THE POLITICS OF NEW MEDIA: IT’S AN OLD STORY



I am back at Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, for the new exhibition

Design Column #3 Likes – [Link]

([Link] to Design Column #2)

Here is my commentary. It revolves again around my concern for human centered design, and under a long term view of history. My main point:

new media are not so new

– they are still about old issues of who gets to have a voice

and how

Design Column #3 Likes brings together a selection of works that illustrate the double-edged nature of social media. Both openness, sharing opinions and connectivity, but also kneejerk reactions and superficial engagement are easy to like.

It is often said that social media make an important contribution to the spread of free speech. By people re-tweeting tweets, liking Facebook posts and sharing blogs, messages are sent around the world at lightening speed. During the Arab Spring, these platforms enabled the whole world to keep abreast, in real time, of protests and fighting in the streets of Cairo, Tripoli and other conflict zones. And more recent, during the conflict in Gaza, the Isreali army, the Israel Defense Force (IDF), announced military operations against Hamas via Twitter. More than 200,000 followers on various social network sites were kept up to date by the IDF about the attacks and numbers of victims.
Design Column #3 Likes brings together a selection of works that illustrate the double-edged nature of social media.

The personal and the political

We are immersed in a world of media devices, services, functions, opportunities.

Out with my smart phone, I take a photo of the café I like and post it to *Instagram*, the mobile app "for beautiful photo sharing", post another photo of an elegant carafe in the café to my collection of favorite tableware on *Pinterest*, "the online pinboard". Over a glass of a rather refined pinot noir recommended to me by my favorite blogger via her *Twitter* feed, I take a little time to check out what my friends have posted on *Facebook*, and let them know I like what they've been up to by clicking the "like button"; the counter on that post about Ben's first birthday party nudges past 600.

This ease of sharing, connecting and interacting around things we like, and in very particular and personal ways, seems new. And it seems to lend new power to those who are sharing. Because if enough people share their like of a new restaurant on *Yelp*, or another similar reviews site, it could ensure its success. Obama's online presidential campaigns, organizing grass roots approval and support, were crucial to his electoral success. In 2012 voters were followed by Obama's reelection team wherever they went online. Rather than put most resources into a single website portal – in 2008 it was *MyBarackObama.com* – dedicated sub-teams were created specifically to develop a presence on *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Tumblr*, the thinking being that the campaign had to reflect the fact that modern voters receive their political news through multiple outlets, including these social media.

And what if we share disapproval? Enough bad reviews could close that restaurant. Or shut down an oppressive regime? It has been widely claimed that organizing opposition to unpopular and authoritarian regimes through the social software on mobile media devices was central to the political changes in the Arab Spring.

The political economy of new media

Is this a new empowerment of the consumer? Is this democracy in action?

Only maybe. Not really.



Evgeny Morozov, author The Net Delusion: the Dark Side of Internet Freedom

Why was *Instagram*, an app on a mobile phone that allows you to share pictures, from a new company of only 17 employees, bought in 2012 by *Facebook* for an astonishing one billion dollars? Because *Instagram*'s millions of happy photographers are now part of the *Facebook* family of over 500 million mobile users, more than a billion total users telling the company all about themselves through pictures of their lives. It is the dream of every marketing department to know just what you and people like you desire; they can use the information gathered through your sharing of what you like, indeed through all your online activities, to sell you things. *Facebook* has this knowledge, *Google* too, and this is what makes them so valuable. Your private likes have never been so public.

The intelligence and security services of every regime, democratic and authoritarian, have long known the value of detailed information about citizens and subjects. There's an unprecedented amount of such information now being generated, though it may be known only to the corporations like *Facebook* who run the social software. Currently they are not selling this information to any highest bidder; in this corporations hold sway over governments, who are seeking to extend their reach into such information, eavesdropping on the gossip of social media. This is often said to be part of the war on terrorism, when terrorists, and child pornographers,

are seen to be lurking in the online crowds. A savvy authoritarian regime can use the same media tools, seemingly representing an unprecedented freedom of speech in democratic communities, to their own ends. Government agents can join online communities, set up their own. Disseminating the information you want heard through mass communities is power. It is enough to recall that Goebbels used radio, news reels and movies – mass media – to great effect in Nazi Germany, while the Stasi, the national security agency in post-war East Germany had one intelligence agent for every 160 citizens, recording everything they were up to in their daily lives.

Marije Meerman (director), Evgeny Morozov; The End of the Internet Utopia, 2011, episode of VPRO's Tegenlicht, broadcast 26 September 2011

The End of the Internet Utopia, a video program written and presented by **Evgeny Morozov**, directed by Marije Meerman for VPRO's Tegenlicht in 2011, delivers this message about the politics of new media with powerful clarity and elegance. Responding to a series of media clips involving activists, internet gurus, politicians, social media users, Morozov outlines an extraordinary convergence of ideologies that he reckons still hold in Silicon Valley. Counter cultural individualism – the Californian utopia of the empowered creative individual, exercising freedom of speech, sharing information, pursuing entrepreneurial opportunity free from too much government regulation, accompanies techno utopianism – the belief that technology, IT, artificial intelligence, embodied in the hardware and software delivered by the likes of Apple Corporation, are the means to deliver this brave new world, with a not inconvenient 26% profit margin. This is combined with a view of global politics that still maintains a cold war polarized perspective of citizens in the democratic west openly sharing their news on Facebook and Google, while censored subjects of totalitarian regimes desperately seek the freedom of speech that will supposedly bring democracy.

Mobile social media do certainly make easier the dissemination of messages in public forums that are nevertheless easily customized to personal interest. You might be very well informed, but change, of course, requires you to be present. Come join the revolution and still enjoy your Starbucks latte; it is all to easy to connect only remotely. Getting people to share their political approval and disapproval is only a beginning – there still has to be action and organization.



Charlotte Porskamp, Face your Facebook, 2010, video

This dynamic of presence and absence is taken up in **Charlotte Porskamp**'s *Face your Facebook* videos. Put online behaviors into the context of personal face-to-face encounter, make them visible, turn the thumbs-up "like button" into gestures and statements on a crowded street and we become more aware of the dynamics at the heart of new media, as well as some of the craziness! It is not that online gestures are less real, or are virtual compared with what we do when we are co-present with others. Relationships and exchanges are broken up, taken out of one context, that of face-to-face encounter, and resolved into incessant flickering media particles. And they are commodified, because every expression of "like" is the same as every other. Online you might be clicking the button on a cute kitten, someone's job change, a salad in a restaurant, all in a few seconds. Shifting from online absence to personal presence, pointing and shouting "like, like, like …" on the street prompts us to reflect on what it means to live mediated mixed reality lives.

Matters of presence and absence are invoked when we post online, and this often involves a choice of signaling our identity, however authentically or inauthentically we may construct it, or adopting anonymity (there's a famous New Yorker cartoon by Peter Steiner that shows two dogs sitting at a computer terminal. One says to the other: "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog").



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PVV hoger dan wegzakkende VVD

De VVD weet haar kiezers steeds minder vast te houden en verliest deze week opnieuw een zetel. Steeds meer VVD-kiezers laten weten bij verkiezingen op de PVV te gaan stemmen.

Door onze reaguurders

NUCHTER NADENKEN dat mensen nog steeds kiezen voor de PVV is echt niet te begrijpen. Je zou maar Wilders als eerste minister hebben. Dat zou enorm schadelijk zijn voor Nederland als internationaal handelsland.
NJ 27-05-12 11:26 +29

MIDLANDS Als je je baan zat bent moet je Wilders gaan stemmen. Zijn weg uit europa en verdwijnen de grote bedrijven uit Nederland. Jammer dat veel mensen toch nog in populisme trappen. Dacht dat dit wel afgelopen zou zijn na het cashuis drama.
NJ 27-05-12 11:28 -6

EWAGON Ik ben moslim, allochtoon, heb een hekel aan Geert, maar vind wel dat hij opkomt voor Nederland en bevolking. Als het aan Rutte en Jager ligt geven ze al ons geld uit aan dubieuze praktijken om een schouderklopje van de VS te krijgen
NJ 27-05-12 11:27 56

TRICKER ED Zo als je maar weer dat mensen emotioneel denken. Grote blonde leider roept wat en de makke schapen hollen er weer achteraan.
NJ 27-05-12 11:36 -15

TEH RAINTIST maurice met zijn onderbroek statistieken, als hij nu echte statistiek zou doen, wellicht kon je dan nog wat concluderen, maar met zijn vast panel die hij peilt kun je echt alle kanten op.
NJ 27-05-12 11:36 -6

http://www.gonnetjl.nl/archives/images/we-zien-je-boobies.jpg Foto Pritt Stift

Femke Halsema steunt Sap als partijleider GroenLinks

Femke Halsema vindt Jolande Sap de beste kandidaat om GroenLinks te leiden. Dat zei de oud-fractievoorzitter vanochtend in Eva Jinek op Zondag. Halsema droeg anderhalf jaar geleden het stokje over aan Sap.

Door onze reaguurders

KLOKKELUIDER blijkt gewoon dat de politieke partijen van tegenwoordig bedrijven zijn geworden, net als de vakbonden, ze hebben zogenaamd allemaal idealen maar ze dienen allemaal maar 1 belang en dat is hun eigen belang
GS 27-05-12 09:56 21

ILLUVATAR Femke is een gewaardeerde reaguurstellega, die verdient geen opgepimpte bijbaantje. Doe eens wegpoetsen, hop hop!
GS 27-05-12 09:40 -5

Jimmy McClure Dat beklijfen doet Femke goed!
GS 27-05-12 09:40 5

EERSTNEUKENDANPRATEN Volgens mij is het nog steeds een doorslikkertje...
GS 27-05-12 09:51 7

G.ZEUR Nou sap die heb je binnen, en nu maar hopen dat straks met de verkiezingen groen links flink aan de kant wordt geveegt.
NJ 27-05-12 09:55 23

VETKLEPPERT Deze geweldige actrice, die als geen ander rechtvaardige verontwaardiging wist te spelen, rijdt zelf natuurlijk wel gewoon auto. En verdomt het haar kinderen bloot te stellen aan de multicul. Daar heeft ze natuurlijk volkomen gelijk in. Prive hoeft ze haar rol niet te spelen. Quod licet Iovi, non licet bovi. Misschien doet ze thuis zelfs haar kaakklem wel af, als ze niet bang hoeft te zijn dat er iets verstandigs uit haar mond komt. En als ze niet een octaaf te laag hoeft te praten omdat anders ieder mannelijk oor automatisch op mute gaat.
27-05-GS 12 10:04 20

STERRNEK Groen-linksers zijn rare mensen. Maar die vibi of tifi lawel ok.
GS 27-05-12 10:09 0

DERAMENLEVINGSRENTJE Ik heb Halsema gezien bij Jinek, maar ze heeft ze dat helemaal niet gezegd! Ze staat achter haar keuze van TOEN, maar niet dat ze nu voor Sap kiest. Daar liet ze zich helemaal niet over uit... Echt weer een blunder van de media!
NJ 27-05-12 11:23 6

AKTIVIST dáár zaten we op te wachten! Mrs Kaakklem heugenpersoenlijk. Mens, ga toch thee drinken bij Bea Bilderberg!!!
GS 27-05-12 10:50 5

MADMORC Jammer, Femke is omgegaan. Terwijl ze eerst zeer kritisch was t.o.v. Sap. Enfin, is dat ook weer helder.
NJ 27-05-12 10:50 0

LIZALIZA pas op die heeft ze achter de ellebogen zei mijn moeder vroeger altijd: „geldt dus nog STEEDS!!!!!!
NJ 27-05-12 12:13 -1

SUPERUSER Als er dan toch gelezen moet worden dan kies ik voor het bos in sturen van dat stel overbodige kakalende mallosen incl. de schijnheilige parasiet Halsema.
NJ 27-05-12 12:26 -3

JEFFREY53 De schijndemocratie regeerd.. zelfs als ze niet meer in de politiek zit probeert ze mensen te beïnvloeden...
NJ 27-05-12 13:59 0

Inhoud 44 pagina's

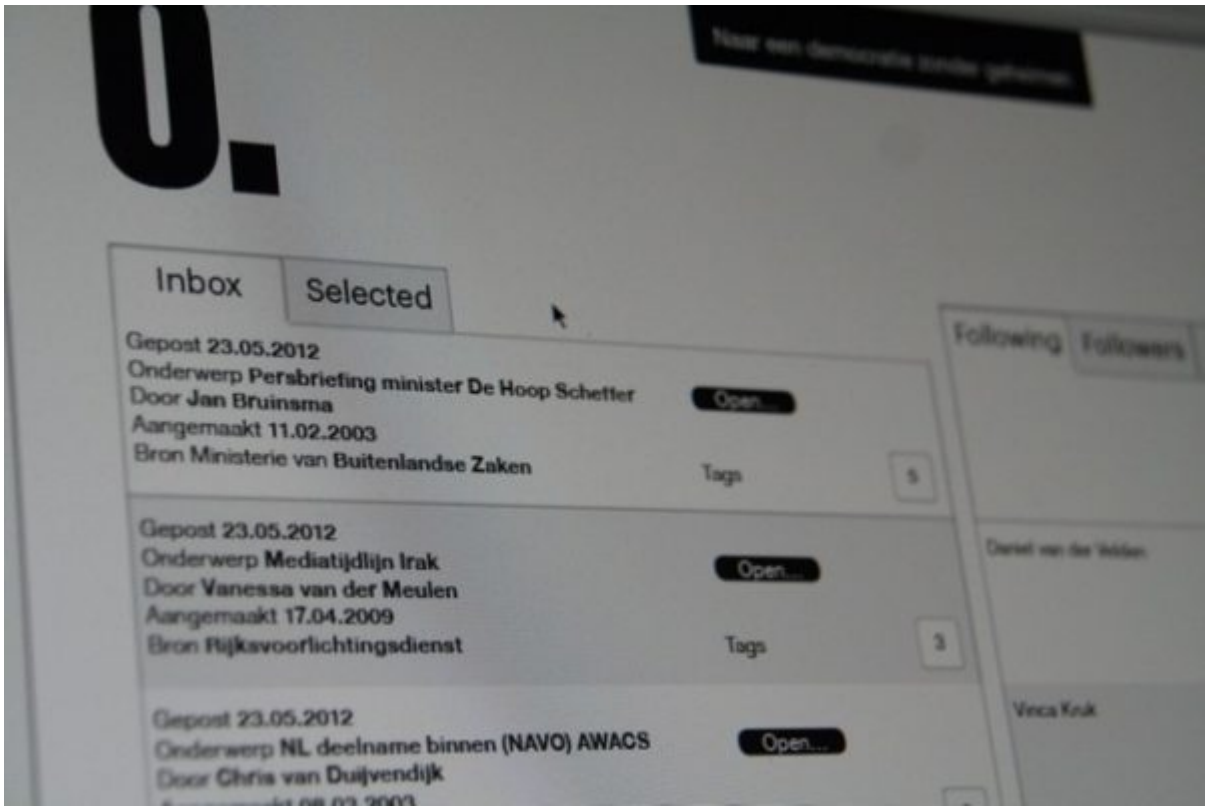
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Eva Storck, Anonimus Et Libertas, 2012, newspaper

Eva Storck explores some of the consequences of this choice in *Anonimus et*

Libertas, an edition of a newspaper she created in 2012 that features only anonymous comment. If anyone can contribute to the dissemination of news and pursuit of reasoned debate anonymously, the result may not be enlightenment at all. People can say anything, make extreme statements without personal or private consequence, if they maintain anonymity. Detached speech acts do not necessarily cohere into a public forum. A network of communicating locations, even if open and inclusive, is not a transparent community. Transparency means having grounds for establishing personal trust.



Metahaven (Daniel van der Velden and Vinca Kruk) and Jonas Staal, 0. Democracy without secrets, 2012

Metahaven (Daniel van der Velden and Vinca Kruk) and Jonas Staal in *0. Democracy without secrets* (2012) offer a means of bringing official information that is typically remote, protected and hidden into debate and use. The issue is the transparency, or not, of the democratic process. New media consistently involve such a tension between private and public, regarding the rights and responsibilities of individuals in what is coming again to be termed the commons.



Kyra van Ineveld, The Wiki Truth, 2011, ink on paper, bound in leather

All media users are now very familiar with the two overwhelming features of the Web: spam, the ubiquity of data trash, and the challenge of knowing what to trust, finding value in the trash, distinguishing gossip and rumor from authentic account.

Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia authored by its users, is founded on this challenge. Traditional encyclopedias are authored by credentialed experts; anyone can edit a *Wikipedia* entry. How are accuracy, expertise and authenticity to be maintained over bias, unsupported opinion and ideology? Wikipedia offers its community efficient means of reviewing every edit. This is its answer to the challenge. It's like the old system of academic peer review, subjecting new work to open criticism and commentary. *Wikipedia*'s community works to filter for trustworthy contributions.

Wikipedia is a remarkable success of collaborative Web 2.0 technologies, the mobilization of collective effort in a dynamic composition of knowledge. **Kyra van Ineveld**'s *The Wiki Truth* (2011), confronts us with a material expression of the enormous amount of work that goes into this collaborative authoring. Each of the massive leather volumes is a bound print-out of just one *Wikipedia* entry, albeit popular ones (Obama; Global Warming, the Catholic Church …), and compiles all the edits, commentary, revisions.



Powerslave, Revolution Man (Signature Series), David Jablonowski, 2011

This hinge between process and product, materiality and immateriality is also the

subject of *Powerslave, Revolution Man (Signature Series)* by **David Jablonowski** (2011). The assemblage of heterogeneous components, of various communicating and signaling artifacts, media devices, reminds us of the interconnectivities, the slippage and interdependence of real and virtual, real and represented, tangible and intangible in the fabrication of cultural experience.



Pieke Bergmans, Res Sapiens, LAMP014 en LAMP015, 2011-2012

It is never as simple as reality versus the internet. That intangible media exchanges can have enormous political impact is the very topic of this exhibition. And this mixed cultural reality is nothing new: for as long as we have been human we have been elaborating the world of the cultural imaginary, realizing the human imagination in artifacts, messages, meanings. Our interactions with artifacts and devices make of the human world a distributed assemblage of humans-and-nonhumans. This entanglement of the worlds of humans and artifacts is wonderfully explored in the two lamps of **Pieke Bergmans'** *Res Sapiens* (2011-2012). What form might an intelligent machine take? The android or robot simulating the human form is possibly the least likely. Embedded computing is already with us. Refrigerators can monitor their contents and order fresh butter and cheese online from the grocery store when supplies run low. These lamps respond to Twitter feeds, translating data

into movement and gesture.

Human centered design

How does this political economy of new media relate to design? For these exhibitions at Boijmans van Beuningen are about contemporary design.

Around the corner from the old Facebook offices in Palo Alto California are the studios of one of the world's most influential design companies – IDEO. In 1998 the company did the design work on TiVo, the personal digital video recorder, a hard drive connected to your TV that can record programs for you. Intelligently: you can tell the TiVo what kind of TV you like and it seeks out, finds and suggests programs for you to watch. On the remote control that enables you to communicate with your TiVo IDEO introduced what were probably the first thumbs-up and thumbs-down buttons – so you can tell the TiVo what programs you like and don't like. TiVo learns about you.

IDEO has come to epitomize human centered design.

Most of twentieth century industrial design has been concerned with styling and branding, focused on the look of things: the clean modernist form of office furniture, futuristic automobile streamlining, 70s glam rock fashion, for example. From the 1960s IT companies became increasingly concerned with how people interacted with machines. As much as styling the look of things, the design challenge came to be one of attending to how people connect with an artifact, taking into consideration ergonomics, human factors, how people psychologically relate to devices, under the aim of engineering equipment and devices that fit the human body and human cognitive abilities.

And more. Bill Moggridge, one of the founders of IDEO, was behind the first commercially successful portable laptop computer. In the design team he was personally responsible for the hinge that allowed the clamshell casing to pivot open, revealing screen at optimum viewing angle, and keyboard beneath, optimally at hand for typing. But his main concern came to focus not on the device, but on the design of interactions, the way that a personal screen close-to-hand is window to a world of software with which to interact. IDEO cofounder David Kelley describes himself as in the business of designing experiences, part of what Joe Pine and James Gilmore have termed our contemporary experience economy.

What is the human in this human-centered design? What are the qualities of human being to which we should attend in our design practice? Of course the answer to this old question makes all the difference: the human can be treated as a physical body; a worker in an organization; an information gatherer and processor; a social being; a being subject to emotion and experience; a source of meaning.

This exhibition suggests we look again at how media devices connect people in communities, networks, friendships, nation states, and how this is motivated by the workings of markets and institutions – what I am calling the political economy of new media. This is a fundamental component of human centered design, though one that is not much discussed and is often eclipsed in the celebration of the latest shiny gadget or social software start-up. In looking at the ways we share what we like, it is good to ask: Who is representing what and to whom, on what basis, and how? These are questions of the politics of representation.

What is kept secret, what is announced in public assembly?

How can collective debate and decision take effect?

Who do you trust, and on what grounds?

Are spoken words and debate as substantial as written account?

A key question concerns our capacity to make a difference, alone or with others – the matter of political agency.

Does this make a difference?

As I say, these are old questions. In spite of the wonders of contemporary digital technology, we are still in the public assembly of the early city states of ancient Greece and Rome. The difference is that things happen somewhat faster now, with more people, and with graver consequences.