to provide, it is still one that must be asked – and is becoming increasingly relevant.

Marion Walton – How Can We Reflect on Mobile Use More Fairly?

Freyja van den Boom

Being in the Netherlands – where smartphones have become a common sight and almost every household has at least one computer with access to the internet – it is sometimes easy to forget this is not the case in many other parts of the world.



In South Africa, where Marion Walton is a senior researcher on mobile communication, most young people do not own a smartphone and using mobile internet is too expensive.

“Marie Antoinette would be proud that because of the high cost of communication there is a chilling effect on political discourse for poor people,” said Ms Walton.

Because dissident voices may not be well represented in mainstream media we need to figure out where else to look. By simply talking to people about mobile communication in everyday life, Marion Walton gained insight into the creative uses of cheap instant messaging services such as Mxit and Mig33.

Mxit has about 10 million users in South America and it became an important platform for political activism during the 2009 national elections.

However the effectiveness is limited by the lack of cross platform linking and sharing content with media outside the Mxit community. When Mxit changed its policy and started blocking users from posting critical content, this forced users to look for new platforms for their political and social discourse. The introduction of Facebook SIM has allowed the network to be accessed on so called dumb phones and, as such, it may become the next platform to help raise awareness and action for social change in South Africa.

However, the question Walton leaves us with remains unanswered: How do we make participation in the social discourse less income dependent?

Nathan Freitas – ‘Checking-In’ for the Greater Good

Andrew Erlanger

How do we best respond to the problems and frustrations coterminous with our widespread adoption of mobile social media? According to **Nathan Freitas**, the answer may lie in building new solutions or enhancing existing alternative structures. In his lively Unlike Us presentation, the global human rights activist argued that rather than merely scoffing at the narcissism cultivated through mobile technologies, we should focus on harnessing this behaviour to have a net positive impact on the world.



The first step towards achieving this goal is perhaps also the most tenuous and tricky: actually defining the ‘mobile’ in question. For Freitas, the complexity of these technologies probes far beyond Steve Jobs famous introduction to the first generation iPhone. While Apple announced the release of just one new product on that particular occasion, their late CEO went to great lengths to emphasise that a phone, computer and mp3 player were all embedded in this miraculously cohesive machine. As Freitas pointed out, however, each of us has a very different relationship with these ‘slabs of processing power’. The contemporary mobile may indeed function as a phone, computer and mp3 player, but these tools constitute just three of many modalities of usage.

Highlighting the diversity of perception and perspective when it comes to mobile media, Freitas first spoke of the phone as a sword, with users now gaining great potential to change, damage and restrict existing structures every time they take hold of these ostensibly

innocuous devices. Then there is the idea of the mobile as something akin to a robot servant, a digital personal assistant so efficacious that we soon develop a dependency. The comforting aspects of the smartphone also lend a sense of companionship to the relationship that exists between user and machine and, as such, its qualities are more readily personified than those associated with static tools. At the same time, many of us feel as though we're carrying a little enemy around in our pockets, which kills our time and perpetually interrupts our offline activities.

Ultimately, the mobile can be seen as a pervasive technology. Freitas argued that through understanding the nuances of our interactions, we are better positioned to hijack such machinery as a positive tool of empowerment. He is seeking to do just this through his work with the **Guardian Project**, a research and development venture that aims to 'create easy to use apps, open-source software libraries and operating system modifications, and customized mobile devices that can be used and deployed around the world, by any person looking to protect their communications and personal data from unjust intrusion and monitoring.' In building communities around the dense issues that mobile media entails, we may be able to beneficially disrupt the overwhelming tide of mainstream usage.

Miriyam Aouragh – Social Media as Damocles Sword: The Internet for Arab Activists Kimberly Waldbillig

Miriyam Aouragh's work with cyberpolitics in the Middle East as well as cyberwarfare in the context of Arab-Israeli conflict has revealed that even scholarly engagement ignores to a large extent the non-media ecology of the Arab activists of the Internet world. In these very special contexts, the materiality of technology is inescapable – her discussion today focuses on enlightening us with its limits.



Her title includes the metaphor of Greek mythology – the comparison of social media to Damocles sword. As it relates to conflict within the Arabic world – those who are empowered

by taking the seat under the sword (using social channels) do so in the constant threat of being slain by this very sword, since slaughter could come the slightest disruption.

Syrian Revolutionaries and their work for and against specific political figures has provided her and her fellow colleagues with unique evidence of how social media is simultaneously an enabling technology as well as an endangering one. She recognizes, like many of the other speakers in her panel, that the unconscious acceptance of ICT's new liberation capabilities can be problematic. She explains the context of these developments with three premises: that this is a relatively new phenomenon with unique images; it's potentially important because it depends on a wider balance of forces; and that the activities that are occurring are part and parcel of hegemonic state structures.

Western academia and mainstream media for long have portrayed revolutionaries as passive victims or aggressive perpetrators; there's no middle ground but there should be. Thus, after years of struggle these Arab activists are entitled to neglect reporters, thereby neglecting those very academic and media voices that have been neglecting theirs for decades. Miriyam expresses this as "a sort of poetic justice", now that the narrative of these agents of change are truly coming to be represented in very niche fragments of social media.

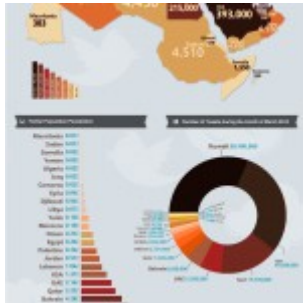
Bahrain and Syria are controlled by a sectarian minority, which is part of the reason why the regime is successful in preventing revolution. What's interesting here is that there is a clear difference in how each of those countries are approached and discussed, according to Aouragh: "We must discard essentialist discourses, it's a question of condemnation". Recently, violent activities in Syria have been the focus of a heated emotional debate in Western media. Despite the fact that the influence of social media on the Syrian revolution is heralded by some academics as liberating, romanticized about the nonviolence...there are plenty of other technologically-mediated "terrible things" happening, especially regarding surveillance technologies and media censorship.

Aouragh apprises that the level of infiltration of counterrevolutionary tactics is so extreme – and not much is being heard on that in media or academic spheres. Abruptly, she pauses to consider her insight that these Syrian revolutionaries feel a sense of failure after the last two years. The Syrian state system has remained in tact – compared to the more "measured reforms" of countries like Jordan and Morocco. In fact, when it comes to these type of political discussions, Syria has always been an exception. She states that the current presidency survives by answering revolution with a reign of terror. The system of sectarian divide and rule has produced counterrevolutionary internet activities that require examination.

The nexus of her argument is that in this situation the cost of doing nothing doesn't outweigh risk of doing something. Approximately 70,000 people have been killed since the Syrian revolution, "thus the price to pay is high". She finds it fascinating nonetheless that entirely different currents of internet politics exist within the same media paradigm. For her, the revolution has since experienced a mental shift – as she describes it: "the genie is out of the bottle, and the regime is having a hard time putting it back in."

What Western media tend to ignore is the true day-to-day ecology of these activists is a difficult one. Her connection to the Facebook "regime" was the analogy that the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad controls the media. This is the real reason why the ecology

prevents the narrative of the activists from getting out. Most of these activists must rely on alternative media forms to communicate. According to Miriyam, Syria is the only state that has an electronic army – completely focused on electronic repression that includes “hacking and attacking”.



She discussed an infographic based on ASMR, Arabic Social Media Research. What Miriyam claims the issue that researchers don't want to acknowledge is that less than 1% of the Syrian population is engaged with Twitter, and this is the reality, that they represent only a meager handful of people compared to the total number of Syrian activists who are pro-revolution. Naturally, she cautions researchers from making conclusions about the impact of Twitter and social media on changing the Arabic political landscape. Reflecting that there are only a handful of topics that reach Western media, there is actually a secondary form of censorship in language barriers.

However, Miriyam acknowledges that Twitter does give an interesting view into the power dynamics between political trends online those already present in cyberspace and therefore discusses a collaborative project with R-Shief and VJ Um Amel, collecting hashtags [#syrianrevolution #assad (for example)]. The key to the data set was properly capturing the unique sentiments of Arabic and English language . She demonstrated that the sociolinguistic nature of these messages differed. Aouragh's hypothesis is that at certain hyperlocal moments, the dominant language is Arabic and it doesn't get retweeted in English. Naturally this conclusion is in part affirmed by the apparent nuance of comparing mainstream media to Arabic mainstream media. In some of her other publications she imparts the work of counterrevolutionary groups in broadcast pro-regime messages using the Internet.

She considers studying Arab & Muslim media is proving to be interestingly timely. The Syrian government was in fact attacked by hacktivist group anonymous last year because of the ongoing Internet blackout, but the Syrian government is still broadcasting pro-regime messages through other channels. Her hypotheses suggest that counter-revolutionary groups are overwhelmingly domestic, but are joined with other pro-revolutionary groups based in the other MENA states. Miriyam concluded her presentation with a few representative examples of that she feels aren't represented in the mainstream media proportionate to their impact.

The sheer lack of electricity as a result of government's ability to shut off the power on a whim has prompted activists to get creative in the ways they access the social networks that power their communication. Although the mainstream Western media has focused on this happening in Egypt and Tunisia, Syrian activists also suffer from the same instability. Her slide had a picture of Syrian activists using car batteries to charge their laptops, and

mentioned that there are plenty of other creative tactics activists are using to charge their devices¹⁴.

What's worse, the control of the regime can also shut off the ISP entirely. As a dramatic culmination to the theme of Riot and Alternatives, she showed footage uploaded to YouTube of activists using non-technological communication because of the monitoring of other channels. [The clip](#) shows people of Baba Amr using homing pigeons, but ironically doesn't represent the violent images that are characteristic of this city in the Homs region of Syria¹⁵. Naturally this resonantly coincides with a key theme of the conference in understanding the power relationships between the social and the technical¹⁶. Read more on Miriyam's [2012 CyberOrient article](#) "Tweeting Like a Pigeon: The Internet in Arab Revolutions".

The online and offline activities of Arab activists have inspired movements and incited action in places and cultures entirely apart from their own. Although the general sentiment is one of "liberation anew", Miriyam Aouragh cautions us to focus on the disempowering implications of the Internet¹⁷. The distribution of counter-revolutionary tools through these same online channels are typically disregarded – to understand the power structures created in the environment of Arab activism, one must not only examine the positive effects of social networks, but the negative ones as well. For more information she can be reached at miriyam.aouragh@orinst.ox.ac.uk.

Simone Halink – The Non-Transparency Report

Freyja van den Boom

Since our lives increasingly take place online we leave behind all sorts of personal data about what we like, what we do and where we are.

This might not be of concern to those who claim they have nothing to hide but most of us, though perhaps not as much as those who joined [Project X in Haren](#), are guilty of at least some youthful indiscretions. And even if you have never posted a [regretful tweet](#) or downloaded an mp3, would you not want to know what information your government is collecting from your use of Google and Facebook?

¹⁴ See [PBS on Syrians using water and batteries to charge cell phones](#), or [The New York Times on other shortages](#). Moderator Mirko Schäfer [tweeted](#) about a new serious game putting players "in the shoes" of Syrian rebels.

¹⁵ A look at the footage from the rest of Miriyam's example video's [YouTube channel](#). Orienting – the history of the region with [this Wikipedia article](#). Also familiarize with a [BBC News post](#). [The Economist](#) also. A [Financial Times](#) piece on the violence in the Homs region, and one from [The Guardian](#). And [Australian SBS](#).

¹⁶ [About, Unlike Us #3 Social Media: Design or Decline](#)

¹⁷ See also [this piece](#) by Miriyam, discussing the dialectics of the internet. She is from this month onward the Leverhulme research fellow at CAMRI [Westminster, London] and is beginning a new project about the political implications of the Internet during and after the Arab revolutions.



Simone Halink, from [Bits of Freedom](#), came to talk about their struggle with the Dutch government about matters of [internet privacy](#) and transparency in relation to data requests. Technology can deeply infiltrate our private lives and since the Dutch government has been [careless](#) with privacy issues in the past it is all the more important to know what user data they have been given access to from companies such as Twitter and Google.

So why does the Dutch government refuse to answer questions about their request for user data?

Apparently it would not be in the public's best interest and would harm social security if they provided Bits of Freedom with this information. Does this mean it is not in our interest to know on what grounds the government wants to analyse what we do online?

Interestingly enough, [Google](#) and more recently [Microsoft](#) have gone public and published their transparency reports so the information is already publicly available.

Instead of speculating as to why the Dutch government is so reluctant, Bits of Freedom, recently changed tactics and asked companies directly. Following the examples of American corporations, they hope that Dutch companies will also start publishing transparency reports. So far companies understand the need for transparency and have shown the willingness to do so. Let's hope it is only a matter of short time. Until then common sense and caution seems to be the best protection against invasions of privacy online.

Thomas Boeschoten – Project X Haren: Participation and Mobilization on Facebook

Stijn Peeters

Thomas Boeschoten is a Dutch new media researcher, currently in Utrecht University's New Media & Digital Culture program and involved with the [Utrecht Data School](#). He was part of a committee that was formed after the 2011 riots in Haren, following a widely distributed announcement of a party there that originated on Facebook. In his talk at the Unlike Us #3 conference, Boeschoten gave an overview of his work within this committee and the findings of their investigation.



The party, dubbed “Project X Haren”, originally started as a Sweet Sixteen birthday celebration for a Dutch girl named Merte. As is often the case, she created an event on Facebook to invite her friends, and made it easy for friends to help inviting the right people by setting the event to be publicly visible and open to outside invitations. However, it quickly went viral – people started inviting strangers and thousands of people indicated that they would be attending. Merte’s father tried to salvage the event by deleting the Facebook event, but the damage was done; quickly a new event was created, and again thousands of people committed to it.

The party itself saw a few thousand people going to Haren, where the event in the end culminated in riots; cars were burning, stones were thrown and there were fights between the police and the rioters. Boeschoten and the committee he was part of were tasked with investigating these events and seeing how such riots could be prevented in the future.

Several factors were found. Facebook’s interface, for example, makes it very easy to both spread the word about an event to many people and to publicly declare that one is going to it; this creates an environment where through a network effect over 200.000 people could be

invited within days. Other factors in fact had little to do with social media: the weather was good on the day of the party, it was on a Friday when many students could use their free travel student card and the party location could easily be reached through public transport. Boeschoten noted that it is therefore important not to focus only on Facebook as a reason for the escalation of events; external factors played a large role as well.

For instance, many other media and other social networks contributed to the rapid spread of the party announcement as well. It was mentioned in popular talk shows, which obviously reached a lot of people; attendees also used applications like WhatsApp and networks like Twitter to spread the news to others in a more direct way. Moreover, another party was set to take place nearby; while it is hard to say exactly what kind of influence this had, it is to be expected that there is some kind of relation, especially as Boeschoten's research revealed that most people attending Project X in fact lived relatively close to Haren. It was this interaction between social media, traditional media and circumstantial factors that in the end made Project X such a "success".

According to Boeschoten, the main point to take away from the committee's findings is that the focus on Facebook as a major factor in the escalation of Merte's Sweet Sixteen party is not sufficient for a comprehensive analysis. While Facebook played an important role, as it offered youths a potent way of organizing themselves, a lot of other factors were involved as well – many of them not related to social media or internet. This combination of a relatively innocent premise, attention from traditional media, the affordances of new media and suitable external factors made for an event the likes of which hadn't been seen before – which is exactly why a lot of people joined; it was a once in a lifetime opportunity, you just had to be there. It's what Boeschoten called the "YOLO factor" – visiting what was supposed to be a nice sixteenth birthday party with thousands of people not even related to the host is a fairly ridiculous prospect, but hey – You Only Live Once.

Simona Levi – Tactics 2.0: Learn in the Net, Act Everywhere

Andrew Erlanger

The tools of the web pose unique opportunities to transform overarching political structures, spawning real and positive change at a fundamental level. Rounding out the second day of Unlike Us #3, Spanish activist Simona Levi took the stage to reflect on what we've learned from the internet and how this might be extrapolated to all spaces of struggle. More specifically, she emphasised the power of the social network to reconfigure existing paradigms and cultivate a more democratic system of governance.



The immense pervasion of centralized organizations is such that we have traditionally accepted them as the norm. Levi argued that by using the internet we are starting to appreciate that no one node is more important than the others, with this novel perspective creating greater potential for the individual as a catalyst.

Much of *Unlike Us* has focused on comparing and contrasting various social network topographies, however Levi stressed that they are all just tools and that it is difficult to draw meaningful distinctions from this perspective. Decentralized networks like Lorea are crucial in enacting radical change, yet commercial and centralized services like Facebook are also useful in that they ensure the message is broadcast to a broader audience.

Of course, such tools are relatively futile without a clearly defined objective. This involves asking who, what, where, when and, most importantly, why in relation to any given course of action. For Levi, the conception and expression of collective identity also marks an important step. Is the movement best understood as a closed group, open group, ephemeral group, anonymous group, lobby group or something completely different?

Then there is the issue of actually spreading the message. While the generation of good ideas is obviously of critical importance, any suggestion of positive action is unavailing in and of itself. Memes need to be shared in order to elicit a meaningful change, but how do we ensure such thinking goes viral? Herein lies one of the great challenges of activism. Levi suggested that our very nature as human beings makes us dependent, obsessive, insecure and, above all, conservative. We're inherently resistant to change and, as such, the unfamiliar requires extreme effort in terms of both consciousness and will. No substantial transmutation has ever taken place overnight, but this only serves to highlight the importance of political reformers persisting with their efforts.

3.2 Research And Informational Blog Posts

Monetizing privacy – How much does Facebook owe you?

Posted: March 21, 2013 at 9:01 am | By Miriam Rasch

By Peter Olsthoorn

The poorest people in the world achieve hardly any physical privacy. They can't afford it. A billion people enjoy Facebook because it's free. Which parallel can we draw?



Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights learns us: 'No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.'

Sounds nice, but does it make any sense? Not more sense than the other Declaration articles in our societal system where money rules. If you're poor the most basic physical privacy, a toilet and a hidden place for sex, are hard to achieve. Paradoxically, at the top income level, privacy is sometimes even harder to get. Privacy payment for fame is even already a fixed principle of European jurisprudence. Privacy shows many paradoxes, for example the ability to change from nearly full privacy to a complete transparent life, without much harm.

Life consists of transactions, many of which are illusory. In the virtual world, it's only worse. Everything on the internet falls into our lap free of charge, simply for our own pleasure. Companies happily go along with this image of altruism. Not to begrudge anyone such illusions; they simplify life immensely, but the bare reality is that hardly anything in life is free once even fresh air becomes scarce.

After money, attention is the most important currency. The internet flourishes through a lively, incessant and ruthless bartering for attention: from considering whether an e-mail will receive a reply of 20 characters or 20 paragraphs, to whether to 'unfriend' contacts on social networks, and so on.

Using personal data as internet currency means that privacy gets concrete, and above all, deliberate value in commercial traffic. You could assign that value yourself. In this kind of model, companies receive permission to collect/use personal data in exchange for certain services for a limited time. The individual would then manage his or her own privacy purse.

This means that you would manage your own personal data, with the potential option of transferring that management to a trusted party. The argument that hundreds of millions of people give away their personal data on social networks with absolutely no interest in the commercial value of that information does not make sense. It is simply the case that they don't have the slightest idea.

I proposed this in 2010 in 'The Price We Pay For Google', and Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad picked it up as an interesting idea in 2012 when I repeated it in the Dutch edition of The Power of Facebook. Now the English edition is here, but maybe more important is a little scan I developed with two (don't scare) marketing companies, Achtung! and Ehio Media. They urged for a very simple #facebookowesme. After Belgian and Dutch newspaper websites wrote about this, thousands of people did the scan. We hope for the viral effect of millions.

I know it's a too simple concept. But it's just the first step to take, making people conscious of the commercial value of personal data. Further steps in this direction are taken by, for example, Sarah Spiekermann, with her very interesting research on experienced Facebook value published in 2012, Privacy Property and Personal Information Markets. Her hypothesis: 'Even if privacy is an inalienable human right it would be good if people were enabled to manage their personal data as private property.'

Because it's not only about 'monetizing'. The earth is, happily, not as flat. But materializing privacy might help us to overcome the huge problems with innocence about privacy of internet users. I look forward to the discussion with Geert Lovink and the Unlike Us audience in Amsterdam on Friday, March 22nd.

Social media for the illiterate: CGNET Swara

Posted: March 21, 2013 at 9:00 am | Stijn Peeters

As online social networks gain a larger and larger influence on our lives, it is easy to forget that even though Facebook has over a billion users, that means there are still over 5 billion people that are not part of Mark Zuckerberg's empire. And while some of those people may deliberately avoid Facebook out of fear for their privacy or other considerations, for most of those people there is a far simpler reason not to use social media: they can't read, and even if they could, they're not connected to the internet.

Take rural India, for example. In remote villages, literacy may be as low as 35% and if there is a computer with an internet connection, it's probably shared by the whole village and mainly used to exchange data about the farmers' crops. Coupled with a similar lack of access to television or regular newspapers, this means members of India's farming communities often lack access to any mainstream media at all.

At the same time, many people do own a mobile phone: and if they don't, a family member or neighbour who owns one is never far away. This is where CGNet Swara comes in. This initiative, founded by the International Center for Journalists, comprises a community-based voice mail-like service where villagers can easily have their message recorded. Contrary to an ordinary voice mail service, though, the "mail box" can be listened to by any other villager; this way, they can share news and record reports of events with villages that are further away even though they can't do so in writing.

While one might expect that such a service would go the way of Facebook and Twitter and get used mainly to share the news of a wedding, childbirth or the latest craze in sari fashion, it is in fact also put to a more constructive use. As Swara translates and records most of its messages on its web site, the service can give even people thousands of kilometres away insight in some of the more serious issues in rural India:

"Mohammad Afsar from Raigarh district in Chhattisgarh is telling us that in Kelo river people are witnessing dead fish from last 3/4 days. The dead fish also include big fish of 4/5 kilograms. First we thought it was a natural process but it is continuing from last 3/4 days so it needs investigation. More than 10 quintal of fish have died so far. This could be for pollution from nearby factories or someone may have put poison in water. For more Afsar Ji can be reached at 09981763123"

Giving such issues exposition that, for lack of access to media, would not be attainable otherwise, Swara allows villagers to effectively spread word of local troubles and united themselves against these problems. Their site lists several examples of how this has lead to tangible changes: for example, a villager recorded a message about how his daughter's school was not serving meals, and within a week many others had joined in the protest, prompting officials to make sure meals were being served.

Though such problems may seem trivial compared to the petitions and calls for action we routinely see on our Facebook timeline (occupy Wall Street! stop SOPA! Kony 2012!), we should realize that we can easily go to a local newspaper or community web site if a social or legal issue isn't appropriately handled by the government. The rural Indian villagers that use

Swara, on the other hand, had no way to call attention to such issues apart from quite literally telling each other at the village pump. Considering this, Swara is quite a beautiful way to use modern communication technology in a social way in spite of constraints such as illiteracy and lack of internet access.

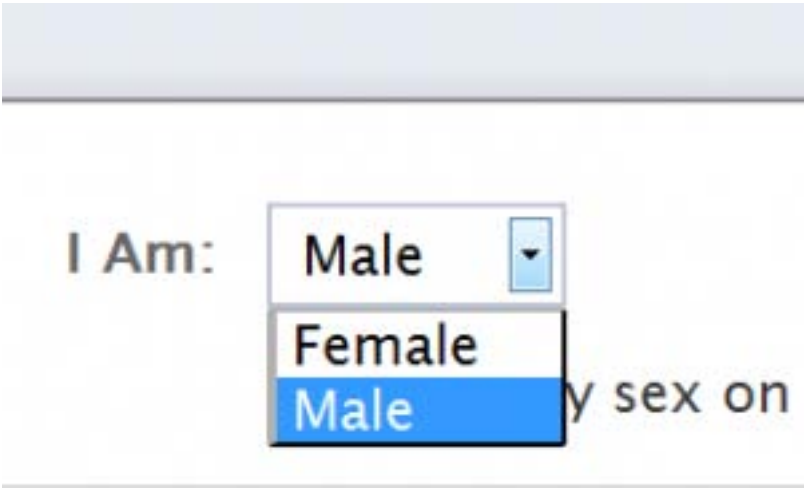
I Am Other/Undisclosed

Posted: March 19, 2013 at 9:00 am | By: Andrew Erlanger

Please complete the following sentence: I am...

How many different responses can you come up with and, more importantly, what do they say about you? In 1954, Manfred Kuhn and Thomas McPartland developed the twenty statements test, an influential instrument used to measure self concept. The test requires respondents to complete the sentence "I am..." on twenty occasions, with the resulting statements serving to indicate prominent identity markers. I may be a dancer, socialist, vegetarian and Harlem Shaker, all of which inform my overall sense of self.

So who am I on Facebook? Traditionally, the social media giant has required all new users to complete the 'I am' field with a binary gender position: I am female or I am male, and apparently nothing more.



This changed last week, however, and new Facebookers are now required to select 'Female' or 'Male' without the preceding 'I am' assertion and underlying identity implications. But while some may feel this marks a step in the right direction, the fact that gender choice is both binary and mandatory means we are still essentially being defined on the basis of 'what's in our pants'.



Female Male

By clicking Sign Up, you agree to our [Terms](#) and that you have read our [Data Use Policy](#), including our [Cookie Use](#).

Sign Up

Please select either Male or Female.

It wasn't always like this. In the formative years of Facebook, the 'select one' instruction situated above its corresponding 'female' and 'male' categories could itself be selected, providing an alternative option for gender identification. As a result of this selection, the news feed of the site employed fairly inelegant gender-neutral pronouns when referring to the user: 'Sam Samson commented on their own status' or, even more awkwardly, 'Sam Samson has tagged themselves in a photo'. Such grammatical dubiousness was only further compounded when the website went global, with translations proving virtually impossible for languages in which gender marking on singular pronouns is obligatory. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the brains at Facebook confronted these obstacles by enforcing a strict binary construction of gender. 'Please select either Male or Female' is the polite yet inflexible instruction provided to new users who neglect to fill the sexually dimorphic field today.

This stuff matters. As Andrew McNicol explains in his *Unlike Us Reader* article, *None of Your Business?*, "because these social media profiles act as a mediator between us and others, the more value we ascribe to these public faces of our complex selves the more likely we are to internalize the identity restrictions set by the system." In other words, the gender limitations imposed on us by Facebook's interface can simplify our understanding of ourselves in life away from the screen, diminishing the pliability of identity construction.

Enter Alec Wright, the engineering student who recently developed an automated method to once again remove gender from Facebook. In three reasonably straightforward steps, users can now change their gender status to 'other/undisclosed', which is reflected through the site's use of gender-neutral pronouns. While this may not present a perfect fix to the gendering issues that Facebook entails, it certainly affords a little more freedom of identity expression for the user.



If Sam Samson is interested in Wright's brilliant JavaScript, 'they' should probably head here. If Sam Samson is interested in social media in general, 'they' should definitely head to Unlike Us #3, which is scheduled to take place in just over a week!

First Monday special issue: Unlike Us

Posted: March 18, 2013 at 12:03 pm | By: Miriam Rasch



PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL ON THE INTERNET

First Monday, one of the first openly accessible, peer-reviewed journals on the Internet, solely devoted to the Internet, has a special Unlike Us edition this March. Follow this link to read the articles:

Introduction: Understanding social media monopolies

Korinna Patelis, Pavlos Hatzopoulos

Society doesn't exist

Jodi Dean

Silence, delirium, lies?

Caroline Bassett

What's on your mind? Social media monopolies and noopower

Robert William Gehl

Smell the fish: Digital Disneyland and the right to oblivion

Oliver Leistert

Social media as a government propaganda tool in post-revolutionary Egypt

Sara El-Khalili

Facebook.com text: Industrialising personal data production

Korinna Patelis

Special issue — Unlike Us: Understanding social media monopolies
The ubiquitous presence of social media in everyday life has not been met by equally pervasive research efforts for their critical understanding, due mostly to the increasing specialization and fragmentation of academic research. This special issue includes papers that attempt to set out a research platform that overcomes both the dominant quantitative analyses and the privacy paradigm in current social media research.

Facebook in film: Crystal Pillars

Posted: February 27, 2013 at 1:22 pm | By: Andrew Erlanger

In 2012, Constant Dullaart publically revealed his Facebook password as part of a Terms of Service performance at New York's New Museum. For many, this might be seen as the most terrifying of social media prospects; a radical yet voluntary act perhaps best likened to stripping oneself bare in the heart of a crowded metropolis. So what exactly drove the Amsterdam and Berlin-based artist to cede authorship of his online identity to a collection of strangers? One year later, this query is resolved courtesy of *Crystal Pillars*, a short film showcasing Dullaart's strained relationship with Facebook and the forces that informed his account abandonment.

The film, a video essay comprised of 'real' social encounters Dullaart experienced throughout his Facebook life, employs a lone voice actor to recite a range of social media sages, from Mark Zuckerberg to Lil B to Dullaart himself. The result is a surprisingly cohesive narrative that takes us on a journey through personal experiences, corporate promotion and somewhat apocalyptic perceptions of our contemporary social landscape. For Dullaart, social network citizens readily give up their privacy in return for potential contacts, as if these were tangible commodities to be exchanged. This fuels the idea we control our identity and how we are perceived, which he sees as an illusion: "You give up some form of autonomy with the idea that it will benefit you in life."

Of course, questions of privacy and identity only make up the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Facebook disenchantment. Dullaart also speaks of the game of competing for recognition, which takes place in a 'perpetual high school classroom' with ever-weakening social rewards. Then there is the actual composition of our communication, having eroded from original thoughts and feelings to the sharing of generic links that vaguely express sentiment.

So was the abandonment of Facebook actually a remedy for the artist's Facebook-inflicted ailments? Absolutely, at least according to the film. Dullaart reports that he has gained a newfound appreciation for seeing people in the flesh. His emoticons of yesteryear have made

way for real facial expressions, while his interest in the mundane has been reinvigorated now that it no longer takes the form of a status update distracting him from ‘more juicy information’.

The ancient Macrabii people of Ethiopia stored the bodies of deceased relatives in hollow crystal pillars and displayed them in their own homes. More than two millennia later, Facebook ‘memorialises’ the profiles of those who pass, allowing friends and family to post in remembrance while preserving the account itself. In the words of Dullaart, “the shell is still there but there’s no soft parts left inside.” Somebody, somewhere is still taking care of his account, but he has managed to walk away from himself. He has left himself in a crystal pillar.

Crystal Pillars is part of an increasing body of films that focus, either directly or indirectly, on the implications of online social networking. But while some find fascination in these dynamic new platforms, others consider their present-day pervasion a bit much to stomach. Writing from the 42nd International Film Festival Rotterdam, Vivian Sky Rehberg describes Dullaart’s work as “a heavy-handed, sickly-voiced-over short about the narrator’s fraught relationship to Facebook”, awarding it the unflattering title of ‘most irritating film’. Rehberg goes on to implore filmmakers, writers and artists alike to stop reflecting on how Facebook has ruined their relationships, a theme which has admittedly received serious media saturation in recent years. But regardless of whether or not we have been over-exposed to social media stories of late, the fact remains that social media experiences are fundamentally changing our lives, and this is certainly worthy of consideration.

Of course, artists play a crucial role in deconstructing the political and economic issues inherent to social media. The Unlike Us #3 Conference will play host to a unique panel discussion on the potential of art to visualise power relationships and disrupt the daily routines of social media usage. How should we understand the political economy of commercial social media, and what opportunities are there for alternative structures? Tickets can be purchased here.

Presentatie Unlike Us-app 14 maart

Posted: February 25, 2013 at 12:59 pm | By: Stijn Peeters



Kom naar de presentatie van de Unlike Us-app donderdag 14 maart. De app bevat tien toegankelijke Nederlandstalige artikelen vol filmpjes, discussiepunten en leestips over sociale media en de kansen en gevaren voor bouwers en gebruikers. De app is gebaseerd op de Unlike Us Reader, een uitgebreide verzameling essays die als boek bij het lectoraat Netwerkcultuur van de HvA verschijnt. In deze essays stellen designers, programmeurs, communicatiestrategen en onderzoekers de vraag: 'Sociale media – deelnemen of afwijzen?'

Theo Ploeg, cultuursocioloog en CMD-docent, Geert Lovink, lector Netwerkcultuur en Marc Stumpel, oud-CMD-student en redacteur van de app presenteren de iPad-versie van de artikelen. Vervolgens kan iedereen meedoen aan de quiz 'Hoe goed ken jij je eigen Facebook-profiel?!'. De winnaars kunnen leuke prijzen winnen, waaronder een toegangskaart voor de Unlike Us #3-conferentie op 22 en 23 maart.

Voor iedere bezoeker ligt bovendien een gratis exemplaar van de Unlike Us Reader klaar! Daarnaast is de app voor hen zonder iPad ook als PDF leesbaar:

<http://unlikeus.dmci.hva.nl/wp-content/uploads/uu-magazine.pdf>

Wanneer: 14 maart 2013 van 17.00-18.00 uur Waar: Medialounge, Theo Thijssenhuis, HvA (Wibautstraat 2-4, Amsterdam) Entree gratis

bekijk hier de flyer: Flyer

The Dutch queen and the dark side of social media

Posted: February 21, 2013 at 12:01 am | By: Stijn Peeters

With our queen abdicating at the end of coming April, it's hard to avoid the retrospectives of her reign that now dominate the Dutch news. When it comes to social media, however, you might expect there's not much to look back on; as a 75-year old woman living a highly sheltered life, surely the queen doesn't engage much with Twitter or Facebook. While there's an official twitter account managed by the royal press agency and a brilliant spoof account pretending to be the majesty, Beatrix herself still routinely sends her official communications by telegram.

Yet three years ago, in her 2009 Royal Christmas Message, she earnestly told the nation not to put too much faith in modern means of communication, implicitly referring to Twitter and similar social media. Signalling an increase in individualism and loss of sense of community, she warned that "virtual meetings" were no answer to this problem, rather, they "increased the distance between people".

While it's easy to discard these opinions as those of someone who "just doesn't get it" (which is precisely what happened afterwards), such a negative view on social media and its impact on our society is by no means uncommon. One of the more recent is the 2012 "trend report" The Dark Side of Social Media, by Dutch IT firm Sogeti, which made some modest ripples in Dutch media a while ago. In a (methodically questionable) overview of recent publications on social media's effects, its authors paint a positively apocalyptic picture. Social media allegedly make us stupid, egoistic and even mentally ill; they also stifle creativity, bring down the stock markets and promote acts of terror.

Though it's easy to find counter-arguments to these claims, our queen and Sogeti are far from alone in their negative portrayal of social media. These views often take shape as a nostalgic view of decades past, when people still talked to their neighbours, showed solidarity in times of hardship and weren't as focused on themselves. Social media, it is argued, makes us spend more and more time behind screens and less and less time with other people "in the flesh", which in the end degrades our quality of life. Often cited in this context is Sherry Turkle's *Alone Together*, an influential and thorough investigation of how new technologies such as texting and social networks have changed the way we interact with each other.

Turkle's book is often criticized for taking an overly pessimistic point of view, but to be fair, something's changed all right; it's hard to deny that having a limited but direct line of communication to pretty much anyone at our fingertips has transformed social dynamics considerably. These changes are not necessarily improvements, either; especially for younger children, for example, bullying no longer stops when school's out, but may continue online. Simply arguing for a return to the ways of decades past, however, is not a solution. The change that social media and internet have brought is practically irreversible, having already become so entangled with our everyday lives; simply discarding all of it is neither possible nor desirable, considering the many good things it's also brought us.

Rather, we should look for ways to improve existing social media and address the shortcomings our current tools for communication do have. In contrast to the old days, where such invention was often the domain of lonely geniuses working in relative geographic isolation, such innovation has nowadays become the domain of globe-spanning collaborative networks, in no small part thanks to new media itself. With open source social media projects like Diaspora or MediaWiki, academic platforms such as Coursera or our very own Unlike Us initiative and myriads of other projects being worked on around the clock, new media users are increasingly often taking matters into their own hands.

It's easy to complain, especially from the sidelines. It is, in fact, also relatively easy to address these complaints, thanks to precisely the qualities of new media that are just as often seen as a bane to our sociality. The trick is getting the complainers to join in. Here's hoping we see crown prince Willem-Alexander at Unlike Us #3.

British government suggests we are what we tweet, but what does this mean for social network citizens?

Posted: February 19, 2013 at 10:26 am | By: Andrew Erlanger

Who am I? This question, asked so often, is deceptively profound and intrinsically difficult to answer. But this hasn't deterred the British government from trying. In a new report titled *Future Identities*, the government has sought to understand our contemporary expression of the self and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the findings indicate that we are what we tweet (or post, like, tag and pin for that matter). The report draws evidence from a myriad of academic disciplines to suggest that social media is driving radical transformation in human identity. As we increasingly cast ourselves online, we find it increasingly difficult to draw distinctions between the 'real' and the 'virtual' self, to the point that the two seem to have merged. According to the report, this trend is also shifting our attitudes towards privacy, with people willingly sharing unprecedented levels of information in the public domain.

Of course, the conception of technology as more than a mere tool but rather an important element of our social and psychological lives is far from novel. First published in 1984, Sherry Turkle's *The Second Self* explores the early interplay between the computer and identity, taking particular interest in the ability of this now-ubiquitous machine to shape our cognitive development. For Turkle, the objective computer that does things for us is inextricably woven with the subjective computer that does things to us, exerting considerable influence over the very nature of our being. But while the seminal notion that we use computers to actively construct the self continues to ring true today, the extraordinarily rapid development of such machinery has enabled a new world of possibilities for identity formation. Most significantly, the advent and proliferation of the internet has completely revolutionised the interaction paradigm central to Turkle's pioneering work. No longer confined to the dyadic relationship of human and machine, the present-day second self is brought to life through a dense and complex network of human interactions. As Turkle herself explains, "Increasingly, when we step through the looking glass, other people are there as well".

In the case of social networking sites, it is not so much that other people are there but rather millions of other people. The immersive online environments offered by social media enable users to remain constantly connected to one another: creating and consuming content with consummate ease. But what should we make of all this private information being publically shared? The report suggests that our present-day willingness to disclose personal details has dispelled any ideas of online anonymity, with our intimate thoughts, feelings and behaviour constantly broadcast to our social circles and beyond.

In an ironic critique of this very phenomenon, German artist Tobias Leingruber has created personal identification cards for 'social network citizens'. Given we already use Facebook to connect to a host of online services, it is certainly not beyond the realms of possibility that the social media giant will be used for offline identity checks in the future. As Leingruber playfully suggests, "next time someone needs to 'see your ID' – how about showing a Facebook ID card instead of the documents your government gave you? On the web this is common practice for millions of people already. Therefore – Forget privacy." It appears the user's next battle is about who controls their privacy, and there is much to be said on this matter.

Leingruber will be addressing 'The Future of Identity in a Digital World' at the upcoming Unlike Us #3 conference. Tickets can be purchased [here](#).

We're commodities, but maybe that's all right – what do we pay for using FourSquare?

Posted: February 5, 2013 at 3:45 pm | By: Stijn Peeters

Culinary tourism isn't what it used to be. Two months ago, I spent a few days in London. Having never been there before, every evening presented a new challenge: where to eat? A decade ago, I might have consulted my Lonely Planet guide (or my Guide Michelin, had I not been a poor student) or asked a random passer-by for directions. Now, I consulted my iPad, and opened the Yelp app; within seconds, I had a conveniently large list of nearby places recommended by others before me.

While the nostalgically-inclined might lament the loss of the "romantic" quest for a decent restaurant in a city full of tourist traps, fact is that mobile, location-based apps such as Yelp

or FourSquare have made finding a nearby place of virtually any kind a lot easier. And it's all free, too – neither Yelp nor FourSquare even show advertisements in their mobile apps. You'd almost think it's too good to be true – so, is it?

“If you're not paying anything, you're the product being sold.” This phrase has been making the rounds on the internet for a few years now and is often quoted when a wonderful online service is offered at seemingly no cost. The notion is that, as a company still has to pay the bills, they have to be making money off their users in some way – presumably by selling or otherwise monetizing their input; for example, their personal information or the data they add to the service's database for no monetary compensation.

The user as the “product being sold” is exactly what Leighton Evans describes in his article *How to Build a Map for Nothing*, from the forthcoming *Unlike Us* reader. Having had an experience quite similar to mine – though in York rather than London, and looking for a place to drink rather than to eat – Evans investigates what FourSquare gained by him checking into the bar he found through the app that evening.

On the one hand, argues Evans, apps like FourSquare present a unique new bottom-up approach to mapping our world; rather than a lone cartographer drawing up a map of York or London, representing only his own (or his employers') point of view, via Location-Based Social Networks (LBSNs) thousands of users can contribute to a real-time, up-to-date map of these places. This allows for, among other things, the user-tailored recommendation lists and user-contributed reviews these LBSNs offer. On the other hand, this information is invaluable to advertisers and the businesses that can be found through the apps; having detailed information about how and when a certain kind of person visits a certain kind of place at a certain time allows for laser-accurate marketing.

I'd say that another strength of LBSNs in this regard is the fact that they are especially well-suited to mobile apps; finding a nearby pub will usually be a goal when you're out in the streets rather than at home. This makes for a rich stream of location-based and user-specific data that the companies behind these networks eagerly monetize. Mobile might just be the next frontier to conquer for social networks in general; with Facebook introducing a Facebook-branded SIM card and Twitter supporting updates via sms from the get-go, it is clear that location is not just the means but also the goal for a lot of networks.

Given this monetization of our input and personal data, it is obvious that we do in fact pay a price for using Yelp or FourSquare. The question is not so much whether this is a good thing or not, but rather whether the price is right; we're providing FourSquare with our minute-to-minute location, and the data we submit about these locations, in exchange for using their nice app and the features it provides. Is this acceptable?

The problem in answering this kind of questions is that while it is sort of clear what kind of data the users provide to the services, information about what social networks do with this information is often foggy. The terms of the exchange between the social network and the user are not transparent to the user side of the matter, and perhaps this is the real issue with being the product that's being sold. Leighton Evans found a nice pub in York, and I found an affordable restaurant in London, but what did Yelp and FourSquare find, and what did they do with it? Without an answer to those questions we cannot yet be sure whether it's all right to be a commodity.

Leighton Evans will be speaking about mobile use of social media at the *Unlike Us #3* conference, on 22 March in Trouw Amsterdam. The *Unlike Us Reader*, with the article 'How to Build a Map for Nothing: Immaterial Labor and Location-Based Social Networking', will

appear at the end of February 2013.

“Breaking down the walls” by Paul Sulzycki // Unlike Us Reader

Posted: December 7, 2012 at 12:39 pm | By: Larissa Hildebrandt

We are happy to announce that our first-ever Unlike Us reader is set to be printed in January 2013. The reader will cover a facet of social media topics, from activism to theory to decentralization. While we are wrapping up the publication, please enjoy the following guest post by [Paul Sulzycki](#), with his thoughts on ‘walled garden’ vs. decentralized social networks.

Breaking down the walls, or how social networking ought to be.

by Paul Sulzycki

Some history

I’ve been on the periphery of the social networking world since deleting my Facebook account three years ago, quietly waiting for a federated option to rise up and shed light on how horrible all our current privatized social networks are. This brief article will concisely wrap up what I’ve found while waiting for The Next Big Thing, and then go into what hopes I have for the future. A caveat first: I know next to nothing about coding and am writing purely from a user experience point of view.



Figure 1: This is the problem with the Internet today. On a favourite site I frequently visit, this is what greets me on the home page. Really? It’s 2012 and the Internet is still fragmented among a few key applications with wonky privacy laws and questionable security practices? Come on now.

The problem

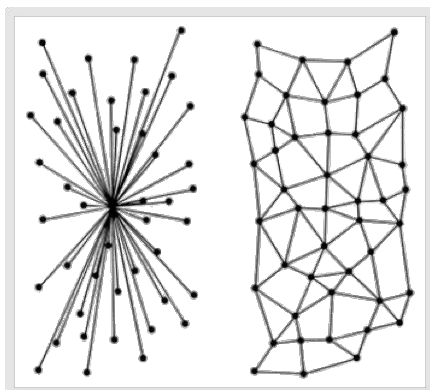


Figure 2: Users on centralized networks must all communicate through one source (L). Users

on decentralized networks can communicate directly with each other (R).

Big networks like Facebook, Google+, and Twitter are what are called “walled gardens”. That is to say, in order to use them you must be on them. This is in stark contrast to “open garden” communications like phone, email, or even the Internet: you don’t have to be with the same service provider to contact a friend who might be with another provider. Though tougher to control on the administrative side, this sort of relationship is ideal for users. For one, it makes customer profiling much more difficult for big corporations. Secondly, it means that you can switch providers and still plug into the network. Lastly, it protects users in sensitive circumstances like journalists or activists whose entire network might be compromised if relying solely on walled garden systems.

Social networking really is a valuable tool. Since Facebook’s launch almost a decade ago, it has turned into something of the next step up in electronic communications. Making social networking even better—and safer—rests on the idea of opening social networks up so that members can communicate across platforms. This concept is known as decentralization/distribution/federation. A second fix to the system would be easy account downloading and deletion. Imagine how great it would be if you could carry a backup of your entire social network (contacts, conversations, albums) on a USB key, and could re-upload it with any social network provider you wanted. Account portability of this sort is still quite a ways away, but social network decentralization and inter-/intra-network federation is already happening all around us. Below are the stories of three of the biggest current trailblazers in this field.

DIASPORA*

Immediately after hammering the last nail in my Facebook account I started looking for alternatives. I loved networking socially and I sure as heck wasn’t about to become an e-hermit. I quickly got word of an interesting project based out of the States: four undergrads from NYU had heard a motivational talk by a Columbia prof, had raised \$200,000 on Kickstarter, and were set to revolutionize the internet with their decentralized network. “Great!” I thought. “Sign me up!”

Right from the get-go, things were rocky. Communication from the core developers was scarce and unclear. No one knew where to sign up, for example. Many of us in the first experimental wave playing with Diaspora now know there are different “pods” and that accounts on these pods communicate with each other in a federated environment, but this still remains a point of confusion for newbies—especially for those coming in fresh from a walled garden with a centralized provider.

Poor communication aside, group chats happened over IRC, coders got together the world over to contribute, and the project quickly gained momentum. Sure, the promise of getting the project to a usable beta stage by the end of 2010 seemed a bit outlandish, but the community was still filled with hope. When the project continued in a buggy alpha mode well into 2011, only the more experienced users started raising concerns. In retrospect, listening to them would have been a smart move for anyone who went gung-ho in promoting Diaspora as a Facebook killer.

Things only got worse on the communication front by 2012. Features would appear and then

disappear, all without explanation. Popular, much-requested modifications would be shot down for no apparent reason, while useless changes would often show up and confuse everyone. There was much talk about having chat working on the Diaspora platform (even video chat), but this thought—like so many before it—came and went without any serious development.

But all this was peripheral: Diaspora was working. It was buggy and came bundled with lots of social disputes between the higher-ups, but it worked. It was decentralized, you could go in there and grab the code, pop it onto your own server and presto! You were off. You'd then plug in to the greater Diaspora ecosystem where you could interact with the free-thinking, privacy-aware, security-sensitive, technically-savvy crowd ~350,000 strong. Many of them were (and still remain) the creative types who actively contribute to conversations. You know, the “conversation flow directors”. Diaspora also brought in many fresh features: being able to format your posts through markdown formatting, the ability to subscribe and “follow” hashtags in posts, and even a rudimentary RSS feed built right into your home page. All these bright innovations certainly made the network a vibrant place to call home.

It was about 1½ years into playing with Diaspora that I noticed the project take a turn to resemble Tumblr more and more, moving its emphasis away from providing a solution to the “Facebook problem”. Interesting applications like [Cubbi.es](#) were written up that allowed you to neatly Shift+click over an image anywhere on the net and pull it into your Diaspora stream, immediately sharing it with all your contacts. Sadly, this project—again, like many things on Diaspora—was never maintained and is now obsolete.

Fast-forward to now: the Diaspora team has officially stated they are moving away from Diaspora to work on a new, marginally-related project, “Makr.io”. I've been on there once or twice and it looks to be something like Tumblr. You can edit posts from the community, mostly through basic picture modifications like adding captions, borders, etc. I sadly realized that Diaspora might actually never deliver on its promises and breathed a quiet prayer of thanks that I hadn't gone full out promoting the network to every stranger I met.

~Friendica

I “met” Mike Macgirvin on Diaspora, where his posts quickly showed him to be a quiet, tech-minded fellow who had quite a bit of experience in computers. A short while into being on Diaspora, and after seeing how unreceptive its core developers were to his suggestions for improvement, he went off and did his own thing.

Thanks to this bold move, we have arguably the best social networking alternative that actually does what Diaspora promised: you can communicate from [Friendica](#) to all of the major social networks out there. It's also fully federated, and its onus isn't so much on providing support to servers holding very many user accounts—as Diaspora had started doing before departing on their Makr.io experiment—but more so on providing people with tools to connect with each other from wherever they want, ideally spread out across as many servers as possible. In fact, it's not uncommon to see registration for some of the original, more popular Friendica pods closed so the developers can focus on providing quality service and not quantity. We all know servers cost money and Friendica, unlike Diaspora, is completely run on free time and small, private contributions—not even remotely comparable to Diaspora's \$200K kick-start.

Hold it. I know what you're thinking. "This is it! Why aren't we all just using Friendica?"

For one simple reason: the user interface is pretty bleak. Going on there, you feel you're back in the early days of the web, trying to navigate one of those classy geocities sites (minus the GIFs). As I mentioned at the beginning of this piece, I am not particularly gifted in advanced technical matters but those who are tend to swear by Friendica. User interface remains a big thing for me, however, and Friendica's interface is just too ugly and difficult to operate.

Friendica fans are quick to point out that UI isn't everything. Perhaps it would be best to close this section with a quote by Mike, the man behind the movement:

"'Social networking' is a business model from 2005. 'Social networks' are obsolete. I want to get rid of them. I want to break down their silly little walls and open the Internet so people can communicate with their friends without requiring a U.S. owned corporation to act as a go-between. Communicating with people is not a business model. It's what we do—and it's what the Internet was designed for. Not selling stuff. That came later, and screwed up everything.

"We don't need to agree to let people spy on our email. Why do we think that we have to accept people spying on our other online conversations—and claiming ownership of all our thoughts and photos?

"What I'm building is a free internet without walls—and where people can share with their friends and not have to 'sell their soul to the devil' to do so. It may look a bit like a social network but it is much more than that. It is freedom."

This, in a nutshell, is my hope for social networking as well.

Friendica Red

Mike has most recently departed from Friendica to work on a new project: "Red". As it looks now, Red will be where Mike will put to use everything he's learned from Friendica, along with four major upgrades:

- Taking into consideration the friendship continuum that our social lives revolve in (not everyone is always either a friend or non-friend).
- Dissolving the assumption that only geeks are capable of running servers with social networks.
- Building mobility into the system so you can access your account using a USB drive through any device and through any Red server in the world.
- Fixing the aforementioned UI design problems.

Libertree

There is one other network out there that is more underground than most. Libertree was started by a Diaspora user who only goes by the handle "Pistos". Pistos was an early helper with Diaspora who wrote lots of code for it, much of which never was integrated for one of those weird reasons mentioned earlier. Tired of this approach, Pistos forked the project, downloading and ameliorating the Diaspora source code with neat features like group pages and chat; items that Diaspora users had requested but that had never been implemented

while the core developer team continued focusing on making their product look shinier.

Seeing Diaspora's core developers weren't overly cooperative, Pistos closed his fork and started Libertree. Libertree currently serves a tiny community, but the advances it presents are truly stunning. They have made some really neat UI advances (you can toggle notifications!) and the community, being so small, votes and provides very much input regarding feature requests, bugs, and even bug fixes.

Where does this leave us?

At the beginning of something new; I can confidently say that. The disgruntled rumblings becoming more and more apparent on the Internet show that people don't enjoy our current model of communication; of always having to go through third-party corporations to get a private message to a close friend. Who knows how many times our behaviour is being recorded, analyzed, and stored. And who knows what this information is being used for? The thought of this alone makes me quite uncomfortable.

In a perfect world, I would like to have a social network that was easy to install so I could run it on a small server in my house, serving close friends and family. Institutions would also have their own servers with their own social networks for members (schools, companies, teams, projects, cities... the list goes on), and all networks would be able to fully communicate with each other. Features like email, chat, video chat, group pages, photo and video albums and easy link-sharing plugins would be a must with these new systems. Cory Doctorow presents a great point in Shannon's Law (2011): "The Net's secret weapon is that it doesn't care what kind of medium it runs over." Breaking down all our walled gardens is a start in capitalizing on this truth.

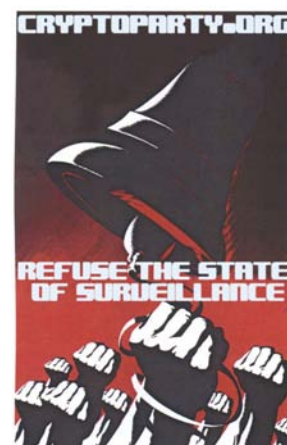
What will I be doing until then? Hanging out on Diaspora, all the while keeping a close eye on both Libertree and Friendica Red. These networks attract the activists, conspiracy theorists, geeks, artists, and all the other creative types who don't follow the crowd. This alone makes these networks a healthy place to check out for conversation and to see what's happening around the world.

However, the moment a network arises that looks as good as Diaspora, and that makes good on Diaspora's initial promises (federation, decentralization, privacy, security, and account portability), I'm making the jump. Again. Hopefully this time for longer.

Amsterdam joins the 'CryptoParty'

Posted: November 17, 2012 at 11:57 am | By: Larissa Hildebrandt

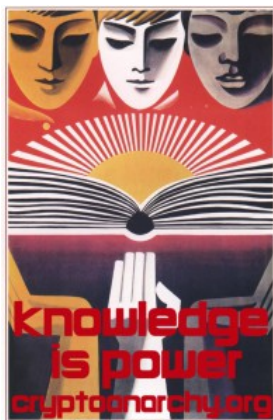
The first CryptoParty in Amsterdam took place on the 27th of September, with the second instalment planned for Monday, December 3rd. I sat down with Jurre van Bergen, one of the



organizers from Amsterdam's Hackerspace. He gave me the run-down of Amsterdam's first party, which was a bit unique. Dialed in via Skype was Cypherpunk's Eric Hughes (hear the audio).

During its heyday in the 1990s, the Cypherpunk movement was best known for its active pro-crypto and privacy mailing list. The list's founder, Eric Hughes, is also famous for writing A Cypherpunk Manifesto in 1993. You'll find the following quote from the manifesto atop the CryptoParty website:

"Privacy is necessary for an open society in the electronic age. Privacy is not secrecy. A private matter is something one doesn't want the whole world to know, but a secret matter is something one doesn't want anybody to know. Privacy is the power to selectively reveal oneself to the world."



At this edition, Hughes took the place of typical crypto workshops, but the upcoming event will dive straight into hands-on teaching. Jurre says they will explain on how to use tools like "Tor from the Tor Project," but it mainly "depends on what the people want to know." "It's not up to us," he explained.

Jurre predicts that December attendees will be the most interested in mobile security. "[...] People are interested in learning how to secure their communication," he told me, "Not only on Facebook, but more generally speaking, on their phones, text messages."

Beyond just teaching programs, he hopes the CryptoParties will eventually "dive deeper into how certain cryptographic protocols work; really basic language so people can actually understand how it works."

Who can benefit from a CryptoParty? Jurre stresses that it's for people of all backgrounds and experience levels. The Amsterdam crowd was a diverse bunch. "There were some journalists," said Jurre,

"Because most of the people were going to areas like Syria or Iran or Afghanistan. The government eavesdrops on a lot of communications inside, so it's pretty hard to even get the information to the outside of the world. So, securing their communication, either with sources or back to the broadcasters, it can be quite important. It can mean life or death in these kinds of areas. So it's pretty important that these people showed up."

You can also learn the basics without physically attending an event. I asked Jurre what someone like me could learn without any experience:

"What the CryptoParty is doing is making a handbook, which is basically a guideline of how you could secure certain platforms like your mobile phone, your Windows computer, your Mac computer, that kind of stuff. So people are constantly updating that handbook so it's not really final yet. But I think that's the best start for people to actually start reading or start contributing to, with questions like, 'how do I do X' or 'how do I do Y' and 'what is the most feasible solution to do this'. I think that's the best option for most people that I would recommend. [...] I believe it's actually with screenshots and that kind of stuff, it really guides

you through. So even if you're not computer savvy, it doesn't require programming. It's pretty straightforward."

It's also a community project: In other cities, attendees have been known to return to subsequent events to help teach what they've learnt. Although it's too early to tell, we could see the Amsterdam 'Parties' go in this direction.

If you're interested in learning more about cryptography, join the Amsterdam Hackerspace for the city's second CryptoParty:

December 3, 2012 / 17:00 – late / Location / More details here.

About the movement

In August 2012, the Australian government passed its controversial Cybercrime Legislation, requiring telecommunications companies to keep not only users' online data, but also text message and other communications.[1][2][3] Within the 30-day period, Australian (and foreign) authorities may request this data. In addition to placing serious new burdens on the companies, the privacy implications were not lost on the Australian public.

One Australian privacy advocate, going by the name Asher Wolf, promptly took her concerns to Twitter. What she thought was a simple exchange of tweets turned into an overnight movement and a global network of Party organizers.

Since the first CryptoParty, more than 40 have taken place across the world, with close to another 30 in the works. Warsaw holds a party on a weekly basis, and Vegas meets monthly.

The website is used for both organization and education, in wiki format. Planners can receive support for their own parties and list their events on the main page. The Resources page is a collection of crypto how-tos and legal information. They are also in the process of crowd sourcing a CryptoParty Handbook that is publicly available in its current format.

Yes, I agree to the terms... I think

Posted: October 30, 2012 at 1:00 pm | By: Larissa Hildebrandt



We've all done it: We're signing up for a new online service and we lie that we've read and agree to the terms and conditions. "It's just impossible" to read them, claims Jan-Christoph Borchardt of Terms of Service; Didn't Read. "It would take you 76 days every year to read all the terms you agree to on the web," adds his partner Hugo Roy. Websites like Facebook are also constantly changing their terms, making it hard to keep up.

Jan-Christoph Borchardt, Hugo Roy and Michiel de Jong are the young entrepreneurs behind the ToS;DR project. Their plan is simple: To give you a breakdown of the terms and conditions so you don't have to read them all. This young, Berlin-based startup aims to fix what they call "the biggest lie on the web." The trio explained the basics in their 3-minute Indiegogo video.

The project is community-run, so volunteers can read, discuss, and collectively rate the documents. Websites are then given a Classification from 'A' to 'E', with 'A' being the best. An A-rated website "treat[s] you fairly, respect[s] your rights and will not abuse your data." By contrast, the E-rated websites "raise very serious concerns." The site also gives a breakdown of the most important things you should know:

f Facebook No Class Yet

- ✗ Very broad copyright license on your content
- ✗ Third-Parties
- ➔ No promise to inform about government requests
- ✗ Facebook automatically shares your data with many other services
- ✔ Transparency on law enforcement requests
- ✔ You can give your feedback before changes
- ✗ No pseudonym allowed
- ➔ (more info on the [forum](#))

Expand Read the full terms

Whenever you click that you agree to terms or policies, you're risking your privacy and giving up your the rights to your content. ToS;DR is an easy to way to answer questions like, "what are they doing with my data?" and, "are they tracking my activity?" Even if you only scan the ratings, look for the red 'X's' that indicate the worst of the bunch:

o Twitpic Class E

- ✗ Twitpic takes credit for your content
- ✗ Your content is for Twitpic and their partners
- ✗ Reduction of legal period for cause of action
- ✗ You indemnify Twitpic from any claim related to your content
- ✗ Deleted images are not really deleted
- ➔ Jurisdiction in Delaware

Expand Read the full terms

They also have a simple browser extension that warns you when you're visiting a low-rated website (download it for Firefox, Chrome, Safari and Opera).

Although the reviews for Facebook and Twitter are far from finished, they are already quite full. Both are criticized for allowing third parties to access your content, and Facebook's critique actually lists names of companies they share your information with. It also says they give users a short timeframe (3 to 7 days prior) to reject the changes, but only if 30% of their 1 billion active users participate.

Out of all the websites currently under review, it worries me how many websites won't allow you to delete your account. The reviews I'm excited for are mobile communication apps like Whatsapp. If I don't read the terms online, I'm even less likely to read them on a phone

screen. Although many users will still accept the terms no matter what, the website can help them choose alternative websites depending on their ratings.

When ToS;DR launched their Indiegogo fundraising campaign, they were already a team of 300 volunteers. At the close of the campaign last week, they had not only reached their €10.000 goal, but they also received another €10.000 grant from Google for Entrepreneurs. You can track their progress on their website, on Twitter, and on Facebook.

Promoted Posts: Facebook's Answer to Edgerank?

Posted: October 26, 2012 at 11:00 am | By: Larissa Hildebrandt

After testing promoted posts in the U.S. earlier this month, Facebook has now rolled out the feature for all users. Like the name suggests, users can now 'promote' their posts for a fee, allowing them to reach a larger-than-normal audience. These posts will feature prominently on newsfeeds, and will be indicated 'sponsored'. Like Facebook's normal advertising, you can set a limited budget for your campaign and track how many users you were able to reach.

Whether it was strategic or not, promoted posts are a solution to Facebook's Edgerank, the algorithm that decides which posts are important enough to show up in your newsfeed. To put this into perspective, The New York Observer posted an article about the new system, claiming that, on fan pages, "messages now reach, on average, just 15 percent of an account's fans."

It you look at Facebook's 'promote' page, however, you won't see Edgerank mentioned:

▾ If I don't promote my post, will people still see it?

Yes. Posting works the same way it did before. When you share a post it gets delivered to the audience you specify.

If someone you shared with didn't notice your post it's likely because they:

- Didn't check Facebook the day you posted
- Didn't scroll down to where your post appeared in their news feed
- Applied their news feed controls

Promoting a post simply bumps it higher than it would otherwise appear in your audience's news feeds.

Although Facebook's example shows a modest \$10 being used for a post, the bloggers behind dangerousminds.net have crunched the numbers for their own fan page:

"To reach 100% of our 50k+ Facebook fans, they'd charge us \$200 per post. That would cost us between \$2000 and \$3200 per day[.] We post seven days a week, that would be about \$14,000 per week, \$56,000 per month... a grand total of \$672,000 for what we got for free before Facebook started turning the traffic spigot down."

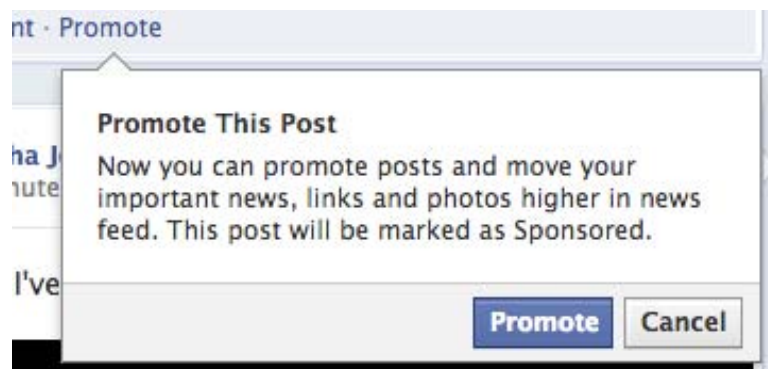
The blog reportedly paid \$2000 to promote this specific post, titled "Facebook: I Want My Friends Back." They took this as their chance to inform readers about their switch to more

affordable promotional platforms like Twitter, Google+, and their email list.

While Dangerous Minds still has a decent Facebook fan base, very small businesses are even more out of luck. Besides the cost, promoted posts are only an option for Pages with more the 400 'likes'.

While Facebook's new sponsored per-user reach seems to be much cheaper than Twitter's, the main difference is that Twitter users are not at a disadvantage by not sponsoring posts. There is no filtering algorithm on Twitter, meaning followers still see every subscribed post in their feed.

A little over a year ago, Facebook posted on its own page saying it had "no plans to charge for Facebook. It's free and always will be." Despite this claim, promoted posts are not only intended for business use, but also personal. Recently, you might have noticed the following when posting on a friend's wall:



Facebook is edging into 'freemium' territory by charging personal accounts to ensure friends see their posts. After all, isn't the purpose of Facebook to help us stay connected? While you can still see all posts on friends' walls, the effectiveness of the newsfeed is becoming questionable.

The act of 'liking' a page is no longer synonymous with subscribing to it. Unless businesses can afford to pay, we may see more and more users opt for alternative services like Twitter or RSS feeds.

However, it also seems unlikely that Facebook will change its mind on the new service. This week, Facebook "posted its biggest daily stock gain since its initial public offering in May." The increase is linked to jumps in advertising revenue, specifically on mobile devices. The positive results will appease investors who were disappointed by Facebook's "IPO disaster" earlier this year.

If you don't agree with Facebook's promoted posts, Dangerous Minds has created graphics for your Facebook profile and timeline photos. Download them [here](#).



Don't Give Me the Numbers – Matthew Fuller interviews Ben Grosser about Facebook Demetricator

Posted: October 25, 2012 at 9:57 am | By: Larissa Hildebrandt

Ben Grosser is an artist, composer, and programmer. His recent piece of software is the Facebook Demetricator, a tool for adapting the social network's interface so that the numerical data it foregrounds is removed. No longer is the focus on how many friends one has or how many comments they've gotten, but on who those friends are and what they've written. Matthew Fuller conducted an interview with Ben Grosser.

Matthew Fuller: Facebook uses numbers as a key part of the information provided on its interface. Things, or what are there rendered as things, such as likes, friends, comments waiting, events, are all numbered as are the relation of several other kinds of things to time. Facebook Demetricator suggests that Facebook users might step away from enumeration as a way of understanding the service. What role, for you, does the number play in Facebook, and what does the Demetricator propose?

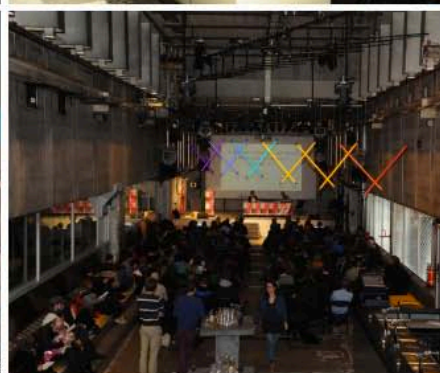
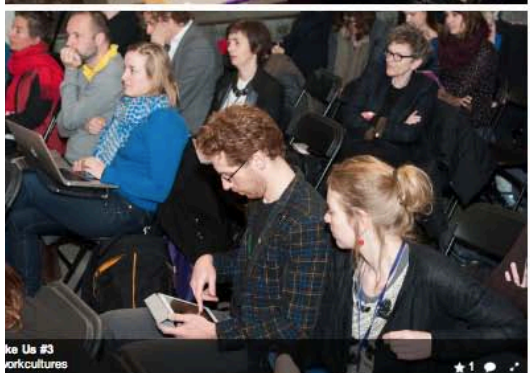
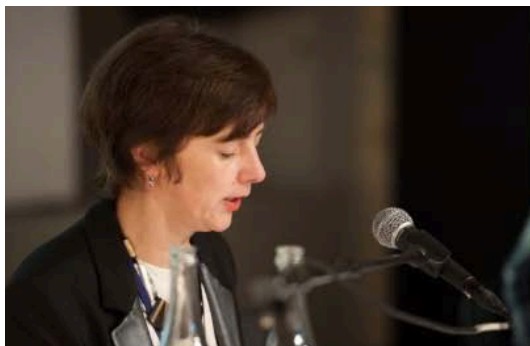
Ben Grosser: As a regular user of Facebook I continually find myself being enticed by these numbers. How many friends do I have? How much do people like my status? I focus on these quantifications, watching for the counts of responses rather than the responses themselves, or waiting for numbers of friend requests to appear rather than looking for meaningful connections. In other words, these numbers lead me to evaluate my participation within the system from a metricated viewpoint.

Read the interview in full: [Don't Give Me the Numbers](#). Watch Grosser's video below or install the Demetricator yourself.

[vimeo]<http://vimeo.com/51487572>[/vimeo]

More information:

<http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/unlikeus/>



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was conceived as a decentralized network, the most widely used web tend toward centralization. Control increasingly rests with centralized who, as a consequence, have also amassed unprecedented amounts of data s and personalities of individuals.

ors, and consumer advocates have looked to alternative decentralized a natural response to threats posed by these centralized services. These d have found little adoption.

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