# CONTROL AND QUESTION

## INTRODUCTION

The obsession that is at the core of this research is one you might recognize. It is an obsession. My obsession with technology. That is the first reason for me to write this essay. I am completely obsessed by the possibilities of the medium but at the same time skeptical about how it is used. Internet: The placeless, time-consuming medium that connects all of the world.

People are always unsatisfied with the internet. It can always be better. Better connection, better apps, better devices. You name it. Everything: better.

I have my doubts about the promises that are connected to the internet. There is the idea that, as long as there is access to information, the world will benefit. And the idea that as long as we keep on, the internet will develop into a better network.

The internet, initially a military network, was opened for commercial purposes - and with that, a more public user base - in 1995. A frenzy followed and now we are here. On the brink of 2k17 and software shapes the world, fueled by glass-fiber connections of hyperspeed: internet. The new water, streaming and overflowing.

A big aspect of technology in general is optimization. The act of making the best or most effective use of a resource.

If you are an engineer at Google you want to optimize search to keep making profit, to in turn make smarter Artificial Intelligence, a better server infrastructure, better self-driving cars, et cetera.

If you are a user of Google, you want to search the best song of the day while you're taking the fastest route to work. To save time. To save money. To be efficient.

Users also want to use the internet in the best way. We are optimizing as well as the people that develop the technologies. What is best is of course totally dependent on who you are and what you want. So these interests of course clash constantly. What is best for Google might not be best for you, and vice versa. But we *are* interdependent.

We have to keep living life with technology. It has become essential to our lives. It's not to be ignored.

I want to question the optimization fetish that comes from technology. It influences daily lives of us all, whether it's first hand or second hand. And it's happening on both sides of the spectrum.

I want to look specifically at the influence the tech industry has in this story. With the tech industry I mean the industry that develops goods, software, services and platforms for us to use. The industry that has Silicon Valley as its Jerusalem (or Alexandria) and that spans the globe. This industry is key to designers because it fundamentally shapes tools that we work with. And more than that. No software, no platform, no service, no device is without ideology. This is where we have to be critical.

I am not an expert of the internet. But I am also going to try to look at these problems from engineering points of view, playing a kind of technological etymology. Etymology is finding and explaining the history of words. I think it's fascinating how this can open your eyes to new perspectives. It broadens your view by looking at a detail.

I think programmers are also not the ultimate experts of the internet. The ultimate experts are the users. People. You, me. We might not know how everything works behind the screens, but we're the ones that know what we want from it. We can identify failure or success without looking at any review, rating, or performance measure. The problem is of course that we cannot directly fix things that bother us. This is where the designer comes in. The designer is both a user of technology as well as a shaper of media that exists on digital platforms.

With this in mind, I pose the question:

How does design relate to optimization in the tech industry?