

**INC Reader #14**

**EDITED BY  
Geert Lovink and  
Andreas Treske**

**VIDEO  
VORTEX**  
**Reader #3**

**INSIDE  
The YouTube  
DECADE**

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INC Reader #14

**Video Vortex Reader III: Inside the YouTube Decade**

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*In Memoriam Thomas Elsaesser (1943-2019)*

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# **VIDEO AVANT- GARDE IN THE AGE OF PLATFORM CAPITALISM**

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INTERVIEW  
WITH BEN GROSSER  
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# VIDEO AVANT-GARDE IN THE AGE OF PLATFORM CAPITALISM

## INTERVIEW WITH BEN GROSSER BY GEERT LOVINK

US new media artist Ben Grosser and I met at the 2013 Unlike Us #3 Institute of Network Cultures event in Amsterdam where he presented his Demetricator, a free web browser extension that hides all the metrics on Facebook. I have followed his work since then. We got in contact again in 2019 when he premiered his video art work *ORDER OF MAGNITUDE*.<sup>1</sup> The cut-up piece features Mark Zuckerberg's obsession with growth. Instead of taking the traditional critical approach, Ben Grosser magnifies particular words that return in each and every one of his sentences: more, millions, billions, trillions. Covering the earliest days of Facebook in 2004 up through Zuckerberg's compelled appearances before the US Congress in 2018, Grosser viewed every one of these recordings and used them to build a supercut drawn from three of Mark's favorite words: more, grow, and his every utterance of a metric such as two million or one billion. Inside the exploding galaxy of Facebook there are no limits of growth. After a few minutes the viewer gets exhausted and is ready to swipe the video away, stand up and walk out: the exact opposite response to what we experience when we're on Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp. The emptiness of the guy is suffocating. Well done, Ben. Time to talk at length with the artist about the status of video and activist works in the age of social media.<sup>2</sup>

**Geert Lovink:** Let's start with the original Unlike Us approach that we kicked off in 2011, in which we originally met. How do you see the visual arts & the Facebook Question nowadays? Especially young artists largely depend on Instagram. There seems to be no counterculture that resists against the social media platforms. The avant-garde is dominated by an unprecedented form of uncritical uptake, a mass subjugation to the platform we have not yet experienced. What's your take on this?

**Ben Grosser:** This is a problem based on a combination of platform dominance, context collapse, metrics-focused interaction design, algorithmic feeds, and the homogenizing aesthetics of social media interfaces. We use platforms like Instagram or Facebook for so many different aspects of life these days (info access, work interactions, entertainment, family communication, network building, etc.) that it's hard to escape them—and harder still to imagine life without them. Their interface designs have fully conditioned users to focus on like/follower/etc counts as primary indicators of success or failure, rather than,

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1 <https://bengrosser.com/projects/order-of-magnitude/>.

2 An extended version of this interview can be found at <https://www.networkcultures.org/geert/2020/04/23/ben-grosser-geert-lovink>.

say, narrative feedback via comments or discussions generated outside the platform.<sup>3</sup> (In)visibility of one's latest post to their network (of 'friends') is determined by an opaque algorithm and thus requires repeated experiments that are challenging to evaluate.<sup>4</sup> All of this happens within a visual interface design that treats user contributions as chunkable content to fill pre-configured slots in a homogenizing layout.<sup>5</sup>

What's an artist supposed to do? Go where all the people are or where the people aren't? Read metric 'success' as a guide for what to post next, or risk posting content that never gains reaction (and thus, visibility)? Succumb to the limits of Instagram's or Facebook's media types, post sizes, page layout, etc., or post their content on a personal blog that nobody visits? In other words, today's emerging visual artists have grown up in a world where the designs of these platforms have been setting the 'conditions of possibility'<sup>6</sup> in many facets of life for the last fifteen years. For most, it doesn't occur to them to resist. Social media is the proverbial water these artists/fish swim in every day.<sup>7</sup> They've spent their whole lives watching 'success' get 'made' on the platforms, and they try to follow a similar path, to emulate methods and materials used by those who've metrically excelled before them.

However, in my view, some forms of resistance are happening *on* the platforms, enacted from an inside position by users of the systems themselves. I do this with my own work (e.g., Facebook Demetricator,<sup>8</sup> Go Rando,<sup>9</sup> ScareMail,<sup>10</sup> etc.) using an artistic method I call 'software recomposition,' or the treating of existing websites and other software systems not as fixed spaces of consumption and prescribed interaction but instead as fluid spaces of manipulation and experimentation. In other words, I write software to investigate the cultural effects of software. These software artworks are designed to get in between the user and the system, allowing everyday users the opportunity to re-evaluate their own experience of the platforms and to see how platform designs change who they are and what they do.

Part of my intention here is to help users develop a critical position towards future platform additions and changes, to nudge them towards an analytical stance where they reflexively examine what a platform wants from them so they can give back something else entirely.

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3 Grosser, Benjamin. 'What do Metrics Want? How Quantification Prescribes Social Interaction on Facebook', *Computational Culture: a journal of software studies* 4, 2014.

<http://computationalculture.net/what-do-metrics-want/>

4 Bucher, Taina. 'Want to be on the top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook,' *New Media & Society*, 14, no. 7, 2012.

5 Grosser, Benjamin. 'How the Technological Design of Facebook Homogenizes Identity and Limits Personal Representation', *H2* 19, 2014. <http://www.hz-journal.org/n19/grosser.html>

6 Fuller Matthew, 'Introduction', in Matthew Fuller (ed.), *Software Studies: A Lexicon*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008, 2.

7 Wallace, David Foster. *This is Water*. New York: Little Brown and Company. 2009.

8 <https://bengrosser.com/projects/facebook-demetricator/>

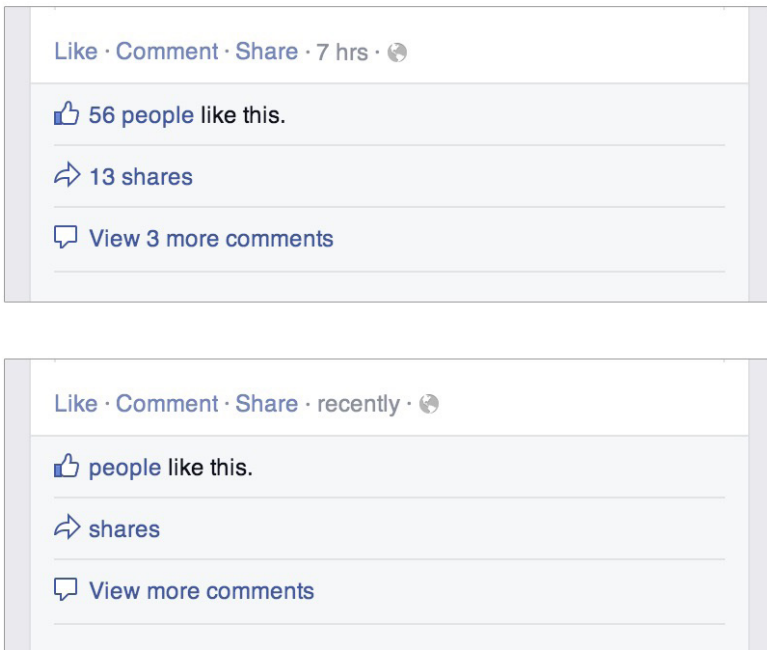
9 <https://bengrosser.com/projects/go-rando/>

10 <https://bengrosser.com/projects/scaremail/>



I see this as a necessary first step in pushing users towards alternatives—we need people to begin to see (feel?) the platforms for what they are, to understand who most benefits from a site like Facebook and who is made most vulnerable. Only after this transformation—one made on a personal level through interventionist experiments that provoke disorientation and reconsideration—can we expect any mass of users to embrace anti-platform alternatives.

Geert, what do you think about this? Can an artistic avant-garde be avant-garde at all—let alone thrive—if some of its critical activity is enacted within the systems it concerns itself with? I would argue, given the monopolistic position of big tech’s current efforts, that any assemblage of an alternative commons is going to require action both outside and inside the dominant system of the day. That we have to use these systems against themselves—in ways that reveal their engineering of the user—as a necessary parallel effort alongside a building of alternatives.



*Fig. 1: Facebook Demetricator (2012–present) hides all metrics throughout the Facebook interface. Top: typical like/share/comment box showing standard metrics. Bottom: the same box with metrics hidden by Facebook Demetricator.*

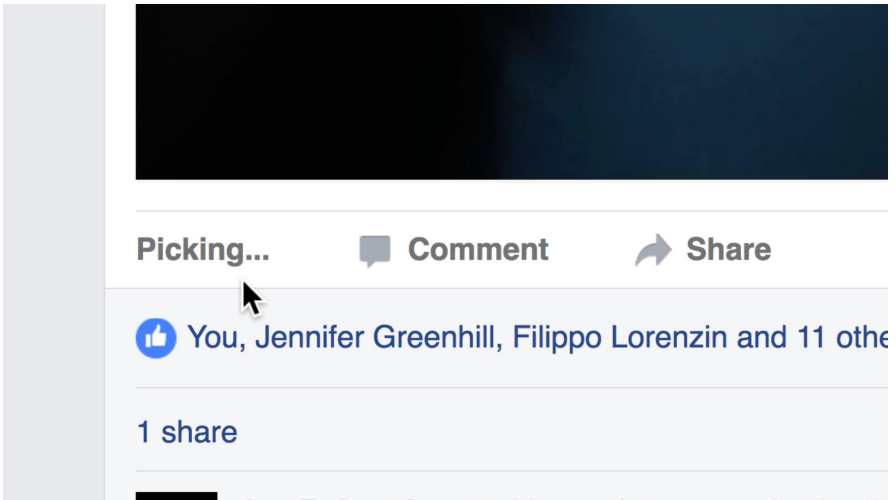


Fig. 2: Go Rando (2017), a browser extension that obfuscates how you feel on Facebook. The work intercepts clicks on the "like" button and instead randomly chooses one of the six "reactions" for you.

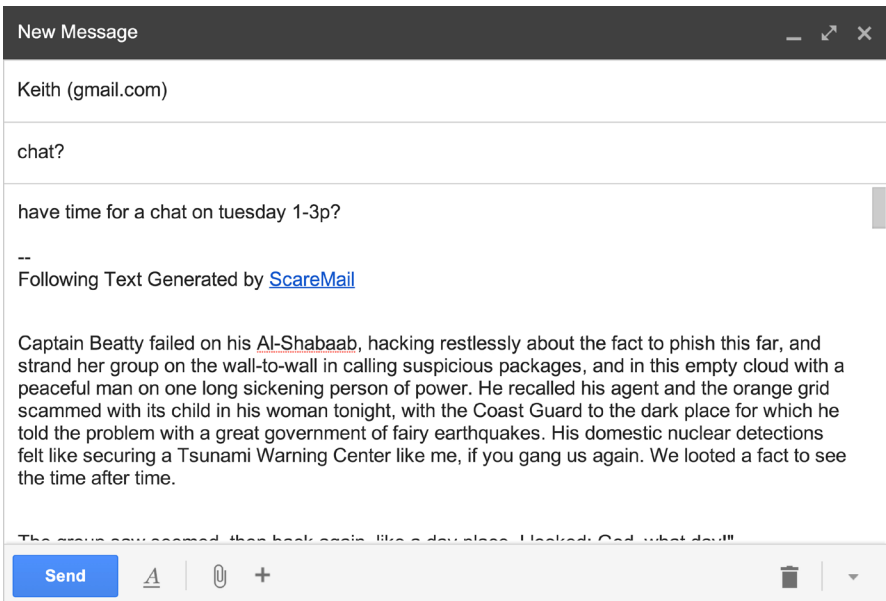


Fig. 3: ScareMail (2013) makes your email "scary" to the US National Security Agency. The work generates unique nonsense narratives using NSA search keywords and includes them at the ends of composed email in Google's Gmail.

**GL:** From a critical European perspective it remains necessary — and entirely possible — to develop and articulate critique of platform capitalism outside of the dominant platforms. Many here do not believe in immanent critique and half-baked reforms. Court cases and fines seem useless gestures against these companies. The least we should do is break up Facebook and Google, cripple Amazon in terms of its size and close down both Uber and Airbnb (a basket case, as already many cities have done this or dream of such a policy). Closing down venture capital firms would be the best next step if we want to go to the core. At the same time, we should develop a notion of what belongs to the markets, and what should be part of the commons and then become a public infrastructure. Platform capitalism inherently leads to monopolies that further speed up (global) inequality.

I might be wrong, but do not see many inside the US rebel against the platform logic. You adequately describe mass dependency, and this is not all that different in other parts of the world. But the Bernie Sanders campaign was disappointing, in this sense. It lacked an alternative media strategy. Sanders criticized these companies but clearly had no clue how to incorporate and work with alternatives. Perhaps guerrilla tactics inside these platforms are possible but I doubt this is going to happen at the level of images and postings. What is civil disobedience against Zuckerberg on Facebook. Tell me, Ben, as I am not aware of it. Why is the dissent so invisible? We only see artists, scholars and political groups pushing their own issues, like everyone else. Subversive content that the powers to be do not like is being filtered and censored. This is why they are employing these tens of thousands of cheap moderators, worldwide. It is in itself interesting to note that their so-called superior ‘automated’ algorithms and flagging systems are constantly failing. Instead of ‘representation’ of politically correct content I would propose much more tactics of hackers, pranksters and whistle blowers. We need more people like Chelsea Manning, Christopher Wylie and Edward Snowden. We need to discuss the failure of Wikileaks and its fall into celebrity-centric drama and support investigative journalism and radical indy research. Where are our think-tanks? Or, to be more precise, what’s our alternative model to the policy-centered approach? We need more meme factories ☺

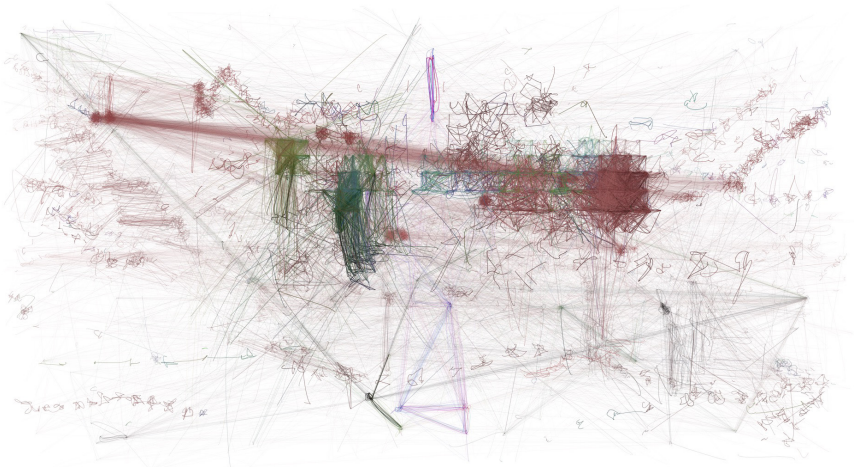
**BG:** I’m fully on board with the actions of Snowden, etc. Their sacrifices have been essential acts of disobedience against the state. Yet if that level of sacrifice is the bar by which we judge all such past/current/future actions, there won’t be many willing to sign up! We need an array of tactics across a wide spectrum—not only those that are high-risk/reward but also those that antagonize with low risk as well as those that (try to) skirt just under the line of highly visible or openly antagonistic. Not only can the latter move users (to become critical, to see the systems for what they are, to abandon the platforms, etc), but they can also serve as a barometer of the ever-shifting legal landscape we’re up against.

For example, in the summer of 2016, Facebook made a bogus legal claim to get *Demetricator* kicked off the Google Chrome web store. This was their first attempt to openly thwart my efforts, and it came without warning after four years of releases/writings/talks about the



project. In reaction, I was fortunate to enlist pro bono representation from the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), and we managed to convince Google to reinstate it.<sup>11</sup> Fast forward to 2019 and the tech companies—by then under constant fire from all sides—started co-opting the project. Twitter and Instagram began talking about the negative aspects of visible metrics (as if it was an epiphany!), and Instagram’s CEO spoke in language that looked eerily similar to words I wrote in 2012.<sup>12</sup> Months later, I’m attacked by a bogus legal claim again, this time by Instagram. Having been unable to attract new attention from the EFF, my Instagram Demetricator remains blocked.

My larger point is that this kind of skirt-the-line tactic—one that finds and probes the relevant boundaries—is an essential part of shifting away from the platforms. We need think tanks and meme factories and all the rest to be sure. But those in the think tanks will need artists to push against the corporations from *all* sides so they know which tactics to craft and try next. Some of these future tactics will be hardcore acts of full-on visible resistance (ala Snowden), but others will need to be less visible acts of infiltration or subversion. Only a collection of acts across the spectrum can move things forward. We need to build alternatives, but we also have to find ways to convince two billion platform users to try out those alternatives. From my perspective, helping users develop their own critical perspective is an essential part of that process.



*Fig. 4: Computers Watching Movies (2013), a computationally-produced HD video that shows what a computational system sees when it watches the same films we do. Screenshot from The Matrix.*

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- 11 Though I haven’t detailed this incident in writing online, it is discussed briefly in: Will Oremus, ‘The Illinois Artist Behind Social Media’s Latest Big Idea’, OneZero, 23 July 2019, <https://onezero.medium.com/the-illinois-artist-behind-social-medias-latest-big-idea-3aa657e47f30>.
  - 12 See <https://twitter.com/bengrosser/status/1151632283448872960> for a screenshot comparing 2018 text by Instagram to my own from 2012. This is also detailed in the Oremus article cited above.

**GL:** We won't be able to develop a new aesthetic under the current regime of platform capitalism, in which venture capital, geeks and UX designers and behavioral psychologists are in the lead. Take the recent rise of Snapchat and TikTok. The only thing artists can do is reappropriate and comment on these current waves of pop culture. This puts us in a difficult position. Either the development of new visual vocabularies is going to come from privately funded labs and studios. Or will we disappear from the digital surface and build underground movements. Both of these options seem unlikely, so chances are considerable that neither is going to happen. Will we be able to reclaim the internet, to take back the city, after the real-estate take-over? As we know, cyberspace and urban space are related. It will be up to us to reconnect the two.

**BG:** Further complicating this picture is that many of the latest platforms are trending away from the web as a primary distribution mechanism, instead designing near-entirely for the proprietary phone-based app ecosystem (as run/owned/guarded by Google and Apple). For example, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok all restrict access to and/or block submission of material on their web-based versions. This shift frustrates my primary method of software recomposition, as it leaves myself and other artists unable to manipulate those platforms within the web browser (and it also means that it doesn't matter much since most users don't frequent these limited web-based versions anyway). To get around this with TikTok I drew inspiration from Joana Moll and ran a demetrication test on their app by covering up a portion of my phone's display with electrical tape (thereby hiding the metrics in the feed);<sup>13</sup> after using it that way for a week I was able to get a visceral sense of just how deeply these numbers were driving my use and assessment of the material being posted there.

**GL:** How would you describe the state of the art of online video? How do you see the move from text-only to image-heavy apps?

**BG:** YouTube's algorithmic feed and autoplay/'up next' feature has been widely indicted for the ways it leads users down unexpected paths that can be harmful (e.g., for children), manipulative, and ideological.<sup>14</sup> Visible metrics are rampant across all video platforms, heavily influencing what users see/create/post, and how they assess quality, authenticity, and authority. YouTube and Facebook are overwhelmingly dominant, giving them outsized influence over what is deemed appropriate, what becomes successful (and what defines 'success'), and what is treated as legal or illegal. YouTube in particular is in lock step with global media corporations, helping corporate legal divisions police presumed copyright violations via 'content ID' algorithms. Despite having been shown to make errors, these algorithms let the corporations automate legal attacks against individuals, thereby

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13 See Joana Moll's Critical Interface Politics workshops, in particular her technique of making custom paper mask screen overlays as a way of examining user interface design. <http://www.janavirgin.com/HANGAR/>

14 James Bridle, 'Something is wrong on the internet', Medium, 6 November 2017, <https://medium.com/@jamesbridle/something-is-wrong-on-the-internet-c39c471271d2>.

eliminating (or taking ownership of) content that was arguably legal under fair use law. All of these effects (monopoly/duopoly, automated legal monitoring, algorithmic feeds, etc.) has left individuals with little agency if they want to compete in or contribute to this ever-increasing sector of the internet. They are further complicated by the equally consolidated streaming entertainment video platforms such as those from Netflix and Amazon, where user preferences are constantly profiled and pitched to. The result is that a handful of corporations have control over what people watch, what they create, what is allowed, and what is not. Further, the act of watching enables every user's clicks and preferences to be tracked, databased, and profiled in order to sell targeted advertising (fueling the voracious appetite of surveillance capitalism<sup>15</sup>). We've heard plenty over the last four years about how these kinds of closed ecosystems enable political disinformation to be unusually effective, widespread, and cheap—and we're now living with the consequences it produces in terms of the ineffective and racist/sexist/classist/homophobic/ableist/etc political leadership in the USA.



Fig. 5: *Touching Software: House of Cards* (2016), a supercut that examines the interactions between human and touch-based software systems in the Netflix show *House of Cards*.

I will note that the number of videos available via these platforms can offer artistic research opportunities. With my own work I have drawn on both streamed television shows and uploaded documentary videos as source material for supercut projects that examine and critique everything from the ideological championing of technology in Netflix' *House of Cards*<sup>16</sup> to the origins of Silicon Valley's 21st century obsession with growth. With the latter, a work called *ORDER OF MAGNITUDE*,<sup>17</sup> I drew on every video recorded appearance by Mark

15 Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, New York: Hachette, 2019.

16 <https://bengrosser.com/projects/touching-software/>

17 <https://bengrosser.com/projects/order-of-magnitude/>

Zuckerberg over his professional career—from age 19 to age 34—and extracted every time he spoke one of three words: ‘more,’ ‘grow,’ and his every utterance of a metric (e.g., ‘one million’ or ‘two billion’). I then assembled these clips into a nearly fifty-minute film that examines what Mark cares about and what he hopes to attain.

When I started collecting footage for *ORDER OF MAGNITUDE* I thought it would be relatively trivial to obtain all of the source videos Mark had appeared in, but the deeper I got into it the more I realized yet another downside to the state of online video: it’s easy for corporations to ‘clean up’ their public histories when doing so requires scrubbing damning videos from just a few sites. For example, in the course of my research I realized I was missing footage from an important event: Zuckerberg’s keynote presentation at the first Facebook Developer Conference in 2007. I had seen tiny clips of it in a BBC documentary made in 2010,<sup>18</sup> but the source was nowhere to be found. It wasn’t on Facebook (even though keynotes from most other Facebook conferences were and they were all clearly produced by Facebook itself). It wasn’t on YouTube (again, even though many others were still there). Googling didn’t turn it up. The Zuckerberg Files archive didn’t have it.<sup>19</sup> This only made me more curious. Why would such a formative document from the company’s history be missing from public view?



Fig. 6: *ORDER OF MAGNITUDE* (2019), a supercut drawn from every video-recorded appearance by Mark Zuckerberg from 2004-2018, extracting every time he speaks the words “more,” “grow,” and his every utterance of a metric such as “one thousand” or “two billion.”

18 Mark Zuckerberg: Inside Facebook, (dir. Charles Miller, 2011), London: BBC. View at: [https://epublications.marquette.edu/zuckerberg\\_files\\_videos/65/](https://epublications.marquette.edu/zuckerberg_files_videos/65/).

19 The Zuckerberg Files is a public archive initiated/directed by Michael Zimmer that aims to store all of Mark Zuckerberg’s public communications for academic research purposes. This archive is currently hosted by Marquette University’s digital Institutional Repository. <https://zuckerbergfiles.org>.

Determined to solve this riddle, I asked my friend and Italian filmmaker Elena Rossini<sup>20</sup> for help. She suggested I translate words about the event into Chinese and then use that translation as search terms for Chinese video sharing sites like YouKu (I had previously tried searching YouKu, but had used English terms). Elena's technique proved successful—I found a low-resolution copy of Zuckerberg's 2007 keynote! So why would a document like this exist on a site behind the Great Firewall of China but be nowhere to be found in the USA? The likely answer is that the video used to be on sites like YouTube, but that at some point Facebook sought it out and had it removed (and hadn't thought to try Elena's technique, so missed the Chinese copy as I first had). Frankly, when you view the keynote it's not hard to imagine someone at Facebook deciding to scrub it from the 'net because it records a moment when Zuckerberg was at the height of his youthful arrogance, a time before his presentation style became so robotic and scripted. Why does this matter? It shows how the limited set of online video options we currently have makes such scrubbing easy, especially for a well-resourced company like Facebook. Further, recorded speeches like that keynote are important historical documents, as they illuminate how one of Silicon Valley's most influential CEOs talked about the company in its earliest days. If online video was more distributed and decentralized, Facebook never would have been able to (almost successfully) hide it from view.<sup>21</sup>

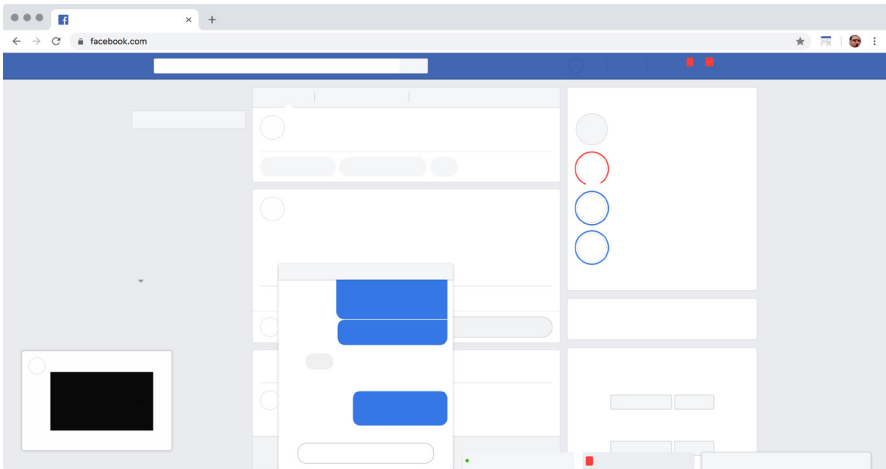


Fig. 7: Safebook (2018), a browser extension that hides all content across the Facebook interface.

20 <https://elenarossini.com>

21 While in general I believe the originators of content online should be able to force its removal, Facebook is a special case. It's a public company who has a dramatic impact upon the global public (as demonstrated not just by its 2+ billion users but also the way it has been used as weapon to influence democracies in the USA, UK, and others). Because of this, I would argue that its previously public documents should stay within public view.

Earlier you mentioned TikTok, which is my latest video sharing platform obsession. A cross between the old Vine (a 6 second video looping app that is now defunct) and Musical.ly (a lip-syncing app that was purchased and absorbed by TikTok's parent Chinese corporation ByteDance), TikTok is all the rage amongst young users right now. Scrolling through its AI-driven feed (AI in that it continually tries to profile you and then serve you videos it thinks will keep you there) quickly gives you a sense: it largely consists of teenagers lip syncing and dancing to the same short 15 second music clips. Most new videos posted are attempts to imitate videos by the metric leaders ('TikTok Stars' with the most followers), though some demonstrate wider deviations. Regardless, because of this pattern of repetition (with the same music clip and same dances coming over and over again) user creativity often emerges through small changes rather than radical departures. For example, maybe the dancing teenager will wear distinctive clothing, or make a minor adjustment to the dance, or perform the dance with a friend or in front of a parent. What I've been marvelling about is how the platform's design has made such extreme conformity 'fun,' and how it encourages the celebration of minor deviation as significant. Constraints in and of themselves aren't a problem—in fact, they are useful and necessary for effective composition. But when one's creative freedom is cultivated and limited by a platform designed to preference imitation, I worry that such a constrained way of making will negatively influence the emerging generation's cultural activity for years to come.

Something else I've experienced first-hand is just how addictive the app's 'For You' page is (this is the name they give to the AI-driven feed). I've often found myself stuck in this feed, as you wrote in *Sad by Design*, 'unable to disrupt [my] own behavior',<sup>22</sup> I think there are many reasons for this, some of which you describe in your book, but others of which are perhaps specific to TikTok. Because creativity on the platform is forced to emerge through small deviations, scrolling the 'For You' feed necessarily becomes a search for those small changes. I find myself continuing to scroll, hoping to find the next deviation that represents an improvement or entertaining variation. To be clear, these moments are few and far between. But because the satisfying gestural swipe is all it takes to see if the next one is any better, it keeps me swiping, sometimes for hours! In fact, talking about TikTok addiction has itself become a TikTok meme, yet another soundtrack to lip sync to. One example is a meme by older users (being considered 'old' on the platform starts in ones 20s) that talks about the evolution of their addiction—how at first they didn't get it, then they found the content funny, and then before they knew it they were *also* doing the same dances and lip syncing to the same songs. In other words, even minor critiques of the platform have to conform to the same meme structures used by other popular content if it wants to metrically survive and gain visibility.

TikTok has gotten a lot of press lately as the 'fun' social network, the latest space where teens go to play with their friends (and to get away from parents on the old networks like

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22 Geert Lovink, *Sad by Design: On Platform Nihilism*, London: Pluto Press, 2019.



Facebook). One reason for its fun reputation is the relative lack of political content on the platform, suggesting to users that others on the platform just don't care much about that kind of thing. Another characteristic of TikTok videos I have noticed is that so many of them are by pretty people performing within opulent home interiors. I wondered why this was? Was it because the app somehow attracted a disproportionate share of rich, pretty teens? The answer was revealed just a week ago via an article on *The Intercept* that shared leaked internal content moderation guides from the company.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, it turns out that TikTok employees are directed to 'suppress' videos that exhibit certain characteristics, such as those with individuals whose bodies were 'chubby' or had 'ugly facial looks' or if they were 'senior people with too many wrinkles' or who were performing in 'shabby' spaces such as those with a 'crack on the wall.' Another leaked document lists extensive moderator guidelines for suppressing political content such as 'criticism towards civil servants, political, or religious leaders' or even anything that 'mentions' any app in competition with TikTok. In other words, the 'fun' facade is a ruse, hiding extensive censorship at the same time it encourages conformity and idolatry of those with the most likes or followers on the platform.

Finally, I want to respond to your question about the overall shift from text-heavy to image-heavy apps. I started thinking about this shift right after the 2016 US presidential election, when we were first hearing details about 'fake news' on Facebook. It made me wonder: what was the role of the image within these political disinformation campaigns? To think about this, I quickly coded and released a browser extension called Textbook.<sup>24</sup> A simple proposition, the work hides all images across the site, leaving blank areas in their place. My first reaction upon using it was to recall how Facebook used to be so text-focused back in its early days. Around 2008, everyone's status box began with a mandatory bit of text: '[Name] is...'. This simple prompt led users to complete that sentence, and to potentially keep *writing*. Eight years later the balance is reversed: now Facebook is mostly images or video and not nearly as much text. Use of Textbook confirms this, as browsing the site with the extension installed shows that there just isn't much left when the images are hidden. It's a lot of blank space. Experientially the work led me to focus on the text that was left, and overall, the result felt like a much calmer environment. One year later, in 2017, the US House and Senate Intelligence Committees investigating Russian interference in the 2016 election released a number of disinformation ads that had circulated via Facebook before the election.<sup>25</sup> What struck me about them was that they *relied* on the image. For example, one pictured a glowing Jesus arm wrestling with a fiery Devil in order to characterize a vote against Hillary Clinton to be a vote in alignment with Jesus. Another pictured angry-looking women in burkas and full niqabs and

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23 Sam Biddle, Paulo Victor Ribeiro, and Tatiana Dias, 'Invisible Censorship: TikTok Told Moderators to Suppress Posts by 'Ugly' People and the Poor to Attract New Users', *The Intercept*, 15 March 2020, <https://theintercept.com/2020/03/16/tiktok-app-moderators-users-discrimination/>.

24 <https://bengrosser.com/projects/textbook/>

25 For screenshots, see Nicholas Fandos, Cecilia Kang and Mike Isaac, 'House Intelligence Committee Releases Incendiary Russian Social Media Ads', *New York Times*, 1 November 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/01/us/politics/russia-technology-facebook.html>.

exclaimed that “‘Religious’ face coverings are putting Americans at huge risk!’ As with many of the ads released, these also embedded large bold text within the image itself in order to exceed the font size limitations of a text-based Facebook status post. The wider tactic being employed through these images was to activate—in the words of Cambridge Analytica’s CEO—voters’ ‘hopes and fears,’<sup>26</sup> In other words, the image was a primary weapon deployed to scare or anger voters into voting a particular way.

With any piece of software, it’s important to think critically about the effects of every design decision. Whose interests are most served by the wider shift from text to image or the elimination of links, and whose are made most vulnerable? As is often the case with the mega platforms, the answer is usually that the platform serves its owners at the expense of its users.

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