CONTROL AND QUESTION / THINK OUTSIDE THE BUBBLE

Digital Agency

(INTRODUCTION)

WELCOME TO THE AFTER-NOUGHTIES

> "A mind as boundless as the internet" The Evening
> Standard, blurb on the back of Jaron Lanier's book
> "Who Owns The Future?"

A moment of your time please, I am here to talk to you
about the Internet's bounds.

> Talking about the future is a polite way of saying
> what's wrong about the present Benjamin Bratton

Bruce Sterling argued in 2014 that it doesn't make sense to
still talk about the internet. That we should instead talk
about GAFAM – Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple and
Microsoft. This makes perfect sense because these
companies are now shaping the internet in very real ways.
If you are not using one of GAFAM's services, your
neighbor or government is.

Silicon Valley. It's interesting how this material came to
stand for power. A kind of power that puts your personal
ideals on the steering wheel. The kind of power that wants
bigger boobs and that wants a faster computer.

So these are the giants that design and implement our
services.

Benjamin Bratton has another power structure in mind. He
uses the metaphore of the 'Stack', which is a vertical
division of separate layers that are interconnected. The
Stack's layers from bottom up are Earth, Cloud, City,
Address, Interface, User. Starting from Earth, ending at one
person, you, me.

GAFAM have a lot of opportunity to design exploits of the
user's weaknesses. While we small-time designers, educated
in art schools, were busy designing interfaces, their big-
time designers backed by GAFAM's ideals of big data profit
– were learning to implement social engineering knowledge
into their interfaces.

People love consistency. We say we want change, but we
also want everything to remain the same. In the case of
interface the answer is *defaultism*. Defaultism is the term
used to describe the happiness and wilingness of people to
use an unchanged, working design. In the beginning of the
internet, people were customizing everything, wanting to
touch every part with their own style. Hell, the whole idea
of stylesheets – code to stylize websites – was to have a
personal stylesheet, which you could use on every page on

the internet. Instead, pages would offer their own stylesheets. Now after that stylistic power has been moved from the individual user to the provider, new standards came to be which we are now happily accepting, *because they work*.

What is the balance between *comfort and surrender*?

What is the balance between *self-control and ignorance*? Agency online, what a person can and cannot control.

I would like to get your e-mail address to continue reading. My Terms of Agreement are just one line.

"I will only use your e-mail address to send you this thesis in parts."

accept ✓ | deny ✗

Internet marketing SEO and B2B, B2C addresses. Guerilla SEO !

Why? Because building an audience is important for me. I want people to know what I'm up to. Because this is how we get most of our information, may it be fragmented or not. It suits my message, which is to be aware of the pitfalls of digital communications. I want to feed you my thesis and your feedback. And feeding nowadays works bite-sized, pre-packaged and customized to your needs. All I need is one little e-mail-address...

Letting go of the internet, abstaining – what the effects of this are.

What are the pros and cons of defaultism in interfaces?

What are the consequences of a dysfunctioning internet?

Which paradoxes do we face when using the internet?

WILD, *ENFANT SAUVAGE*

(The Renegade)

"I fantasize sometimes about the end of electricity. The machine stopping at the apex of its own performance. That people would find themselves isolated, but suddenly together. With all the fascinating and horrifying character treats that were normally hidden under the gleaming surface. Reinventing the wheels, social structures, culture and trade while in total chaos and emergency. It would be an ugly world, but would it be more ugly than the one we're in right now?"

Users and people are one and the same nowadays. In Dutch a a user (gebruiker) could mean a user of drugs, which is a popular use of the word. Now users are people. Or are people users?

Besides the silliness of this little observation, the word user is sometimes interchanged with consumer. This switch shows the same tendency, to see a human being in a system primarily as a consumer, whether that is consuming food or news. And this is a bit strange to me. Do we really just consume our news?

According to my Mac's dictionary, to consume meand either to eat, drink, digest, buy, use up (a resource), completely destroy (especially of a fire), or to absorb all of the attention and energy of someone. It's a very negative word which suggests all people are depleting earth's resources.

It comes from Latin where consumere came together from *con-* (altogether) and *sumere* (to take up).

CONTROL AND SUFFERING

(The gonzo)

Nobody would move in the room, but it was hot and sweaty like Bikram Yoga. All and all, I can't tell you much about what's been going on, but it was insane. On a binge YouTube streak I snuck up some of the most insane 9/11. The alt-right meme page is hilarious. It's insanely racist, but KKK, what else do you have but your laughter?

I like to go layers deep into Facebook profiles and just start liking the shit out of everybody. You know how they say you're always three handshakes away from Hitler? Well, guess I befriended Ivanka Trump solely through her enemies' profiles.

I have been listening to a Podcast of two net artists: Rafaël Rozendaal and Jeremy Bailey. It is nice to hear them quarrel about topics related to the internet, artificial intelligence, the idea of an archive, et cetera. Both are very interested in new developments in technology but they have very different approaches towards them. Rozendaal is a techno-pessimist, always waiting for new technology to crystallize before using it. Bailey is a techno-optimist. He adopts new techniques quickly.

Distraction Addiction

If there is one thing that keeps coming back in the influence of the internet on personal life, it must be

distraction. The infinite scroll, keeping us captive, autoplay that's on default on and *You Might Also Like* this mug with a cat-face.

And their eyes glazed over

Joelle Renstrom wrote a killer article. In the article the question if internet use is an addiction comes up. Her experience is remarkable because she teaches at Boston University, a very prestigious college. The trouble and work (and money) required to get in is apparently not enough to motivate students to leave their technological habits on the side in class.

Destination Procrastination

Get your body snatched!

STRATEGIES FROM HISTORY

Computers as Poison, the attitudes and stances towards networks back in the days compared to now

Many examples of the "dark side" of computers and internet use can be found. In January 1985, some years even before the WWW, followers of Steward Brands's legacy of the Whole Earth Catalog, published an edition of their magazine *Whole Earth Review* titled *Computers as Poison*. Subtitled *All panaceas become poison*

(piece about it's -sometimes uncanny- equal to today's situation and talk about if stuff came true or not)

I I I, how does todays individualism relate to other, older ways of communicating?

FLEETING TIME

Going on the internet to lose a sense of time?

As an addict of video poker says: "(...) The more I gamble, the less I got about my chances. Wiser, but also weaker, less able to stop."

Is the internet an addiction? Is it a hypnosis? Is it a new medium with which we deal so much we just don't know how to handle it?

Intentional suffering, voluntary suffering, self-harm, torture, self-conflict.

Related to running, the *runner's high*, professional athletes professionaly suffering to expand their personal limits.

Filter Troubles

I took matters into own hands. Or at least made some attempt at that. Bought a €10,- phone at Mediamarkt. Almost as cheap as a pack of cigarettes. I posted my phone number on the social media I frequent with a short message. But the weird thing is, that I have no idea who will read my message. The algorithms will decide.
This demonstrates simply how overly social media have become. It's discriminated the friends that don't like me — with a slight margin, finding out exactly how the algorithms work is a tough challenge   reference— and decided who gets to see my goodbye.

page about the algorithms of facebook

OPTIMIZATION AND DISASTER

Our pants are smarter than us!

Design as immunisation – Benjamin Bratton. Not only innovating but also making ourselves immune for the things we do not need.

MAAKBAARHEID EN MYTHE

The sentence describing Silicon Valley, the series: "In the high-tech gold rush of modern Silicon Valley, the people most qualified to succeed are the least capable of handling success".

BORING INTERNET

A near infinite source of ideas and information. (I'm talking about the World Wide Web again). What does that mean? That means *a lot* of opinions, *a lot* of facts and *a shitload* of other information. The internet brings all of that to you.

Nicholas Carr reasons that human beings aren't at all made for this kind of information. According to him, multitasking is a skill that used to be necessary in order to continually survive. If you weren't constantly shifting focus, you wouldn't notice a predator or another danger and you might be dead before you knew it.

He argues that people are now suffering from this 'predetermined' survival instinct. According to Carr, we are in the process of losing the ability for deep reflective thought in the process of adapting continually to new and faster information technologies.

And he might be right. As I write, next to my communications and next to my entertainment system, I have the possibility to switch around the entire time. I also try to multitask and I also often fail, because my mind is just limited. I can't focus on many things at once.

I wonder if this new urgent way of treating information is something we should worry about. It's, after all, a reality already. In social media it is a matter of playing or not playing, and when you don't play, you lose. Some things, notifications about events, jokes, maybe even friendships. But I would say that the internet offers also a very new way of 'deep, reflective thought.' Maybe the ways of the book are just over and people think in more ephemeral, associative ways. Ways that might have their own qualities.

Or not.

The disability to learn from humans in combination with the computer   1 and the dependence of social interactions on an extra digital layer does leave me with a sense of loss. I wouldn't be as disappointed if the internet we would use would have something really amazing to offer, *if the internet would be more like a real human being*. With flaws and abnormalities that would *not* be coded away, debugged, and that would not simply be left behind for a newer version, because it couldn't be. An internet as a developing persona that would reflect some of the struggles that we humans face. Instead of connecting, we would be relating to the web.

But the personalizing of the internet has been tried and resulted in an array of options, which might be called interesting.

"fucking emojis", "quasi-personal interface design (which usually is fake chat screens)", "avatars, reducing a person to a medal with a nice reflection of themself.", ""

Actually it would be better to have a boring internet with no options and freedom. This view is what I'd like to call the nazi-internetists.

Then, there is the modern equivalent of brutalist architecture, gathered in the brutalist website movement

And then there is the touchable, playable internet, where every button is happy and all interactions feel like a fresh breeze and all of that, just for you!

> "Life is pain, highness. Anyone who says differently is selling something."
> – Dread Pirate Robberts (Farmboy)

Dread Pirate Roberts (a.k.a. Ross Ulbricht) is the creator of Silk Road and a successful internet pioneer. He claimed the name Dread Pirate Roberts from a family film called *The Princess Bride*. The movie is a fairy tale of good versus evil. The Dread Pirate Roberts is an infamous bandit, scouring the seas for loot. No one man knows this pirate's true identity. And it is never the same. DPR is a changing identity. When one pirate dies or goes to land, the next takes over. The one is not one, but many.

(LITTLE BIO FOR R.U.)

For Ross Ulbricht, the idea of this changing identity must have been a great ideal, but pirates also get caught. Ulbricht is now facing life sentences in prison for making drug trade and more dark business possible online.

His fans are trying to break him free by crowdfunding cash for his defense.   2

What were his ideals? How did they clash with the ideals of society / government?

Constant Dullaert's *Dulltech*

CONCLUSION

Her position in all of this is critical towards technology.

> "In Chongqing in China, sidewalks contain a special lane for people who can't be bothered to look up from their phones. And in the German city of Augsburg, there are traffic signals on the ground for people who would otherwise endanger themselves by failing to notice red lights."

> "multitasking instead of failing to focus."

> "Technology demands a significant amount of time and attention and has conditioned them to not question it. It takes up more and more of their bandwidth, and the net effect is lobotomising."

TECHNOSTRESS AND A MAKEABLE AUDIENCE

And in this term I think there is a shift between the old and new generation. The inpatient millenial stands together with the outpatient Babyboomer on the sphere of the internet. The babyboomer spells doom while the younger generation is like "chill, grandpa." And what a nice situation to observe. Never before has the internet been used by people of such different ages. All ages use the network.

The youngest don't know a life without it, the generations between might still have a vague idea of life before the internet and the older generations may be struggling to cope with digital technologies.

It shows in different ways. An interesting page to visit is the website of *Technostress* http://www.technostress.com/ .

In a Q and A, the authors describe the following situation:

> Q: You talk about TechnoStress in the home – how is technology affecting the family?
>
> A: The modern family is isolated, with each person wrapped in his or her own "Techno-Cocoon." Just take a look at the typical family looks at the end of the day ... Mom preparing dinner while checking the answer machine, head glued to the portable phone while she returns calls. One child is playing games on the computer in his bedroom, another is talking on her own phone, and the youngest is playing Nintendo. Dad comes home later from work and goes immediately to the computer. And the kids seem to know so much more about computer technology that their parents are feeling intimidated and inadequate. In many homes we are seeing a loss of communication and a major shift in the power balance in the family.

The problem I have with this kind of critique is the stereotyping of the situation. For some reason, it sounds as if these Techno-critics have no better answer to the problems faced by technology than to draw a bleak picture of what a family is in times of rising technology. And while they have some valid points, all credibility is lost through the use of slogans, commercials for the book, and metaphore upon metaphore.

Coping With Technology @WORK @HOME @PLAY

But okay, maybe this made much more sense 20 years ago. Who am I to judge that. It is interesting however to see how it relates to the problems of the internet. The look and feel of their homepage is very particular to the years between 1990 and 2000. A lot of elements on the page are blatantly commercial, trying to convince you of selling something. There are testimonials of different people that recommend the book, a link to *order your copy!!!,* pictures of the authors, resumes, and so the list goes on.
Now how do we compare this example with the current situation? For internet years, this web page is a dinosaur. Can it even be compared to internet culture of today?

Let's speculate for a minute that Dr. Rosen and Dr. Weil would try to reach their audience online today. There would be two distinct paths they could take. The one option being comparable to the thing they did on their original page.

1. Make website
2. Launch website
3. Update website with relevant information

Now this is all fine and dandy but I have the feeling they would rather go for the more mainstream approach:

1. Set up a facebook page for events and updates on the book
2. Go on instagram, post pictures of daily activities related to everything surrounding the book. Use hashtags.
3. Link to personal twitter accounts
4. Link to website

Forgive my inadequate knowledge of internet marketing, there must be so many ways in which this formula can be expanded. But for the sake of comparing the two approaches, it's important to spot one big change, the change from a kind of autonomous internet, to a practice relying totally on services and platforms of third parties. To make money online, you have to build an audience -the makeable audience-, and keep them triggered through social media.

CRITIQUE: Our attitude nowadays to the internet, what's it like? Does it inspire action or apathy? Maybe both? In what way?

Just make life hell you know, hell on heaven

CONCLUSION

The internet has changed agency. Acting in enormous systems makes it possible to act very big very fast but can also render an individual powerless.

THE INTERNET has given us back some virtues: we might get paid for taking time to sleep, or a basic income could be coming to your neighborhood. All of these ideas come and spread and take over people's ideas. And not, at the same time. Putting technology at the center of all of our problems is ignorant and distracting. Instead, we should be paying attention to people around us. Not paying people in Pakistan to increase our following. What kind of followers do you need?

Judge ideas, not people. Be aware of the influence of your personal needs.

RANT

We don't have all the pieces of the puzzle. But these pieces I put together. Maybe it was in a forced way, and probably I've misplaced some of the parts. But how much I like talking in metaphores, I want to tell you, thanks for reading. I hope you can use this.

If design lives on, this is how it should work to deal with corporate powers, third, fourth, fifth parties' interests and, last but not least, the self.