

Introduction

The Pride and Glory of Web 2.0

“Blogging is a form of vanity publishing: You can dress it up in fancy terms, call it ‘paradigm shifting’ or a ‘disruptive technology’, the truth is that blogs consist of senseless teenage waffle. Adopting the blogger lifestyle is the literary equivalent of attaching tinselly-sprinkles to the handlebars of your bicycle. In the world of blogging ‘0 Comments’ is an unambiguous statistic that means absolutely nobody cares. The awful truth about blogging is that there are far more people who write blogs than actually read blogs.”

- Stodge.org, The Personal Memoirs of Randi Mooney, posted on May 5, 2005, (14) comments

By 2005, the Net had recovered from the dotcom crash, and, in line with the global economic figures, reincarnated as Web 2.0.ⁱ Blogs, wikis and ‘social networks’ such as Friendster, MySpace, Orkut and Flickr were presented as the next wave of voluntary alliances that users seek online. Virtual communities had become a discredited term, “associated with discredited ideas about cyberspace as an independent polity, and failed dotcom ideas about assembling community in the shadow of a mass-market brand such as forums on the Coca Cola site.”ⁱⁱ Instead, there was talk of swarms, mobs and crowds. Media had turned social. From collaborative content production such as Wikipedia, to social bookmarking on Digg, there was a new élan. The BBC designated 2005 as the “year of the digital citizen.” The Boxing Day tsunami of 2004 starkly showed the potential of these tools. Later that same year, the July 7th London bombings and the hurricanes in the U.S. forced home the fact that citizens had a much larger role in the production of news than ever before. The BBC received 6,500 e-mailed mobile images and video clips showing the fires at the Buncefield oil depot, thousands more than the number received after the London bombings.ⁱⁱⁱ Media started to look more participatory and inclusive, concluded the BBC report. That’s the perception management side of the story. The challenge here is to come up with ‘harsh meditations’ that reflect on Internet discourses in real time, based on informed engagement.

Despite a new generation of applications and the spectacular rise of the Internet population, and increased user involvement, most of the topics facing the Internet remained much the same: corporate control, surveillance and censorship, ‘intellectual property rights’, filtering, economic sustainability, and ‘governance’. As I wrote in the introduction to *My First Recession*, it was important for me to stay on-topic and not leave the scene. Much of what I deal with in this book is ‘unfinished business’. It is no doubt uncool to deal with unresolved issues and to either celebrate the New or critique it is in much higher demand. We cannot merely map old power struggles onto new terrain. It is justified to share the enthusiasm around free wireless infrastructure, peer-2-peer networks and social software. I nonetheless chose to look into ongoing issues such as the stagnant ‘new media arts’ sector, the whereabouts of German media theory, the ‘nihilist’ impulse of blogging, the way triumphant Dutch architecture avoids dealing with the Internet, the ‘ICT for Development’ galaxy and its World Summit of the Information Society, the abyss of Internet Time, and the progress made at the Sarai New Media Initiative in Delhi,

five years after its opening. Despite all the victories, the confusion whether ‘new media’ are frontier technologies or liminal activities has not yet been resolved. Finally, together with others, I indulged myself in speculative thinking and elaborate on collaborative work done on three concepts that have emerged in recent years: free cooperation, organized networks and distributed aesthetics. I also give an update of ‘tactical media’, a meme that we designed during the roaring nineties.

In my work on Internet culture I distinguish three phases: Firstly, the scientific, pre-commercial, text-only period before the World Wide Web. Secondly, the euphoric, speculative period in which the Internet opened up for the general audience, culminating in the late nineties dotcom mania. Thirdly, the post-dotcom crash/post 9-11 period, which is now coming to a close with the ‘Web 2.0’ mini-bubble. Blogs, or weblogs, really began around 1996-97, during the second euphoric phase, but remained off the radar, as they had no e-commerce component. The significant change of the past several years has been the ‘massification’ and further internationalization of the Internet. In 2005 the one billion user mark was passed. The ‘globalization’ of the Internet has been mostly invisible for the dominant Anglo-American Internet culture due to organized willful ignorance and a deficit of foreign language skills. It is hard for some to realize what it means that English content on the Web has dropped well below the 30% mark. Growth has also lead to further ‘nationalization’ of cyberspace, mainly through the use of national languages, in contrast to the presumed borderless Net that perhaps never existed. The majority of Internet traffic these days is in Spanish, Mandarin and Japanese but little of this seems to flow into the dominant Anglo-Western understanding of ‘Internet Culture’. This picture gets further complicated if you take into account the ‘cross media’ potential of the two billion mobile phone users, blogomania in Iran, South Korea possessing one of the densest broadband infrastructures, and the rise of China.

In this introductory chapter I do not intend to synthesize all the concepts that I deal with in this book. Instead I will highlight a few threads that, in my view, characterize the state of the arts within the given period 2003-2006. Some of them deal with the ‘darkening of the Net’ after 9/11, whereas others address the economics of Internet culture. There is no doubt that technologies such as the Internet live from the principle of permanent change. There is no normalization in sight. The tyranny of the *New* rules, and it is this echo of the dotcom era that makes Web 2.0 look so tired right out of the gate. We can despise the relentless instability as a marketing trick, and ask ourselves why we, time and time again, get excited by the latest gadget or application. Instead of transcending away from the market noise and detaching ourselves, we may as well reconcile ourselves to the same old ‘change’ and enjoy precisely selected and manufactured ‘revolutions’. A decade after its appearance and rapid growth in popularity, Internet culture is torn apart by contradictory forces that make it no longer possible to speak of general trends in either good or evil directions. Whereas permanent change takes command and massive control regimes have been introduced, the tens of millions of new users that are being added on a monthly basis give the medium unexpected twists as they accept the given and joyfully appropriate services in ways that market watchers could never have guessed.

Net critic Nicholas Carr asks if there is a counter-argument to be made to the Web 2.0 hype. “All the things Web 2.0 represents - participation, collectivism, virtual communities, amateurism - become unarguably good things, things to be nurtured and applauded, emblems of progress toward a more enlightened state. But is it really so?”^{iv} Web 2.0 promoters, says Carr, “venerate the amateur and distrust the professional.” We see it in their praise of Wikipedia, and we see it in their worship of open-source software and their promotion of blogging as an alternative to ‘mainstream media’.” My answer to this differs from Carr, who is reluctant to undermine the good parts of the traditional professional model. The libertarian praise of the amateur grows out of a distrust of and resentment towards large organization that are wary of the anarcho-capitalist recipes on how to innovate. Utilizing open networks threatens the closed IP-focused knowledge management systems. In the libertarian approach the professional becomes an obstacle because of this trade-union-like behavior. The result of a lacking pluriformity of models is an unarticulated reluctance to think up economic models for (emerging) professionals that leave behind the copyright structure, yet are desperate to earn a living from their work. Carr defends the fact-checking journalists that are employed inside the media industry. “In his article *We Are the Web*, Kevin Kelly writes that ‘because of the ease of creation and dissemination, online culture is *the culture*.’ I hope he’s wrong, but I fear he’s right - or will come to be right.”

The question I pose here is how the praise of the amateur can be undermined, not from the perspective of the endangered establishment but from that of the creative (under) class, the virtual intelligentsia, the precariat, the multitude that seeks to professionalize its social position as new media workers. What is needed are economic models that assist ambitious amateurs to make a living from their work. “Everyone is a Professional.” Related to this is the still outstanding debate of professional standards, certifications and codexes: what is web design, who can do it, and how much does it cost? How do new tasks, related to computer networks, fit into existing institutions such as hospitals, trade unions and museums? We cannot answer before we have codified the work practices, much in the same way guilds have done this in the past and professional organizations are doing right now. Is it the aim of professionalization of new media work to create new, separate sectors in society, or should we rather dissolve these tasks within existing professions? I will discuss this question further when I look at the example of ‘new media arts’ in its relation to ‘contemporary arts’: is self-referentiality a sign of maturity or rather one of an unsustainable ghettoization? Can we argue in favor of radical trans-disciplinarity while at the same time create an archipelago of micro-disciplines? Such issues can be tackled through fundamental practice-based research, which was my model in founding the Institute of Network Cultures in 2004.

Crusaders of the Free

Unreconstructed fragments of 1990s Internet ideology are still floating around. These are mostly ‘facilitating’ concepts that appeal to freedom-loving, young users. Take blogger Ian Davis, for whom Web 2.0 “is an attitude not a technology. It is about enabling and encouraging participation through open applications and services. By open I mean

technically open but also, more importantly, socially open, with rights granted to use the content in new and exciting contexts. Of course the Web has always been about participation, and would be nothing without it. Its single greatest achievement, the networked hyperlink, encouraged participation from the start.”^v Read the catchy self-definition of Digg: “Digg is all about user powered content. Every article on Digg is submitted and voted on by the Digg community. Share, discover, bookmark, and promote the news that’s important to you!” It is not enough to deconstruct the lure of such techno-libertarianism in an academic journal or on a mailing list. The rebel-business talk of ‘change’ has nowhere near been taken apart. No dissidents have yet stood up to object to the hypocritical agenda behind ‘free’ and ‘open’ in broader public arenas. What in fact should be done is to demand from the Free gurus to come up with an innovative economic model every time they ‘free up’ the next cultural or social activity.

On a more visionary scale Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales listed Ten Things That Will Be Free. The list was inspired by David Hilbert’s address to the International Congress of Mathematicians in Paris in 1900 where he proposed 23 critical unsolved problems in mathematics. Apart from the obvious Free Encyclopedia and Free Dictionary, there are standard curriculum schoolbooks, maps, communities, academic publishing, music and art, but also TV listings, product identifiers, search engines and file formats.^{vi} The confusion that Richard Stallman never managed to make history, namely that free, in his view, doesn’t mean free-of-cost but instead expresses the possibility to change computer code, should not be reproduced yet again. For me there is no immediate connection between free and freedom. The ideology of the free (as in beer) lures, facilitates, and ultimately satisfies the millions in order to mystify and obfuscate the fact that the promoters, and the virtual class in general, cash-in elsewhere in the chain. The emphasis of Lessig, O’Reilly, Kelly, Ito and many others on the right to remix mainstream content is an important issue but not crucial as most aspiring artists produce their own work. It is a bad postmodern cliché to state that today’s cultural production merely consists of quotations. The exclusive focus on young and innocent amateurs that just want to have fun, and the resentment against professionals is not accidental. Amateurs are less likely to stand up and claim a part of the fast increasing surplus value (both symbolical and in real money terms) that the Internet is creating. Professionals who have been around for a while would understand what the implications will be for content producers if one giant such as Google instead of book publishers end up controlling money flows. What is important here is to envision sustainable income sources beyond the current copyright regimes.

The vices of Internet architecture must be known (and not left unquestioned) so that its virtues may prevail. The ideology of the free as one of its key components is part of the lubricious business language. In his essay *The Destruction of the Public Sphere* Ross McKibben states that the most powerful weapon of market-managerialism has been its vocabulary. “We are familiar with the way this language has carried all before it. We must sit on the cusp, hope to be in a centre of excellence, dislike producer-dominated industries, wish for a multiplicity of providers, grovel to our line managers, even more to the senior management team, deliver outcomes downstream, provide choice. Our students are now clients, our patients and passengers customers.”^{vii} According to McKibben it is a

language that was first devised in business schools, then broke into government, and now infests all institutions. “It has no real historical predecessor and is peculiarly seductive. It purports to be neutral: thus all procedures must be ‘transparent’ and ‘robust’, everyone ‘accountable’. It is hard-nosed but successful because the private sector on which it is based is hard-nosed and successful. It is efficient; it abhors waste; it provides all the answers. It drove Thatcher’s enterprise culture. It is more powerful than the kind of language Flaubert satirized in the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* since, however ridiculous it might be, it determines the way our political (and economic) elites think of the world.”

“You shall give everything away free (free access, no copyright); just charge for the additional services, which will make you rich.” This is the first of the “Ten Liberal Communist Commandments” that Olivier Malnuit published in the French magazine *Technikart*. The person who embodies these values like no one else is the Japanese venture capitalist, hacker and activist Joi Ito. Slavoj Žižek quoted Malnuit’s commandments and lists Bill Gates and George Soros as liberal communists. Žižek: “The signifier of liberal communist Newspeak is ‘smart’. Being smart means being dynamic and nomadic, and against centralized bureaucracy; believing in dialogue and co-operation as against central authority; in flexibility as against routine; culture and knowledge as against industrial production; in spontaneous interaction and autopoiesis as against fixed hierarchy. Their dogma is a new, postmodern version of Adam Smith’s invisible hand: the market and social responsibility are not opposites, but can be reunited for mutual benefit.”^{viii} Žižek goes on to say that liberal communists are pragmatic; they hate a doctrinaire approach. “There is no exploited working class today, only concrete problems to be solved: starvation in Africa, the plight of Muslim women, religious fundamentalist violence.” Žižek’s conclusion comes as no surprise: “We should have no illusions: liberal communists are the enemy of every true progressive struggle today.” Liberal communists give away with one hand what they grabbed with the other. This goes to the core of the Internet ideology that makes us blind to what we actually pay, while overly happy to join the gift economy of the free.

Žižek mentions the necessity, in instances such as racism, sexism and anti-Semitism, to build coalitions with the liberal communists. But what about the case of the Internet? Isn’t it time to bail out from the shared agendas with the libertarians, call for the exodus and confront the libertarians with their double agendas? Felix Stalder and Konrad Becker from Vienna summarize the fight for media freedom in a neat way. “The goal is to devise new ways in which information can flow freely from one place to another, from people to people. Instead of deepening fragmentation, information and cultures are held to be a resource produced and used collaboratively, rather than being controlled by particular owners. People should be free to appropriate information as they see fit, based on their own historical and personal needs and desire, rather than having to consume the standardized products of McWorld.”^{ix} My take here is that we can only continue to spread such calls for liberty if they also contain antagonistic statements about the ‘state of the free’. We cannot continue to uncritically support Creative Commons, open source and knowledge for all platforms such as Wikipedia if their ideological premises cannot be discussed.

Internet Jihad in the Netherlands

A major challenge during the research period of this book concerned the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by Muslim fundamentalist Mohammed Bouyeri on November 2, 2004, two blocks from our apartment in the Eastern part of Amsterdam. Several months earlier, van Gogh had shot a film with then Dutch member of parliament Ayaan Hirsi Ali about the position of women in Islam. The 'new media' component of violent Islam fundamentalism posed a range of ethical questions for me that go way beyond the disputes with trolls that I described in my previous publications. List moderators, community sites and providers constantly find themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to deal with an Internet culture gone out-of-control, something they would rather like to keep free and open. Mohammed B. (as he was referred to in the Dutch press until his conviction) and his friends made intensive use of the Internet to shape and propagate their views. They operated in several discussion forums and made their own web pages. They had their own web pages for jihad fighters - often with MSN groups, for example, under the name of '5434' and 'twaheedwljihad'.^x Van Gogh also was actively involved in the Dutch Internet with his website *De Gezonde Roker (The Healthy Smoker)*. During 2004 weblogs in the Netherlands were at the height of their popularity. In the blogging essay I discuss the function of so-called shockblogs. The hype was in full swing and scores of celebrities, from ministers to crooners, maintained a personal blog. In my biography of Internet engagement, the conspiratorial chats, massive online hate speech and racism and peer-to-peer sharing of beheading videos in the months leading up to van Gogh's murder mark the final realization of the democratization of the Internet. From now on it was no longer legitimate to speak of new media's democratic potential. Internet and mobile phones had penetrated society to such an extent that it felt ridiculous to even ask about the 'impact' that technology had as if it was still outside. Internet and society, at least in the Netherlands, had completely merged. Why should one be surprised that "radical losers" (a term by Hans Magnus Enzensberger)^{xi} publish websites, transfer files, exchange messages via e-mail, discuss in web forums and news groups, and talk to each other via chat, instant messaging or do video-conferencing?

In October 2005 University of Amsterdam researcher Albert Benschop published a report about the van Gogh case, in which he emphasized the new media aspect. For Benschop the Internet is a free state and a refuge for awkward opinions. Theo van Gogh had learned, just like his killer, how to make use of it. As a columnist, van Gogh had been dumped by many newspapers and magazines for his extraordinarily insulting texts; writings that were legal under Dutch law, in the name of tolerance and freedom of the individual - a tenant close to the heart of Holland. Following Benschop's analysis we have to connect the move of Dutch politics towards rightwing politics under Pim Fortuyn (who was assassinated in 2002) with a specific reading of Internet freedom. Theo van Gogh considered the Internet to be the only medium on which he could speak freely. Benschop in his "chronicle of a political murder foretold": "The rise of populist Fortuynism in the Netherlands went hand in hand with a strong hardening of the political debate and a coarsening in the style of discussion. It was difficult not to notice that many

people who make use of the Internet contributed to this polarized hardening. Many discussion forums have degenerated into refuges for people who deeply insult and slander each other, and even threaten each other with death.”^{xii}

Polarization in society after 9/11 is further amplified by the libertarian Net architecture that ensures an unconditional and absolutist freedom of speech.^{xiii} Benschop: “Communications via Internet do not have immediate repercussions on the local social life of the individual participants. Thus they feel free(r) to express themselves in a disinhibited way. This is precisely the reason why Internet communications are characterized by two extreme manifestations of social behavior: being excessively and unwontedly sweet to other people (‘netslutting’ or ‘flirting’) and excessively insulting or even threatening people (‘netshitting’ or ‘flaming’).” Dutch Muslim youth visited sites such as How to Prepare Myself for Jihad, with calls to fight in Chechnya. On the Moroccan site for youngsters mocros.nl Theo van Gogh had been threatened with death for months. Already in April 2004 a picture of the filmmaker was posted on a forum page of mocros.nl, with the text “When is it Theo’s turn?” In this poster, over his throat, chest and head a target was projected with seven bullet holes. “Allah will quickly get rid of this literal and figurative swine.” Mohammed B. used the Net to find texts on radical Islam, which were then translated into Dutch.

Rejections to the murder by the public were equally extreme. On Moroccan websites and discussion forums - before they curbed themselves - many contributions from Islamists could be read that alleged the godless pig had finally got what he deserved. That Allah’s will had triumphed and that said van Gogh had received a suitable dose of his own medicine. “Praise the martyr who shot down Theo van Gogh! That’s how the Zionists and their servants come to their bloody end!” Albert Benschop: “Many people transformed their sorrow over Van Gogh’s death into an exceptional aggressiveness towards everything experienced as ‘culturally impure’. We were too weak and we should hit back. ‘We cannot even express our opinion in our own country anymore’ (Angelica). Apart from huge outrage about infringement of freedom of speech and senseless violence, people cry out for more violence: revenge. ‘Perhaps next time we should finish off an imam when he opens his trap about Dutch society’ (anonymous). ‘Who sets fire to the first mosque? I hope many will go up in flames’ (Dutch person). ‘Dutchmen wake up! It’s about time we take the law into our own hands and start in the underprivileged areas’ (Henk). ‘Throw that scum out of the country and close the doors!’ (Leo). So much for the infamous Dutch tolerance.

Societies in turmoil, such as the Netherlands, produce more (digital) data than anyone can process. Few scholars are technically and linguistically up to the job of monitoring the multitude of fast-moving translocal chat rooms, blogs and sites. The detailed empirical study of Albert Benschop cries out for a critical theoretical follow-up and a shift of Internet studies away from soft constructivism and *Ideologiekritik* towards a non-judgmental approach that is ready to dig into the dirty everyday doings of the network society. We need to say farewell to theories that equate the Internet with democracy, empowerment of Identity and The Good. The Theo van Gogh case study is by no means the only one. *Smart Mobs* author, Howard Rheingold, had to revise his optimistic vision

of how (mobile) technologies were empowering the swarms for the good. The Power of the Many can take us in any direction. During the Sydney beach riots of December 2005 thousands of protesters were mobilized through SMS messages that called to clear the beaches of Lebanese men and others of Middle Eastern appearances.^{xiv} In another instance, jailed members of the PCC gang in São Paulo paralyzed the metropolis by orchestrating an intimidation campaign out of their prison cells, using SMS messaging and a TV network showing a cell phone interview with someone who presented himself as the PCC leader.^{xv} In response, the Brazilian government planned to submit a bill forcing mobile operators to install equipment that will block signals inside prisons.

“We Lost the War”

A deeper understanding of the Internet ideology has been hampered by the range of Homeland Security measures of the GW Bush administration, willingly copy-pasted by coalition governments. War-on-terror measures, worldwide, can be credited for the return of pure and worthy libertarian ideas such as being cool and, yet again, countercultural. Instead of displaying their usual optimism, in 2005 a leading hacker from the German Chaos Computer Club, Frank, wrote a “Declaration of Capitulation.” It was called “We Lost the War. Welcome to the World of Tomorrow.”^{xvi} This manifesto indicates that the hegemonic strategy of simply claiming a superior knowledge position as computer programmer against the Powers That Be no longer works. Frank calls on his constituency to, again, investigate what, under the current circumstances, amounts to an underground attitude. The text starts with the mysterious sentence, “Losing a war is never a pretty situation.” His picture of the victorious mood around 2000, just before the dotcom crash and 9/11 sounds accurate. “We had survived Y2K with barely a scratch. The world’s outlook was mildly optimistic after all. The ‘New Economy’ bubble gave most of us fun things to do and the fleeting hope of plenty of cash not so far down the road. We had won the Clipper-Chip battle, and crypto-regulation, as we knew it was a thing of the past. The waves of technology development seemed to work in favor of freedom, most of the time.”

These days, says Frank, “democracy is already over”. 9/11 is being used by the elite to push through repressive legislation that would normally be flat-out rejected, or at least resisted. “Cooking up the terrorist threat by apparently stupid foreign policy and senseless intelligence operations provides a convenient method to get through with the establishment of a democratically legitimized police state.” The author points out that hackers now have to build the very tools they once detested. Because of massive investments in internal security Internet culture is changing. The author warns that anonymity will become a precious thing. “Closed user groups have already gained momentum in communities that have a heightened awareness and demand for privacy.” Decentralized infrastructure is needed. But most of all fun! “Exposing surveillance in the most humiliating and degrading manner, giving people something to laugh about must be the goal. Also, this prevents us from becoming frustrated and tired. If there is no fun in beating the system, we will get tired of it and they will win. So let’s be flexible, creative and funny, not angry, ideological and stiff-necked.”

It is curious to see that these concerns, conspiracy-driven paranoia or not, fail to mention what people are actually doing on the Web. The gap between the code hacking class and the ten of millions that chat, skype, link, google, message and email with each other is greater than ever. The millions of ordinary users simply do not exist. The fight over the Internet is portrayed as a heroic struggle between the hackers and the security forces. The user masses are not even considered a spectator audience. The hi-low distinction that once plagued the television discourse returns here, except that the one billion Internet users simply do not exist.

Debating Web 2.0

“Please, God, just one more bubble!”

- A bumper sticker

It is important to analyze the Web 2.0 hype and see how it differs from the late nineties dotcom days. The days of empty portals have long gone by. Instead, bands and brands are running after the roaming hordes of users in an attempt to boost their popularity. What we gained compared to 1999 is the realization that people do not flock to the Web for e-commerce reasons but to have conversations.^{xvii} Instead of the Web 2.0 term that Tim O’Reilly plugged, Trebor Scholz prefers to talk about “sociable web media.” Trebor, posting on the iDC list: “The term Web 2.0 is yet another fraudulent bubble designed to trick investors with pretended newness. It’s just like McDonald’s re-stacking their greasy beef layers to sell an entirely new product every 6 months.”^{xviii} Nonetheless, the cluster of applications referred to as Web 2.0 are relatively new, as are the tens of millions of users that make use of social networks such as Digg and Facebook and sites like Wikipedia. And let’s not forget the economic exchanges through eBay or Craigslist.

Writing in the same mailing list thread, what fascinates technologist Andreas Schiffler is how Web 2.0 presents a rediscovery of existing technologies such as RSS Netscape 1999, AJAX XML/HTTP Request IE5, DHTML/CSS IE5. These were popular features with browser-based companies, which were then transformed into a ‘social phenomenon’. It seems besides the point to classify the seventy odd million MySpace users as mere victims of corporate media, simply because Newscorp’s Rupert Murdoch at some point acquired the site. It seems hard for corporate consultants, hackers and media activists, to move away from the broadcast model and fully accept, beyond good or evil, the massive uptake of user content production and related networks of friends. The disdain of AOLers locked up in their crappy Microsoft products sits deep, but in reality only shows that early adaptors elites have long lost their grip on the Net.

Web 2.0 promoters have rightly been accused of hyping emerging sites so that they can be sold to venture capitalists who then replace the management and alienate users who then move on so a new cycle can start elsewhere. Yet this isn’t the end of the story. Jon Ippolito: “To dismiss the innovations behind Web 2.0 simply because venture capitalists are using this silly term to squeeze cash out of investors is like dismissing the

environmental movement because British politicians are suddenly waving green flags to court election-year voters. Let's not confuse the carpetbaggers with the communities." Saul Albert admits: "There is nothing wrong with the business proposition if you can maintain the delicate balance of my needs against the imperatives of funders and advertisers." He then gives the example of del.icio.us that had a chance to supersede (kill) Google with a bottom-up public knowledge infrastructure at some point immediately before it got bought. Juha Huuskonen of Pixelache in Helsinki reminds the list participants that it "seems essential for an organization/service/tool to maintain their image as the 'good guys', something that might become increasingly difficult for commercial services in future. One complex and important issue seems to be how to deal with monopolies, both in the case of commercial services like Google but also for projects like Wikipedia. The magic role of the 'benevolent dictators' like Jimbo Wales for Wikipedia or Linus Thorvalds for Linux does not seem like a lasting solution."

Sloganism for the Tagged:

*"Last year she lost four days to flu, and seven days to spyware." (add) * How to Connect Citizens to a Structure * "The Power of the Default" (slogan) * Blogging 'n Belonging * Theory of the Surrounding Society * polluted talent pools * "Weaving what the network demands * Pathologies of the Self-instructing Child (book title) * The Tragedy of the Nomadic * Expertocracy International * Blogging for Tenure * Critique of Capturing (sub title) * Where are you? replaced How are you? * Google Blockage Syndrom * Pioneering the Untagable * Visualize Whirled Peas * Become a Filter * "I was an enemy of linearity." * Michel Serres and the necessity of parasites * "I shagged Tom from MySpace" (t-shirt) "NaKisha's blog theory is a brain fart that she cannot get out of her head. It's like she knows what to do but how can she when she feels like her life is standing still." * "These worlds were not made for me." * "You can't blog this" (Danah Boyd) * "I fart in elevators" (MySpace t-shirt) * "Just a bunch of assholes with cameras and some software" * "Account deleted, because it was not used for a long time or violated our terms of use. Please contact us, if you want it back." **

A Short-lived Discordia

Juha Huuskonen, who organized festivals about the 'Dot Org Boom,' mentions trust, security, credibility and monopolies as the topics that connect different discussions. This is also what the following didactic story, or *Lehrstück* in the Brechtian sense is all about. Towards the end of *My First Recession*, in a chapter on open publishing, I discussed the coming into being of a group blog called Discordia, which was launched mid 2003.^{xix} Its aims were "social filtering, collaborative moderation and different styles of communication." Having gone through a long coding process (using Scoop software), with members having to deal with internal differences exclusively online, this 'Slashdot of the Electronic Arts' surprisingly closed down 16 months after its launch. It's interesting to briefly discuss its failure here as the issue of filtering and moderation has by no means disappeared simply because we're in the age of Web 2.0. Discordia's original intention was to have a web forum that would use ranking of postings and

comments as a way to overcome the ‘enlightened dictatorship’ of mailing list moderators. Discordia was a failed attempt to overcome rivalries between professional cultures such as criticism and theory, visual arts and computer programming. For some, the content was too academic to feel that they could make a valid contribution. Joseph Rabie: “I have always thought that Discordia suffered, and did not flourish, because of a propensity of many posters to be ‘objective’ - almost in a third person sort of way. Blogs are exciting when people put their own selves on the line.”

As it often goes, users lost track and couldn’t remember the URL, login name and password. Others expected a much more visible presence of the founding collective that ran the project. Soon after its start Discordia got caught in a downward spiral. Discordia programmer Peter Traub: “The general concept of the site was good but the nature of the content possibly drove people away or just intimidated them to the degree that they did not feel comfortable contributing. The lack of regular updates to the site causes users to check back less frequently. And when users check back less frequently, the number of new posts drops.”^{xx} In the end the chemistry between content producers and coders was frayed. The influence of programmers turned out to simply be too big, leaving the project in limbo once the coding job was done. Expectations to have the kind and number of responses a la Slashdot could not be fulfilled. It was time for a new project, but Discordia as a debating platform had barely begun and was just about to pick up some web traffic. The Discordia saga proved that one cannot enforce a complex Web 2.0 platform on a community.

Apart from the group dynamics, the main reason of Discordia’s failure was the lack of coherence within the global new media arts community to have public debates on the World Wide Web, away from the safety of cozy, inward looking lists. The critical mass simply wasn’t there to start working with the ranking system. There was not enough of an interest to join an equal, open dialogue between critics, artists and programmers. This problem can be extended to other fields such as humanities and social sciences, activism, contemporary, ‘civil society’ and the NGO-sector and autonomous social movements. The problem is not one of technophobia. Rather it is caused by avant-gardism, having adopted the Net relatively early, and not feeling the need to upgrade yet again. The excitement of tactical media geeks, NGO workers, community activists, electronic artists, including their accompanying academics, curators and critics toward Web 2.0 has been remarkably low.

Perhaps Discordia had placed too much emphasis on getting the network architecture right. The utopian spark within the new media arts community failed. People did not get enough out of posting. Facilitator Trebor Scholz, looking back: “For debates I chased people to post and chased yet others to respond to what was posted. I see no point in having a tool like Discordia just for those who built it. I saw our role in the creation of context, it should not be about us providing content as well.” UK media artist and programmer Saul Albert: “The conversations had during its development ended up being the most valuable bit for me. When we’d finished making the tool, I didn’t need it for anything. I think the idea of a collaborative weblog was only an uncomfortable stepping stone on the way to something far more distributed and dissonant than we envisaged.”

Saul sums up insights that he made while working on Discordia: “There needs to be regular interpersonal contact at the core of a project, in my opinion. A-priori categorization doesn’t work, even if it’s playful. It just confuses people. Choices of technology should follow the needs of a group of people with a goal in mind.”

Cynical Spirit of the Blogosphere

Instead of deconstructing the Web 2.0 as the blanket term referring to startups that generate more RSS than revenue and are driven by the same old Silicon Valley types, I spent most of my research time during the Berlin winter 2005-2006 formulating a General Theory of Blogging.^{xxi} It will remain an ontological question whether criticism of emerging phenomena is indeed possible or not. What I mean by critical inquiry is that I ignore the legitimate but, in my view, all too ‘correct’ position that blogs can only be studied through their different genres (political, educational, research, narrative, and so on). Blogs are the proxy of our time. It is a techno affect that cannot be reduced to the character of the individual blogger. There are possibly as many blogs as there are voices and topics. Rough estimates in early 2006 came close to 100 million.^{xxii} How to do research when your object is in a state of hyper-growth and permanent transformation? This is the case with the ‘blogosphere’. Instead of merely looking into the emancipatory potential of blogs, or emphasize their counter-cultural folklore, I see blogs as part of an unfolding process of ‘massification’ of what is still a new medium. What the Dotcom medium after 2000 lost, is the illusion of a rapid overhaul of society as such. The void thus created, made way for large-scale interlinked conversations through automated social software systems, of which blogs are but one of many applications.

The main chapter with which this book opens attempts to formulate a theory that moves away from the commonly held presumption that blogs would have an elective affinity with the news industry. With this I do not only mean the ‘citizen journalist’ label but, more structurally, the built-in a-priori that blogs should produce ‘feeds’ and that the essence of blogging is ranking. Instead of focusing on the quality of the content, and the culture of writing, diary keeping, and reflection, they have become more of a rat race for maximum attention, measured in links and ‘friends’. Whereas blog software has facilitated the ‘massification’ of the Net, bringing easy-to-use publishing to tens of millions of users worldwide, by 2005 the blogosphere went into hysterical overdrive. A next wave of Net chauvinism emerged. Blogs lost their slackness and first-movers started looking for the exit. The ‘snarky’ undertone of much of the postings disappeared. Slick self-promotion began to take over, moving from collectively defining the news issues around 2003 during the days of the Howard Dean campaign to the precarious blogging of *How To Make Money With Your Blog*. In that sense the ‘sticky nihilism’ of the blogosphere may already have become history as ‘truthfulness’ often conflicts with the public image. The cynical take on blogs is that their sole purpose has been to create a talent pool for the publishing industry. Signing up these talents is not only benefiting the media business, it is threatening the positions of those journalists that do not deliver. They will be fired. In the end it is not the blog world but the media industry that will be strengthened.

This Is Not An Economy 2.0

“First build relationships, then revenues.”

- Paul Szydlowski

On the business site there is a growing uncertainty, now that ‘convergence’ has become a reality, if Web 2.0 is the beginning of the end. Finally - the technology sector bumps into the Content Question. Up until now this has only existed as a discourse without an object. The “content is king” slogan from the late nineties remained an empty promise. What will people watch, listen to and do with these machines, now that they are becoming interchangeable and interconnected? Saul Hansell asks in the *New York Times*. Hansell lists three anxieties of ‘old-line media’: “Business-model anxiety. Will paid download services undercut TV networks’ huge advertising revenue? Creative anxiety. McLuhan is out. The medium is no longer the message. Anyone who wants to tell a joke or spin a tale can produce any combination of video, text, sound and pictures for viewing on a 50-inch TV, a laptop computer or a cell phone screen. Control anxiety. Since the invention of the high-speed printing press, mass media have been created for the masses, not by them. Now we can all be DJs and film directors, distributing our podcasts and movies online without groveling before a studio executive. The career prospects for hit makers, gatekeepers and even fact checkers may well be in doubt.”^{xxiii} But before getting all flustered and excited, let’s research the actual incomes and labor conditions of the creative class.

Whereas user crowds move from social bookmarking to photo sharing and classification as the next thing, what remains unresolved is an equally decentralized and distributed Internet economy. For most users the Internet is not ‘free’; they pay considerable money for hardware and cables, external drives, connectivity, software and upgrades, design features and subscriptions. Content producers pay to have their work shown.^{xxiv} The techno-libertarian model of 1990s remains prevalent, which says that those who write software and provide the telco-infrastructure will make the money on the basis of the ignorant masses who are all too happy to hand over their content for free. How content producers are going to make a living is perceived as a personal problem that is rarely discussed. Most of them are amateurs and the few professionals generate their income through old media such as the printing press, film, television and radio.

One of the few changes we witnessed over the past years has been the rise of tools such as Google’s AdSense.^{xxv} However, it remains controversial exactly how much Web authors actually earn through such services. Nicholas Carr, ranked number 689 on Technorati, reported a net loss of \$1425 over the first year of his Rough Type blog.^{xxvi} Darren Rowse, a Melbourne-based professional who runs ProBlogger (“Helping Bloggers Make Money”) advises to use Chitika’s eMiniMalls that “selects the top products for your web page and displays interactive and robust information such as product ratings, descriptions, reviews and related blog content”^{xxvii} The economic rationale here is to “turn

page views into profit.” Online advertisements are no longer the manual placement of web banners. Earnings can come through sponsoring, business blog writing, merchandising, online donations, and then the old tricks such as consultancy and speaking engagements. In many such cases the blogger has to act as an independent representative of Big Business. As a corporate proxy, out in the field, the blogger-as-spy equals not so much the salesman or woman (think Tupperware) but should be more considered as part of a civilian network of informants. Increasingly bloggers are drawn into corporate structures, getting involved in a complex economy of links, tags, traffic data and indeed, ‘micro debits.’

The list of tools that will give the blogger the impression of making money grows on a daily basis. Many such services will no longer exist in a few years. Take this example of two companies called Prosper and Zopa who are convinced that social networking a la MySpace can be combined with borrowing and lending. “They’re intent on using eBay as a model for listing and bidding on loans without the involvement of a bank. Call it peer-to-peer finance. There are already some 800 groups on Prosper ready to loan money to specific causes, such as the Apple User Group, ‘a lending group for those wishing to purchase either a Macintosh or Apple iPod.’”^{xxviii}

“The Internet business path is about to split,” says Seth Goldstein.^{xxix} “One direction leads to an open approach to data, governed by the principles of transparency and publicity. The other direction leads to a closed approach to data, focused on privacy and opacity: the black box. Both directions have legitimate and consistent end-user benefits and economic rationales.” Goldstein warns of the danger of being stuck in the middle: “Looking to increase your edge but not locking up the information it is based on; or promoting your open-ness but not sharing data back to the system.” In this rather confusing picture, we’re moving to a ‘mixed economy’, where a steadily increasing army of independent web workers will try to make a living. In this outsourcing model research and the ‘manufacturing of consent’ further loosens the borders that works inside and outside the corporate walls. Blog software increasingly speeds up the model of the firm as a ‘networked organization’ in which business increasingly becomes a permanent regrouping of loose units. However, a great deal of this shift remains ideological and a redistribution of financial resources such as research budgets and profit fail to materialize. Whereas the network takes on more risks, the concentration of power in fewer hands further increases.

Translate this back to the Internet Economy and we see that the most profitable businesses are playing an intermediary role. Nicholas Carr: “They’ve realized that, when it comes to making money on the Web, what matters is not controlling the ultimate exchange (of products or content or whatever) but controlling the clicks along the way. That’s become even more true as advertising click-throughs have become the main engine of online profits. Who controls the most clicks wins.”^{xxx} According to *Long Tail* author Chris Anderson, venture capitalists openly admit that there is no money to be made in content, including blogs. The business plans that make sense are not are not so much content creators as aggregators and filters.^{xxxi} He quotes David Hornik, a venture capitalist at August Capital :“While different filtering technologies may make it slightly

more likely that an end user finds his or her way to a piece of obscure content, it will not likely be sufficient to catapult an artist into the mainstream. The beneficiary of the filtering is the end user and the filterer, not the content owner per se.” Oso, the Latin America Regional Editor at Global Voices put it this way: “Aggregators are better funded than content creators. Floating in a sea of noise, we become dependent on islands of aggregation (Digg, Google News, del.icio.us/popular, Newsvine, Boing Boing, Global Voices) to guide us to the gems. Our dependence on those sites ensures their funding (either by investment, grants, or ads). But the people who make the actual content, the heart of the artichoke, go unpaid.”^{xxxii} Another reason could be the so-called 1% rule, which says that if you get a group of 100 people online then one will create content, 10 will interact with it (commenting or offering improvements) and the other 89 will just view it. Seen from this perspective the content producer is just a tiny minority that can easily be overlooked. The question then becomes why this number of 1% is that low.^{xxxiii}

Where social networking and blogging proves to be a hit amongst users, the underlying business model of such services remains shaky. Too much money is again pouring into too many unproven, unprofitable ideas. According to a report in the *Los Angeles Times*, MySpace and YouTube have yet to make money, “and some skeptical investors wonder what hope there is for all the copycats. ‘There is a risk that we’re going back to the marketing of eyeballs without a business model,’ said Jim Lussier, a general partner with Norwest Venture Partners in Palo Alto. He has kicked the tires on nearly two dozen online video companies but said he couldn’t find anything unique.”^{xxxiv} As long as innovative Internet startups depend on the 90s model of venture capital, leading up to a take over or IPO, the hope that a change in culture will occur will remain slim. It is only a matter of time until the development of Internet applications will no longer happen on the US Westcoast, for instance shifting towards the centers of mobile devices in Asia and Europe. At such a point, cultural differences have to be made productive, taking into account, for instance, that credit cards, the dominant e-commerce payment systems right now, are full of social limitations and used only in a limited number of countries.^{xxxv}

In or Out?

This book will prove, that contrary to the ‘new new’ hype, the position of ‘new media’ in society is no closer to resolution than it was during the “old new” hype of the first Web bubble. Mass adaptation has lead to a ‘status anxiety’^{xxxvi} of an emerging discipline that is polymorphously perverse in nature. The in-between position is increasingly becoming uncomfortable. There is a multitude of talent going nowhere. Shifts in the integration of technological networks into the everyday have proven no guarantee that institutional change will occur. Despite all the talk, the Internet has not delivered the revolution it promised. Societies adapt to ICTs but do not change in a fundamental way and prove remarkably flexible in staying as they are. Logically speaking this means that the ideology, and not the world, will have to adjust. So far, this has not happened. How can libertarian techno-celebrities continue to sell dream worlds about freedom and leveling the fields, without being scrutinized? There is little indication that they will shut up, or

even face serious opposition. There seems to be a never-ending demand among geeks and entrepreneurs for salvation. We can only so often repeat that the Web is not a place apart. So, how can young people be educated to resist the seductive calls of the 'Californian' sirens? Would it suffice to design alternative memes? Are insider calls for reform useless in that only something entirely different can stop the spin? Should we believe in the power of the argument and continue the strategy of 'ideology criticism', knowing that such intellectual endeavors fail, time and again? *Zero Comments* was written in the firm belief that we have to work through issues. We have to study the patterns behind perpetual change. Besides its archeology, new media now has a history of its own - full of disruptions, anomalies, failed attempts, unnoticed remakes, come-backs and rare instances of the new. I have seen it as the task of my ongoing 'critical Internet culture' research to not only write such histories but to shape future understanding, in close collaboration with a network of friends and fellow thinkers.

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- i Instead of a definition of Web 2.0, for instance the one from Wikipedia, I would like to suggest this Listible entry:
<http://www.listible.com/list/complete-list-of-web-2-0-products-and-services>.
- ii Christopher Allen, *Life with Alacrity*, Tracing the Evolution of Social Software, October 2004. URL:
<http://www.lifewithalacrity.com/2004/10/index.html>.
- iii <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/-/2/hi/technology/4566712.stm>.
- iv Nicholas Carr, *The Amoralty of Web 2.0*, *Rough Type*, October 3, 2005,
http://www.roughtype.com/archives/2005/10/the_amorality_o.php.
- v <http://iandavis.com/blog/2005/07/talis-web-20-and-all-that>
- vi See Ethan Zuckerman, *Ten or Maybe a Dozen Things That Will Be Free*, October 6, 2005,
<http://www.worldchanging.com/archives/003593.html>.
- vii Ross McKibben, *The Destruction of Public Sphere*, *London Review of Books*, January 5, 2006. URL: http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n01/mcki01_.html
- viii Slavoj Žižek, *Nobody has to be vile*, *London Review of Books*, April 6, 2006.
http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n07/print/zize01_.html
- ix Konrad Becker & Felix Stalder, *IP and the City*, posted October 22, 2005. URL: <http://world-information.org/wio/readme/992003309/1135254214>
- x In the MSN-group '5434' of April 2004 Aboe Qataadah explained how to act when taking shooting lessons. In the MSN-group tawheedwljihad Aboe Qataadah answered the question whether he who abuses the prophet should be killed. His answer: "It is an obligation to kill he who abuses the Prophet whether he is Muslim or Kaafir. And Hirsi Ali and Theo van Gogh, these pigs who have abused the prophet their punishment is death and their day will come with Allah's will..!" (from Benschop's report).
- xi Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Der radikale Verlierer*, *Der Spiegel*, 45/2005.
- xii Albert Benschop, *Kroniek van een Aangekondigde Politieke Moord, Jihad in Nederland*, Utrecht: Forum, October 2004. English translation can be found here: http://www.sociosite.org/jihad_nl_en.php.
- xiii According to Benschop's report in September 2001, *Leefbaar Nederland* (Liveable Holland) decided to close its discussion forum on account of the many discriminatory contributions. *Leefbaar Nederland* had insufficient volunteers to steer the derailed discussion in the right direction. After the murder of Pim Fortuyn on 6 May 2002 the tone in many public discussion forums became much more violent and vicious. They were flooded with vitriolic brawls, racist statements and provocative death threats. Daily newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad* couldn't cope with such a massive form of forum vandalism and closed her open forum, in order to open again afterwards with a mandatory registration of visitors who wanted to participate in the discussion.
- xiv See: Gerard Goggin, *Transmitting Race on a Sydney Beach*, in: *M/C Journal*, Vol. 9, Issue 1, March 2006, <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0603/02-goggin.php>. See also Angela Under the Beach, *the Barbed Wire*, *Metamute*, February 7, 2006. URL: <http://www.metamute.org/?q=en/Under-the-Beach-the-Barbed-Wire>.
- xv *Global Voices*, May 22, 2006.
- xvi The text was originally published in *Chaos Computer Club* (ed.), *Die Datenschleuder #89*, Berlin, 2005, p. 2-9. The author Frank Riedel, gave a talk based on this text at the 22nd CCC conference late December 2005 together with Hacktic and Xs4all founder Rop Grongrijp. URL: http://frank.geekheim.de/?page_id=128. The nettime debate about this text continued from January 7-17, 2006.
- xvii This is a reference to the famous phrase from the Cluetrain Manifesto: "Markets are getting smarter—and getting smarter faster than most companies: these markets are conversations." (<http://www.cluetrain.com>).
- xviii Trebor Scholz, *Against Web 2.0*, discussion on the IDC mailinglist, May 26, 2006. The following quotes are all from the same thread.
- xix See the static archive of the project: www.discordia.us and *My First Recession*, NAI-V2, Rotterdam, 2003, pp. 244-248.
- xx Internal Discordia email, October 7, 2004.
- xxi Whereas I do believe that it is too early to come up with a General Theory of the Internet, I do think it is possible, and necessary, to formulate larger statements about the workings of certain applications such as blogs, wikis, social bookmarking and tagging. Bifo, in a response to a lecture I gave in Milan on March 16, 2006: "The theoretical Lovink's contribution (radical pragmatism and Net

criticism) can be viewed as a critique of the cynicism of the European (vanishing) intellectual life. Geert says that it's not yet the moment for a general Theory of the Net. Well, it will never be the moment for a general Theory of the Net. The Net is the end of any possible General Theory because it is ever expanding, and the most essential thing (in the Net) is the last one, the just emerging one, the not-yet happened, the happening just now." (nettime, March 22, 2006)

xxii This estimate comes from Blogherald.com (October 10, 2005. There is no website yet that has taken up the challenge to a blogcount on a global level. One problem is the blogs that are no longer in use. Blogs are so 'hautnahe', so close to life that you can praise yourself lucky to read them as most of them disappear overnight. The disappeared diaries have been taken by Internet providers that offer blog services or the makers themselves. Some blog services take down blogs after three months of inactivity. A test done in the Netherlands in 2005 showed that the infamous archive.org did not store the vanished blogs of www.web-log.nl, which, at that point, claimed to host over 100.000 blogs.

xxiii Saul Hansell, Convergence, As Gadgets Get It Together, Media Makers Fall Behind, New York Times, January 25, 2006.

xxiv A worrisome trend is the demand of some film festivals to have artists pay in order to get their work screened. Eva Drangsholt, in a letter to the River's Edge Film Festival: "I am very disappointed that you have presented me with a screening fee-bill at the same time as you are informing me that a film of mine has been accepted for screening at the River's Edge Film Festival. Your initial call for submissions did not mention any entry fees. In luring me into sending my films to you under the pretense that you do not charge money for films that are submitted, you have made me spend money on postage, the bubble envelope, and the DVD." Posted to Spectre, January 6, 2006.

xxv For more info, take this tour: http://www.google.com/services/adsense_tour/.

xxvi http://www.routhtype.com/archives/2006/04/a_year_in_the_s.php.

xxvii http://chitika.com/mm_overview.php?refid=livingroom

xxviii From: <http://slashdot.org/article.pl?sid=06/05/16/2013205&from=rss>

xxix Seth Goldstein, Media Futures: From Theory to Practice, posted on November 17, 2005. URL:

http://majestic.typepad.com/seth/2005/11/media_futures_t.html.

xxx Nicholas Carr, Hypermediation 2.0, November 25, 2005. <http://www.routhtype.com/archives/2005/11/hypermediation.php>

xxxi Chris Anderson. VC advice on finding money in the long trail, posted on December 15, 2005. URL:

http://www.thelongtail.com/the_long_tail/2005/12/vc_advice_on_fi.html

xxxii <http://el-oso.net/blog/archives/2006/07/14/amateurism-individualism-and-collectivism/>.

xxxiii Charles Arthur, What is the 1% rule? In: The Guardian, July 20, 2006. "each day there are 100 million downloads and 65,000 uploads - which as Antony Mayfield (at <http://open.typepad.com/open>) points out, is 1,538 downloads per upload—and 20 million unique users per month. Wikipedia: 50% of all Wikipedia article edits are done by 0.7% of users, and more than 70% of all articles have been written by just 1.8% of all users. That puts the "creator to consumer" ratio at just 0.5%." Nick Carr mentions the example of social bookmarking site Digg: "Data reveal that of Digg's 445,000 registered users, only 2,287 contributed any stories to the site during the last six weeks. But here are the real eye-openers: The top 100 users contributed fully 55% of the stories that appeared on the site's front page, and the top 10 users contributed a whopping 30% of the front page stories." (Routhtype.com, August 2, 2006)

xxxiv Is the bubble about to burst again? Los Angeles Times, July 16, 2006.

xxxv "Credit card payments rule the Internet today. An obvious question, then, is why try to invent something new. The short answer is credit cards are unprofitable for the seller at purchases below \$5.00" (from <http://www.merchantseek.com/article9.htm>).

xxxvi Allan de Botton's notions on status anxiety have so far not yet been transferred to conceptual levels and institutional power politics. "There are few more powerful desires than to be treated with respect. We long for status and dread humiliation. But such an aspiration is rarely spoken about, or at least not without sarcasm, embarrassment or condemnation." The 'we' could very well be new media or Internet culture (quote from http://www.channel4.com/life/microsites/S/status_anxiety/alain.html). For instance, translate this warning: "From failure will flow humiliation: a corroding awareness that we have been unable to convince the world of our value and are henceforth condemned to consider the successful with bitterness and ourselves with shame."