

A Virtual Interview with Geert Lovink

Susan Elizabeth Ryan

Geert Lovink is a media theorist, critic, and activist who teaches at the Institute for Networked Cultures, University of Amsterdam. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Melbourne and was a founder of the Nettime mailing lists. He is also a member of Adilkno (Foundation for the Advancement of Illegal Knowledge). He is a radio program producer and a co-founder of The Digital City, the Amsterdam-based Freenet. And he is the author of numerous books on network culture, including My First Recession: Critical Internet Culture in Transition (2003), Uncanny Networks: Dialogues with the Virtual Intelligentsia (2003), and Dark Fiber: Tracking Critical Internet Culture (2002).



In an email exchange that took place October 2 and 3, 2007, I asked Geert what he thought about an exhibition of communication-oriented wearable technology, an exhibition we were planning to call "Social Fabrics." He said "Great!" but added some comments that are worth printing here:

SR: What are some of your thoughts on wearable technology?

GL: It is time for radical prototyping and some very explicit stuff. The danger of wearable computing at the moment is increased invisibility. After decades of carrying around heavy loads of gear, the pendulum now shifts to the opposite side, which is a shame. RFID in textiles is not a good thing. Fashion implies visibility, seduction, and play. It's nice if you weave chips and LEDs into fabric, but this should be done in order to increase freedom of form, not for some good intention or practical reason."

SR: You mention designers elaborating wearables ("weaving chips") but say this should be done "not for some good intention etc." Do you mean a good intention that is in fact not good, i.e., commercial? Or, good intention meaning just functional and not expressive?

GL: Aesthetics should put us off, disturb us. Beauty does. It is shocking. The integration of technology into clothing has the danger of becoming invisible and merely expanding corporate functionality, which is not beneficial for the user.

SR: Is there a good example of wearable technology used expressively that you have noticed?

GL: Who is the Oscar Wilde of our age? Momus, perhaps? How can we imagine walking and talking, dancing, peer-to-peer stations that give [things] away?

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In the early 1990s Adilkno speculated about data dandyism, written before the spread of the internet in society. The question is, how do we re-introduce the outrageous into the wearable technology discourse?

SR: Lastly, what are the implications for society-now regimented into notions of logo-fashion and icon uniforms-to (instead) technologically enhance the inherent quality of clothing to convey messages of all kinds, including personal or counter-cultural ones? Do we need to learn (or relearn) how to have things to say, as well as how to feel free to say them?

GL: Unlearning is a good start. Undressing street wear is another.