

Jennifer in Paradise

The chorus of outrage that flared up this summer was followed by dry disenchantment: In June a technical staff member of the American National Security Agency leaked secret documents from his employer to the press, detailing the systematic monitoring and storage of worldwide internet communication by the American and British Secret Services. Those who hadn't already foreseen the simultaneous monitoring of their virtual existence at last realized that the Internet is by no means an empty room which can be inhabited in a free, self-determined and safe manner.

The heterotopic space of the Internet as a boundless homogeneous topography whilst linked with many sites, simultaneously creating a complex environment allowing for non-hegemonically structured havens of privacy and self-expression, is now considered desecrated. The concept of a user-specific, virtual second existence that leaves the real body untouched – and civic identity anonymous – was moved to the romantic myth of the early days of the Internet. The hegemony of the state over its citizens through methods of monitoring, identification and categorization seems to have found a new and more ingenious tool in the Internet.

Although a debate about the re-conquest of virtual freedom has been sparked, this is supported with evidence that these rights do not only have to be demanded from the Secret Services of the Western States, but rather must have necessitate economic and cultural upheavals of the Internet. Edward Snowden's action delivered a huge amount of knowledge to users in a short time, however, the question remains: What to do? Who plays the goalkeeper of the international user community, especially when it became clear that the walls of their self-built glass house are made of rubber?

It belongs to the profession of the Dutch artist Constant Dullaart (*1979) to deal with questions of individual access versus institutional pre-structuring of the Internet, and the nature of visibility online. Internationally known for a large number of domain-based internet works, many of which make it possible for the user to engage in provocative hacking of existing web interfaces, his performance, video and sculptural practice aims for training attention. At the start of the 2013 gallery season the artist is offering a comprehensive commentary on the crisis of the Internet. His double exhibition „Jennifer in Paradise“ takes place at two of the leading sites of artistic post-internet culture in Berlin; Future Gallery (Anne Betting and Michael Ruiz) and the non-profit IMPORT Projects (Anja Henckel and Nadim Samman).

The eponymous main work „Jennifer in Paradise“ (2013) tells the story of a digital photograph. At the end of the 1980s John Knoll, co-creator of Photoshop, used an attractive picture of his girlfriend Jennifer as the demonstration image to showcase the software's capabilities. Distributed with early copies of the program, the photo was made available to all users for the practice of digital manipulation. Knoll's plan worked: the photograph of Jennifer circulated among users of his program in numerous copies and variations. He had created one of the first visual memes. Today, however, the image does not exist on the Internet. It belongs to the place of myth.

Dullaart now feeds it back into the digital image canon.

His print „Jennifer in Paradise“ contains an invisible surplus: In its code a visual message is inscribed, whose steganographic decryption by password is only possible for the eventual purchaser.

„Jennifer“ is online. The return of the image, brought back to us by Dullaart, refers to the temporal aspect of the Internet as a transfer area for data that gets connected upon request, within a database. The Internet never forgets. This truism, a painful certainty of today's world, is made productive as a memory without boundaries this way.

Dullaart sympathizes with Knoll's decision to place the beautiful and yet private picture of his girlfriend – now, wife – in the hands of a user community without hesitation. In a poetic and liberal gesture during a recent performance at the New Museum, New York, the artist gave the audience access to his Facebook account and requested that they change his passwords and take responsibility for his identity on the social network. According to Dullaart, the Internet does not merely affect the cold, smooth surface of technologies and their algorithmic programmed data. His

interventions address the human as an acting subject and decision maker, who stands behind the Internet. He views the Internet as the virtual self-expression of man – not just in the form of pseudo-personalized blogs, Facebook pages and personal domains, but also in the domain of the employees of large structuring forces such as Google, whose identity, biography, work schedules or body odour we don't like to know but rather prefer to deny.

Once we become aware of this counterpart of human-equals, an acceptability of flaws and accidents in the operation of digital data-exchange as normality is possible. On the other hand, this could be seen as a starting point of a critical consciousness in the handling of digital data. Dullaart does not belong to the group who sympathize with a network exit or an alternative communications network, given the current shock of the virtual self-determination. His hope is still the attempt to make the space of the Internet a counter-space of real economic and political power structures. The right life in the wrong one?

Following the idea of Foucault's heterotopic construction, it requires mechanisms of inclusion, and delimitation of the heterotopic place of the surrounding social space, whose regulations it contradicts, replaces or even neutralizes through its existence. The semi-permeable window through which we enter the Internet is moderated by experts. But can the gallery, where Dullaart's pictures bear witness to the technological layering of the Internet and the decisions of its creators, be a critical counter-site? This leads us to the brothels of Foucault. Intended as a place of sexual deviance which allow otherwise non-normal desire, they have by no means a function within the realm of fantasy. Their heterotopia unmasks the illusion of reality, in the sense that the sexuality of everyday life becomes visible as an illusory construction. At this point, „Jennifer in Paradise“ applies. In addition to being a story about a picture, this work concerns the Dionysian idea of the dissolution of boundaries that can not only allow the photographic representation of Jennifer Knoll a free ride through virtual space, but also make the image a re-usable collective property. „Jennifer“ in paradise Internet possesses no identity, no topological location or time marker.

The work group „The Windows of the World“ also refers to such a heterotopic dissolution of boundaries: During a study trip to China, the artist came across the eponymous theme park in Shenzhen, where the most famous tourist attractions of the world are united as 130 small-scale reproductions on 48 acres of ground. Built in 1994, this park was supposed to show the Chinese working class the iconic world of those for whom they produce export goods, but which they will never travel to. At the entrance the words „Welcome to our world“ greet visitors. A greeting as a euphoric allegation of an international merge of states and culture and, at the same time, a hidden proclamation of a later property claim?

In the Manhattan area of the park the twin towers are still standing. Dullaart approached the management and proposed that as a symbolic tribute to the people who lost their lives on Sept 11th the park should remove the towers. They rejected the idea, on the basis that they not possess the standard of being up-to-date. In this way the Chinese miniature window on the world as a protocol of the Chinese view of the world becomes a work of art. As a heterotopia, it generates a closed space which promises access to a different location, but visitors are not satisfied in this border crossing, and are thrown back to their starting point - the Chinese society. Besides the correspondence with the park management and a video of Twin Towers still existing in the Manhattan of this Chinese heterotopia, Dullaart exhibitions footage of the Niagara Falls, whose water supply is turned on every morning by staff.

The metaphor of the window to the world also runs continuously in the premises of Future Gallery, where Dullaart comments on the promise of transparency claimed by the Internet in a range of analog and digital collages. For his work „Untitledinternet.com“ Dullaart programmed a digital image mask that lays digital brush and pen strokes on accessed websites. The canvas of the digital brush stroke is the Internet, which - printed out and placed behind glass - objectifies the surface layer of the Internet. Dullaart's heterotopia of digital manipulation therefore works on a change in our view of the capabilities and possibilities of the digital world. The „Jennifer in Paradise“ exhibition negotiates access to the Internet as a problem of visibilities.

At the gallery, Dullaart's work sets free new additions to the Internet's heterotopic residual reality. Residual reality? The demarcation between reality and virtuality usually becomes unnecessary in

the post-digital mode. We all are Jennifer. However, Dullaart's art is a light cast on the dark areas of the rugged area of the Internet, so we'll become aware of the deep stratification and starting points for a discussion on the future of the Internet, instead of lighting up a resigned reclaim of antiquated forms of privacy, ownership and visibility.

Heterotopia Neuland Sophia Gräfe, 02.09.2013