

WikiLeaks as an Editorial Problem

A Conversation with Geert Lovink and Merijn Oudenampsen

Willem van Weelden

Interview – November 18, 2011

In the wake of the developments around WikiLeaks, the time is ripe to take a closer look at the current information landscape. Willem van Weelden, researcher and publicist specialized in media and culture, spoke with political sociologist Merijn Oudenampsen and media theorist Geert Lovink on how WikiLeaks can effect social and political change and contribute to making power more transparent.

Willem van Weelden

Questions of censorship, information filtering and ideologically coloured news services seem to have entered a new phase: Facebook's filtering of data flows generated by the Arab Spring in order to prevent existing regimes from misusing information; censorship of the regular media in the USA as a result of the WikiLeaks revelations; extreme sanctions imposed by the Chinese government against internal dissident voices; growing populism in Europe, urging greater state control over the media and more transparent policy; the illegal wiretapping practices of Rupert Murdoch's bungling media empire, which became the victim of overplaying its own hand ...

These almost arbitrary examples point to a general change of climate in news coverage and pose the question of what the term 'media ecology' could still mean. Or, to reformulate the question in a cybernetic and thus almost politically neutral fashion: What is the connecting pattern that emerges in this hybrid constellation of mutually influencing factors? The answer can only be discovered through a network analysis and a political / aesthetic analysis of ideology and editing, (informational) power and spheres of influence. We can then perhaps say that the first lesson that WikiLeaks has thoroughly impressed upon the world reintroduces what in principle is an old fact: namely, that exposing the way in which data and information is handled is – painfully enough – more revealing than the possibly extremely compromising content of the 'hard data' itself. The ultimate consequence of this conclusion goes much further than the almost pathetic battles Julian Assange believes he must wage in order to preserve 'the truth'. In that respect, let us above all not forget that 'truth' is a media effect that is produced! With its cleverly directed, media-savvy campaigns, WikiLeaks seems to be following the same logic that lies at the bottom of the escapades of the distressed Murdoch empire.

Assange's media logic became almost palpable when he stated in an interview with Amy Goodman and in conversation with the philosopher Slavoj Žižek on the American radio show *Democracy Now* that he was amazed by the fact that the populist and nationalistic Fox News show had shown more images of the shocking *Collateral Murder* video than had CNN, which at the first hail of bullets had broadcasted a blank screen under the pretext that it wanted to spare the families of the victims.¹ Assange assumed that despite the fact

that Fox had condemned WikiLeaks's publication of the video images and treated the material in a biased and tendentious manner, the truth was more served by Fox than by the prudish CNN. Assange's 'truth' appears to be a videographic truth, an almost transparent ideology of media penetration. It is precisely this aspect of the Assange doctrine that has evoked the requisite restraint and reserve in a camp that one would normally expect to have supported him – the leftist-activist camp.

How can we arrive at a correct assessment of all the different levels and scales of importance connected with WikiLeaks and subsequently construct a truly productive framework of action? With this splintering of perspectives, what is necessary in order to find an answer that not only unites but also spurs democratic action, and offers a counterbalance to the imminent threats created by the exponential increase of control over historiography, access to information, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, freedom of dissidence and freedom of questioning? What does WikiLeaks have to offer within this subversive framework?

The leftist camp is divided on WikiLeaks as an activist phenomenon and has a hard time properly interpreting its effects. On the one hand, there is mistrust of front man Julian Assange, who according to some has emerged as a dictatorial leader and self-styled celebrity who has piloted WikiLeaks into populist waters. On the other hand, with the publication of hundreds of thousands of documents, the WikiLeaks motto 'No power without accountability' has unleashed an undeniable force and caused an inspiring chaos in geopolitical relations. At the same time, WikiLeaks' impact on the regular news media can hardly be underestimated.

In any case, WikiLeaks always knows how to take advantage of a momentum and capture global attention with new revelations, as witnessed not only by the shocking images of *Collateral Murder*, but also by the publication of a tremendous amount of documents on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the 779 documents on the American detention camp Guantánamo, the hundreds of files on the crisis areas of Honduras and Pakistan, and of course the very extensive collection of diplomatic documents (the 'cable files'). Time and again, WikiLeaks has caused consternation and desperation on the side of the people, parties and institutions compromised by the revelations.

Yet these revelations, no matter how shocking and historically important, do not seem to be the only merit of WikiLeaks: it has above all demonstrated that an anarchistic way of dealing with reporting is a public good and can generate democratic effects. In order to effectuate this, WikiLeaks has moreover installed a 'custom-made' infrastructure. In short, WikiLeaks is only the beginning of a promise. To quote the conservative thinker Oliver Wendell Holmes: 'The mind, once expanded to the dimensions of larger ideas, never returns to its original size.'

What To Do?

So far, the fiercest reaction to WikiLeaks has been in the USA, which is not strange when you consider that the platform appears to be waging an emphatic information war against the goings-on of what still may be regarded as one of the most powerful countries in the world. That its power is at stake due to the revelations made by WikiLeaks is evidenced by the reactions, which have varied from calls for legal action and the freezing of WikiLeaks' assets – which have indeed occurred – to repeated exhortations for Assange's sentencing and execution.

WikiLeaks has received support, in itself not surprising, from the hactivist collective Anonymous, which reacted with DDoS (Distributed Denial of Service) attacks on credit card companies that had frozen WikiLeaks' assets (Maestro and PayPal) and additionally devoted themselves to 'Operation Crowdleaks': an attempt with the help of volunteers to translate collective information provided by WikiLeaks for a larger audience. The tactic

behind this form of mass journalism is to publish cables that thus far have had little or no attention in the media. In the meantime, WikiLeaks and Assange have received various awards, including the Amnesty International UK Media Award. Slavoj Žižek has expressed himself positively about WikiLeaks and Assange's fight; while Daniel Ellsberg, who in the book *Pentagon Papers* leaked information in the 1970s on the war in Vietnam, has meanwhile been exerting himself on countless forums to draw parallels between how he was assailed as a whistle-blower at the time and the way in which Assange has been thwarted and prosecuted in America by both the government and corporations.

Perhaps less obvious is the support that WikiLeaks has received from the art world. Less obvious because, as the account of former WikiLeaks co-worker Daniel Domscheit-Berg demonstrates, Assange's attitude towards art is, to put it mildly, rather reserved.² The question of the extent to which WikiLeaks could benefit from art, or vice versa, is closely connected to the general question of how the WikiLeaks strategy relates to global developments and power relations, and how it can contribute to the rediscovery of a perspective for social and cultural action and emancipation.

In the following conversation with Geert Lovink, media theorist and founder of the Institute of Network Cultures, and Merijn Oudenampsen, political scientist and sociologist, both also allied with different generations of hackers and activists, the dilemmas outlined above come to the fore in varying contexts. Lovink and Oudenampsen contributed greatly to a public discussion conducted both online and offline about WikiLeaks, sometimes seemingly taking different standpoints. In December 2010, Lovink co-authored with Patrice Riemens a polemic piece about WikiLeaks, called 'Twelve Theses on WikiLeaks', which appeared in various European papers and online forums. It was published in the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* under the heading 'Voor WikiLeaks telt alleen de banaliteit van het spektakel' (All That Counts for WikiLeaks is the Banality of the Spectacle). Oudenampsen reacted fiercely to this piece through the *Nettime* mailing list with the article *12 Stellingen, 13 ongelukken* (12 Theses, 13 Disasters).³

This conversation modifies their differences of opinion somewhat and contains no incontrovertible statements or detailed solutions. Starting from the phenomenon of WikiLeaks, it explores where there is room for social and political change and where there are perspectives that can contribute to greater transparency of the workings of power.

Willem van Weelden: *In his article 'Transparency and Exodus: On Political Process in the Mediated Democracies', the cultural critic Brian Holmes quotes Felix Guattari: 'What is it that separates the left from the right? ... Fundamentally, it is nothing but a processual calling, a processual passion [author's italics – ed.]'*⁴ *Holmes draws a parallel between certain forms of activism and experimental art: both are said to have a processual character in that they resist stereotyping, pigeonholing and unequivocal left / right divisions of the political power arena. What about the left wing's passion with respect to WikiLeaks? In the discussions on WikiLeaks, the two of you initially seem to be diametrically opposed when it comes to a critical interpretation. All the same, the content and process of WikiLeaks has been less in the news lately. The media's attention skips from an item on Assange's behaviour to the next scandal about the peripheral symptoms of the phenomenon. This raises the question of the extent to which the alternative camp is still capable of not only putting Holmes's celebrated processual passion on the agenda concerning WikiLeaks, but also successfully implementing it.*

Merijn Oudenampsen: I think WikiLeaks gives visibility to the filtering process in the traditional media, and that there has been a strategy, if not a tactic, of publicizing the WikiLeaks narrative in a particular manner. By focusing on the personage of Assange, the spectacle, the stories about Gaddafi's bodyguard, the character of Sarkozy or – as happened in the Dutch paper *NRC Handelsblad* – by discussing the literary qualities of the cables, it was possible to avoid dealing with the more fundamental issues in terms of content. On the one hand, this would seem to point to lazy journalism (as is often the case

in the Netherlands). On the other, it could also have been the result of a conscious strategy, such as with *The New York Times*, whose editors met with bureaucrats from Washington in order to decide what to publish and what not. Afterward, a cable downplaying the threat of the Iranian rocket programme was purposely not published, while an article with an opposite slant was put out. This sort of case is a typical illustration of Noam Chomsky's classical position on the functioning of Western media as a mouthpiece of the established order. That is certainly true for the USA, but in the Netherlands you don't immediately expect it.

WVW: At the time, you criticized the publication of Patrice Riemens and Geert Lovink's text in NRC Handelsblad. Was the choice of NRC Handelsblad as a platform the most important point of criticism for you? After all, this paper took a rather conservative stance on WikiLeaks.

MO: In the first instance I was shocked by the headline, 'All That Counts for WikiLeaks is the Banality of the Spectacle'. However, that turned out to be formulated by the paper itself, not written by Geert and Patrice. I was indeed concerned about the context in which the piece appeared: in the Dutch media, including the *NRC*, WikiLeaks was attacked as being irresponsible and Assange was set aside as an eccentric figure with megalomania. Of all places, the article appeared in this context, and then written by people whom you would expect to stand up for WikiLeaks; but that didn't happen. At least, that's the impression it gave, also because the *NRC* had omitted Lovink and Riemens' first thesis (the zero thesis: 'WikiLeaks is a good thing'). Geert and Patrice had originally written the text for the online mailing list *Nettime* with the intention of it being a critical piece. In the context of the *NRC*, it did not have that effect. This is why I thought it would be good to thoroughly examine precisely this point in the discussion that unfolded on *Nettime*. Judging from the reactions I received, there actually turned out to be little sympathy for this. I think that's strange. After all, *Nettime* is part of a world that ought to have sympathy for something like WikiLeaks. Where was it? I absolutely cannot explain that. But after all, I'm from a different generation.

Geert Lovink: I have indeed moved beyond Chomsky's criticism from the early 1980s, although it has lost nothing of its validity. In working with activists and artists, it is good to repeat that criticism from time to time, but it no longer generates any new strategies. So I don't have a problem with its veracity, but with its effect on the creativity of collective subversion. It curtails the many possibilities that there are. Very concretely, the filtering of information always makes me think of processes that take place at the *NRC* or *The New York Times*, which are clear to me. But a book has just come out by Eli Pariser that discusses new forms of power generated by very fine filtering processes that offer personalized information to users of Google, Facebook and other information distributors without their really being aware of it.⁵ These are developments that could truly lead to new insights into how the media powers of the twenty-first century work. They no longer work by manipulation from the top down, but by giving people the feeling that they are being served and can develop themselves, that they are being taken seriously and their subject is being addressed. With information filtering, I see new workings of power; and I am extremely curious about this because I think that new activist strategies should above all focus on that. We've known for a while now that the *NRC* and other old media manipulate and have a certain agenda.

Engaged Art and the Journey Out of the Reservation

WVW: *It is striking that it is above all artists who are reacting to WikiLeaks in an interesting manner, while this is much less the case with regular activists. Merijn, you have expressed rather critical views on engaged art, for example in your reaction to the essay by the artist Jonas Staal, Post-propaganda* ⁶*To what extent do you feel that the art world's support of WikiLeaks is interesting or important for the further propagation of the transparency agenda? Assange himself seems to have a tremendous disdain for art, according to the book by former WikiLeaks co-worker Daniel Domscheit-Berg.* ⁷

MO: My criticism of Jonas Staal arose from the discussion about the so-called 'new engaged art' in the Netherlands. This new engagement surprises me because it doesn't take any position at all. Jonas Staal, whose art is considered part of this movement, is someone who represents social contradictions in his work, but does not take a position himself. And that's called the new engagement. The old engagement was about intellectuals and writers taking a position, like Zola's *J'Accuse* with the Dreyfus affair. With Sartre, the existential notion of engagement involved a moral responsibility whereby it was impossible not to take a position, because aloofness is also a position. ⁸ And now you end up with a form of new engagement that in fact means interaction, it's about art that engages with the public. This notion of engagement as interactive art was pushed forward under Tony Blair as the spearhead of the cultural policy of New Labour, a vision that was later supported by Richard Florida with his book on the creative industry. ⁹ If that's the new engagement, then the old notion of the term utterly escapes me. My criticism of Staal was formulated on the basis of this difference, because in the Netherlands there is hardly any engaged art at all!

For the rest, specific identities like artist and activist don't interest me that much. I think more in terms of a series of skills, a repertoire of competencies that enable people to examine a social reality in a totally different manner, to undermine existing perspectives, to stimulate people to a new kind of reflexivity. 'Activism is often more aimed at effect, at presentation on the streets, at making a claim based on a certain identity, while art can actually question such claims. I think that examining and questioning is very interesting at the moment, because in the case of WikiLeaks it's not possible to make a very clear claim.

WVW: *But was Brian Holmes right in saying that there are parallels between activism and art, and that they now are very obviously visible? Or is it so that we can no longer identify a phenomenon such as WikiLeaks and its spectacular actions as activism?*

MO: It is most certainly activism, and I think that there are also parallels with art – just not in the Netherlands. The Netherlands has a very strong tradition of depoliticization and of what Jacques Rancière calls the logic of 'police': compartmentalization, or pigeonholing. ¹⁰ You're in the literary world, or you're in the new media world, etcetera. Everybody's got their own sandbox to play in. The point of all art that is engaged is to 'get out of the reservation', as the philosopher and writer Jacq Vogelaar says. That's just been put on the agenda again.

GL: That's because the reservations are being dismantled!

MO: Yes, the zoos are being torn down, the gates thrown open, and they're not feeding the animals anymore! But from an international point of view, there is certainly a question of convergence. I think this is because the activist identity, the certitude of being a worker or a squatter, for example, no longer exists. Such identity frameworks have disappeared. So lots of activists have acquired the same investigative attitude as artists. They understand one another much better now.

GL: The problem is that the process of political awakening is no longer occurring gradually. Everywhere, 'waking up' is taking the form of gigantic eruptions. Revolts,

uprisings, resistance, or whatever you want to call them, are no longer the consequence of political organization per se. At the most, you could say that a political organization comes forth from it. That may also be true of what is happening right now in the Middle East. And that's also why we are so focused on the so-called Facebook revolutions, not because those uprisings are the result of Facebook, but because we do not understand how such political eruptions come about. For it is abundantly clear that they no longer are the result of a cumulative growth of political organization. You could also question the extent to which these eruptions are the result of alienation, of great despair, such as was the case in Spain and Greece, or with the smaller eruptions in Italy. With change, I primarily think of that effect, whereby the logic of being shut away in a reservation of your own is radically shattered.

WVW: Does the tearing down of those old pigeonholes and reservations produce an effect of transparency? The Arab Spring became famous because the social media supposedly had a corrective effect on dictatorial power, and so forth, but at the same time it must be said that those very media also made it much easier to pick up dissidents. Could you say that, in parallel to the transparency movement, WikiLeaks has manoeuvred itself into the position of an International Tribunal of abuses and faulty practices? And that in doing so, they place themselves outside the legal frameworks?

MO: I don't think it's anywhere near that bad. What WikiLeaks has released doesn't even fall under the category of 'top secret'. But Ellsberg's *Pentagon Papers*, which revealed the cynical politics behind the Vietnam War, were top secret at one time. Ellsberg is the man who so many years later is seen as a great model and defender of democracy, certainly within the Democratic Party. It is remarkable to see that WikiLeaks, on the basis of releasing much less important documents, is now branded as a semi-terrorist organization. That says a lot about the spirit of the times. The Democrats also don't have any regard for WikiLeaks, while the newspapers who once published the *Pentagon Papers* are now spoon-fed by Washington. For that matter, WikiLeaks plays a modest role that we must not exaggerate. I find Assange's claim that WikiLeaks made the uprisings in the Middle East possible rather arrogant.

GL: The release of the *Pentagon Papers* took place at the height of the anti-war movement, anti-Vietnam and very many other movements in the late 1960s, early 1970s. It's almost impossible to see those things separately from one another. At this moment in time, what social context should we place WikiLeaks in? Looking back, I would think that WikiLeaks is connected not so much to social movements, but to the major events that occurred during the period of the financial crisis of 2008-2009, which caused the erosion of capitalist legitimacy.

WVW: So, then, do you also agree with Assange, as he cites in the e-flux interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, that power is increasingly located outside governmental circles and can be found in patronage, the lobbies of the banks, the stock market and the big corporations, and that the most important decisions are made there? ¹¹ Do you share his analysis that this constellation cannot be controlled within the traditional frameworks and that it should be made transparent in an alternative manner?

GL: Yes, but I think that WikiLeaks is only a start at making those lobbying and consultation structures transparent. I think it would be good if things developed more in that direction. In the Netherlands, the construction fraud whistle-blower is still undertaking legal action in order to gain recognition for what he did.¹² So here, too, we are only at the beginning of the process of making power transparent. WikiLeaks and comparable initiatives play a big role in this. An important question is what we could do to facilitate that process.

Transparency and Media Strategy

MO: That's a fascinating point. The spectacle that Geert refers to in 'Twelve Theses' seems to form an inherent part of getting into newspapers like *The New York Times*, *Der Spiegel*, *The Guardian*, and so forth. Within the American publicity world, a great deal is known about what goes on behind the closed doors of Goldman Sachs, the relation between Goldman Sachs and the political-financial elite, or other abuses within the financial world, but in one way or another, the news coverage on this is never mainstream. I find that contradiction interesting: the spectacle or the personalization is precisely what makes it possible for WikiLeaks to get through to the mainstream.

GL: That's also a difficulty. On the one hand, I see the efforts of WikiLeaks from the perspective of hackers, and how they have become a productive part of facilitating openness, and on the other from the perspective of the crisis of investigative and quality journalism in general. Can we indeed gamble that if you have quality in that area, it will also lead to a political reversal? It turns out that personalization is one of the crucial facilitating factors. I have problems with that, because if you bet on celebrity strategy instead of the quality of the work, of diligently seeking out the precise workings of power and describing them, then a lot gets lost. That's the dilemma we're facing right now.

WVW: *Assange is rather ambiguous in that regard: on the one hand he argues that WikiLeaks should be seen as a storm troop that forswears the ego; on the other, it seems like an almost populist programme, considering the choice of what is publicized.*

GL: Yes, but there has also been a reversal in that regard, which took place in early 2010. Before that, celebrity status was not an issue. The question is, exactly what motivated that reversal? The obvious answer is to relate this to the decision Assange made at that time to work with regular newspapers and to cease utilizing his own organizational capacity of the Internet culture.

WVW: *In an interview, you inferred that the Internet has entered a new phase.¹³ Through the greater use of social media, people are actually being drawn away from the open Internet, and more and more exchanges are taking place within private, controlled environments. On the other side, there is an increasing amount of control, commercialization and regulation on the open Internet. Do you believe there is a connection with the problematic of WikiLeaks here?*

GL: Yes, a direct connection, because this touches upon the agenda of all hackers. That agenda is about openness, and currently also about the issue of net neutrality. There is a long list of militant issues. WikiLeaks is part of the hacker agenda. Its entire rhetoric comes from there, even though Assange himself has now more or less drifted in the direction of mainstream media.

WVW: *But at the same time you could also wonder, with all the databases that are being put online, what kind of emancipatory function WikiLeaks can still have for public opinion. The cables, for example, were briefly in the news; a bit of trivia was debated and a few jokes were made about world leaders. But as far as putting the topics that are hidden within them on the agenda goes, or bringing transparency to the foreign policy of the USA, publicizing them has had only a relative and mainly media effect.*

GL: I think that it has had a very big influence, and still will have. With its Cablegate, WikiLeaks has by now become a circus travelling from country to country. If you don't follow it, you wouldn't know that all sorts of things happened last month in Pakistan in which WikiLeaks was involved, and that very many things are going on in Honduras right now because of WikiLeaks. You could indeed have the impression that it is already over, yet these are things that will have consequences in the world in the long term. I see it

more as a cultural change that goes much further than today's headlines.

WVW: *In any case, there is a problem with the freedom and independence of the regular media, which are censored from above, or in some instances censor themselves. Then again, you see transparency movements such as WikiLeaks that come from the tradition of hackerdom and try to find their way to openness by means of the Internet. A gap seems to be arising between vital, important information published on the Internet and the degree to which that information attracts public attention. I think that only a few people are up to date on the role of WikiLeaks in Pakistan and Honduras.*

MO: The point is that the spectacle and the banality are precisely what make it possible to break into the traditional media. I think that selective groups of informed people and networks will increasingly be better able to do something with the less visible or sensational information and spread it further – think of diplomats or journalists, for instance. What makes WikiLeaks possible, among other things because of the cables, is a database that can be referred to, accessed and studied every day. The huge volume of the leaks also makes that possible: every time a political crisis occurs, the database can be searched on the basis of a certain theme, and new things can be brought out. That won't change for a while. There are all sorts of attacks on the infrastructure of WikiLeaks, but this is a practice that can also increasingly develop at the local level. That way, outside the spectacular aspect, translations and edited versions of the leaks can end up in the mainstream media.

WVW: *WikiLeaks has anticipated situations very well by putting out certain information at precisely the right moment, so that the revelations could have their maximum effect. Can we learn something from that?*

MO: I think that the way in which the Afghanistan 'War Logs' were presented is illustrative. The press conference, how it was published in the papers – I don't know how all of that was prepared, but a great deal can indeed be learned from it. If only because of the incredible amount of information, which was presented in a very accessible manner. On the basis of that information, people can make projections with Google Maps, and designers can also open it up with graphics. The great challenge is to deal with that enormous data flow of information and to translate it into a digestible form that can be published in a newspaper. That way, a tipping point can be induced. WikiLeaks has done this superbly. And the whole problematic aspect of spectacle and personalization has played an important role in this.

GL: We should of course see this in the perspective of the neutralization and parallelization of the antiwar movement by the Obama administration. That's the strange thing about this medium of hactivism: it has an odd relation with the political reality of the protest movements. I don't believe in the thesis that there has been a 'virtualization or paralysation of protest', that the libidinous energy of the street is moving to the space online. The events in Egypt have shown that this is obviously not the case. But there's still the question of how these things actually do relate to one another. The relations have been lost, there is no longer any organic connection. Maybe it's because so very many processes are taking place at the same time. That makes it difficult to follow. Maybe you should determine that paralysation and politicization are occurring simultaneously, as totally contradictory movements. This would indicate that the concepts we use are no longer valid, or that in very many places there is an acceleration of processes going on that might indeed be occurring simultaneously but that are not directly related to one another.

MO: As far as protest goes, I think that the crisis actually has had a stabilizing effect on the challenging of power, and resignation is setting in. With the cutbacks, there is a reactive movement, to be sure, but the vast majority of the population thinks: 'We mustn't complain, we'll just have to tighten our belts.' You can see that there is less room for

criticism. That also was demonstrated in the 1930s: the threat of a crisis incites a proclivity for authority rather than resistance.

WVW: *But couldn't it also be that, as Geert argues, different social and political processes are taking place simultaneously nowadays? That the reactions are conservative, but that this conservatism is simultaneously the germ of an unprecedentedly strong protest?*

MO: If you look at the Middle East, you see a completely different constellation than in the West. It might be connected with the global system economically, but culturally and politically it is an entirely different situation, of course. In Greece and Spain, various movements are trying to politicize the present crisis, but there is no perspective whatsoever for action. So I'm rather cynical about it. In Europe, people are again seeing that something like politics exists, that there is something like ideology. That is new, but I do not see a way out, no line of escape.

GL: The question is whether you should seek those lines of escape within the given frameworks of 'capitalistic realism', as the writer and theorist Mark Fisher describes it, for example.¹⁴ Those frameworks are fairly hopeless. So if it has to be about a perspective of action, the question is whether to place it inside or outside that. Without becoming nationalistic, you would have to get much more into local initiatives, which are separate from the global infrastructure in which the Netherlands is so fervently participating. The dismantling of the global infrastructure: that might be a good place to start.

This conversation took place on 29 June 2011.

Willem van Weelden is an Amsterdam-based teacher, lecturer and independent writer on new media culture, media theory and interaction design.

Footnotes

1. Broadcast on 12 July 2011.
2. Daniel Domscheit-Berg, *Inside WikiLeaks* (Amsterdam: Lebowsky Publishers, 2011).
3. For Lovink and Riemens' text, see: digitaleeditie.nrc.nl/digitaleeditie/NH/2010/11/20101211_2_01/article1.html, www.eurozine.com/articles/2010-12-07-lovinkriemens-en.html. For Oudenampsen's reaction, see: www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-nl-1012/msg00020.html.
4. Brian Holmes, 'Transparency and Exodus: On Political Process in the Mediated Democracies', *Open: Cahier on Art and the Public Domain no. 8 '(In)Visibility: Beyond the Image in Art, Culture and the Public Domain'* (Amsterdam / Rotterdam: SKOR / NAI Publishers, 2005), 49.
5. Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011).
6. Jonas Staal, *Post-propaganda* (Amsterdam: Fonds BKVB, 2009).
7. Domscheit-Berg, *Inside WikiLeaks*, op. cit. (note 2).
8. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1956).
9. Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2002).
10. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
11. See *e-flux journal* nos. 25 and 26 for the Hans Ulrich Obrist's two-part interview with Assange: www.e-flux.com/journal.
12. Ad Bos, a Dutch contractor who primarily is known as the whistleblower in the so-called building fraud affair. In 1998, he discovered duplicate accounts held by his employer, the Koop Tjuchem construction firm, and made them public. See: nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ad_Bos.
13. Maurits Martijn, 'WikiLeaks moet zich niet met de inhoud bemoeien', interview with Geert Lovink, *Vrij Nederland*, 16 February 2011.
14. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK / Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2009).

Tags

Activism, Control, Media Society, Transparency

This text was downloaded on January 21, 2026 from
Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain
www.onlineopen.org/wikileaks-as-an-editorial-problem