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# WHO'S AFRAID OF THE DIGITAL?

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# How we define real and virtual

**Corina Bucea:** *One of the starting points for previous reflections when we met and talked about digital technologies is the dichotomy between real and virtual - you mentioned this as a source of great misunderstanding and prejudice. Your main point was that the virtual world is an extension of what we call the real world, along with everything it brings - our identity, our relationships, how we see the world, ethics, etc. How does our perspective of virtual, digital, artificial and so on change in this context, once we pass these prejudices - and how would you define these prejudices?*

**Maude Bonenfant:** The biggest problem with this distinction between the virtual - less 'real' - and the real - allegedly a guarantee of truthfulness - is that **we have underestimated the very real effects of information and communication technologies on society, on our feelings, our social relationships and our identity.** By not properly measuring the impact of such technologies on our lives, we underestimate both the positive effects (e.g. the creation of new friendships, the possibility to unite across the world to defend a cause, the maintenance of social bonds, etc.) as well as the negative effects - for example, intimidation and stalking, recruitment by extremist groups, campaigns to damage people's reputations and so on are no less 'true', 'real' or 'serious' just because they happen online. All these have concrete effects on our society and **we should stop drawing a line that in fact doesn't exist.**

CORINA BUCEA



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MAUDE BONENFANT



*Maude is Professor at the Department of Social and Public Communication of the Québec University in Montreal (UQAM) and Doctor of Semiology. Her research focuses on the social dimension of communication technologies and digital networks, online communities as well as videogame practices. She is Director of the research group, Homo Ludens, on gaming and communication in the digital world and co-Director of the Research Group on Information and Surveillance in Everyday Life (GRISQ).*

**CB:** *How do you see the virtual space in connection to reality; what is the key to separating and identifying real and virtual in our unique existence? Our abilities, social skills and knowledge change with each generation and each new technology seems to bring along a new set of shifts into how humans themselves function. But beyond the tools, do you see a challenge in our ability to make this separation or is our current baggage of knowledge and understanding fit enough to grasp the multitude of possibilities that the virtual seems to open?*

**MB:** I think that the best example for understanding the changes brought about by young generations (if we go on with this false distinction between 'virtual' and 'real') is the meaning that younger people give to information and communication technologies: when a teenager or a young adult uses such tools, they will never say 'this is virtual; this is real; this other thing is virtual, etc.'. These two categories are not part of their vocabulary when communicating with others. Actually the experience of the world, in person or through technologies (and often

both at the same time since we never part from our smartphones) is a continuum, a real experience, no matter which communication tool we choose. On the other hand, each technology clearly has a different function for these generations, so they will not use Facebook, their telephone or Snapchat for the same reasons since these platforms are 'different'.

So, if the experience of the world is a real continuum, the experiences can be very different and the meaning of a face-to-face encounter is not the same as sending an e-mail for example. For this reason, **instead of criticising the alleged 'virtuality' of our online social relationships, we should rather call into question the tools and modes of communication via technology.** That's where we should increase our knowledge: **none of these tools is 'neutral'**; each leaves its mark in the form that our communication - hence our social relationships - takes, and we need to understand the implications of this. An sms, an app, a social media or an e-mail all encourage certain behaviours, allow or prevent certain actions and produce certain effects which are out of our control.

For these reasons, the way we organise our communication is not neutral: there is always some mediation between me and the others. Language itself is a form of mediation which gives a different 'shade' to each culture: similarly Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, Instagram or Snapchat are not equal and each give a specific 'colour' or shape to our social relationships. And we shouldn't forget that all these tools come from private corporations whose aim is to make as much profit as possible...

**CB:** *I'm happy you brought up the topic of social media, since this particular topic seems to raise many questions lately and a lot of attention proportionately, for a good reason: many social media have growing importance in people's lives (and beyond, I would say). From our social behaviour to political movements, social media has grown to be an important player in so many good and bad ways. And when talking about social media, it's impossible to avoid subjects such as privacy, exposure, surveillance - as many platforms have an important role in how much and what*

***we tell the world about ourselves and our relations.***

*Indeed things are even more complicated as these are tools over which we have limited control (and limited knowledge), and that are part of a complex market of information in which private individuals, groups or the state participate<sup>1</sup> and share ownership.*

*Having this perspective in mind, knowing how our clicks and posts are building up in huge data farms, how we are leaving traces that we never know what will happen to and how inter-connected these traces are<sup>2</sup>, can we still see digital technologies simply as tools? Are we, through our choices, making up our identity or is it the identity we mirror in the tools we use that affect our choices?*

**MB:** It's an excellent question and the answer, as so often, is twofold. First of all, of course we have a certain control of the way we use these information technologies and we can make some choices about how we use them every day to limit the negative effects on our life. Certain measures, sometimes simple, sometimes requiring some technical knowledge, can avoid problems in the mid- or long term. For example, we should think carefully before publishing pictures online: do we really want to spread such pictures, do we want to see them again in a few years, do we want to transfer our author's rights on them (as it is the case on Facebook), etc. On another hand, to undertake these measures, citizens need to be informed about what is happening, about their rights, the effects of their actions and the way they could act. In order to act, you have to first understand...

<sup>1</sup> 90% of the population of the US is identifiable based on three elements of information: the postal code, the date of birth and sex, according to this article: [http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/06/17/faisons-du-big-data-une-chance-pour-l-europe\\_4655737\\_3232.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/06/17/faisons-du-big-data-une-chance-pour-l-europe_4655737_3232.html)

<sup>2</sup> This interconnection in its most simple way is seen in the way we can log into different platforms, which mostly use Facebook as a tool today. Or Amazon that uses our IMDB searches to personalize its suggestions.

In general what I blame on online surveillance nowadays is that we know very little about it even if we try to be informed. For example, very few of us know about the system of massive sale of personal data to third parties via data brokers<sup>3</sup> and about the legal inadequacy surrounding this kind of practice. And yet this system, which generates millions of dollars, has major effects on our lives, our social relationships and our identities. In this sense you're totally right: **no, these IT technologies are not just 'tools', but rather very powerful economic, social and ideological tools whose effects we don't fully reckon with.** We believe we have some power because we make some choices, but is this only an appearance of freedom? Am I really free when after all I'm offered the choice between A or B, blue or red, Android or iPhone? Do I really have the choice to escape this system?

Furthermore, **believing I'm free, I don't notice the effects of such devices on my identity.** For example, I believe I recognise myself in the selection of books that Amazon suggests to me, but isn't this recommendation system just trying to convince me that I am a certain kind of reader? Would I have bought those books in another context? This principle of the so-called **'self-fulfilling prophecy'** follows a simple logic: without this system of recommendations, I would not have bought that book; but since it's suggested to me by saying that it suits me, I buy it. Thus I realise the prophecy, 'you will like this book and you will buy it'. So, yes, the device gives me an image of myself in which I believe I recognise myself, and to which I finally conform... and I will conform to it more and more with the improvement of these techniques (the algorithms are ever more powerful) and the ever increasing collection of my personal data (an ever more precise profiling).

<sup>3</sup> An example of a famous data broking company is <http://www.acxiom.com/>

For this reason I don't believe in the 'data double' so often spoken about – I don't think there's a double of ourselves online. This idea comforts us, because it creates an apparent 'distance' between this 'virtual' me and the 'real' me who I believe is safe from any manipulation and from the stupid influence of systems like the recommendations. But as I said before, there is no such distinction between virtual and real, and my online actions do have an effect on me. What I do with these information technologies has an effect on my identity because I end up 'identifying' and building my identity through them. Here we should pay attention to distinguish between identification (like certain systems which identify me as user) and identity as a process that evolves through my experiences. In this sense, yes, Amazon has an effect on my identity if I trust its recommendations that suggest 'what I like to read'. My identification on this platform ultimately influences my identity...



Picture from [Le iShow](#) by Les Petites Cellules Chaudes (Canada)

# When technology meets art

**CB:** *There are obviously many topics gravitating around the emergence of digital technologies that also intersect with the arts - questioning the way technology influences our work in the arts, how digital media influences genres or contributes to a certain hybridization of forms, or how we think of our audience, partially or sometimes mostly formed by digital natives. But what would you say that we should pay attention to and what might be the big subject of tomorrow, if you had to name just one aspect?*

**MB:** Besides mobility (I mean mobile technologies and devices which increasingly gain shares of the market and get into our lives) and Big Data (producing, capturing and treating massive quantities of data of any kind), the so-called Internet of Things connected to the cloud is gaining more and more space in our lives. In short, it consists in connecting, via all sorts of technologies added to our everyday objects, some that 'respond' to each other and exchange information. Burus, in *Wired*, writes: *'The Internet of Things revolves around increased machine-to-machine communication; it's built on cloud computing and networks of data-gathering sensors; it's mobile, virtual, and instantaneous connection; and they say it's going to make everything in our lives from streetlights to seaports "smart"'*<sup>1</sup>.

For example with RFID (radio-frequency identification) technologies, those chips are increasingly used (and very little legislated) to track objects and get a certain amount of information. Our 'smart' fridge (what a strange qualification, 'smart'!) can get a signal from the RFID chip in the milk bottle

saying that today is its expiry date and we should send an automatic order to the grocer to have a delivery tomorrow morning... With the excuse of simplifying our life, more and more surveillance tools - because that's what they are at the end of the day - will be integrated into our daily life (without any reference to Orwell!). This is the next big technological development of which we as citizens should be aware - but will these transformations have an effect on the performing arts? Do you think that the Internet of Things will be a topic for performances or that it will be also integrated inside theatres?

**CB:** *I think digital phenomena have several visible effects or applications in the performing arts, more easily noticeable in the way arts integrate digital technology in the performance itself, sometimes purely instrumentally but sometimes as a consistent part of how a work is being created and conceived, from process to scenography. But the topic of physicality is maybe something that draws my attention more when it comes to performing arts meeting technology, perhaps as it is challenging on many levels, from thinking, to working or performing just as well. Networks, telepresence, virtual reality, information exchange, digital mobility, online tools are just a few elements of this intricate web of new topics that in some ways are tackled in performing arts. **The body is being re-discussed on stage, or presence itself is being analysed as filtered through thoughts on virtual reality and virtual space; digital tools play an important role in the way we work; Facebook, chatroulette or Skype have made their way onto the stage***<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> *To name just the example of the performance we saw together - iShow, which uses many of the popular social networks or online tools - skype, chat roulette, facebook, wikipedia, youtube, etc.: <http://leishow.com/the-ishow/>*

*Topics like the Internet of Things do or surely will come to the attention of performing artists, for sure, just as anything that has some political or social impact ends up being discussed by artists, sometimes even in contexts where topics might come to the attention of the audience for the first time in a theatre space or in the form of a performance. But besides just tackling subjects such as this one, **it might be possible that the norms, the form, the space of performing arts as we know it now might change in the near future as rapidly as the Internet of Things is estimated to grow in impact.** It's very plausible that we will see performances with humans and robots on the same stage soon enough to imagine that people will be laughing at reading these naive prophecies fifty years from now, when things might have already passed to a next level of advancement that is hard to predict today...*

*But before we get caught by the wave of prophecies about the future, would you have some thoughts on what could be the challenges of implementing technologies and platforms in the arts? Do you think there's ever a danger that technology could trump creativity?*

**MB:** No, I think that human creativity will exist forever, as it's one of the features of humanity: we are creative regardless of the situation. However this creativity can be more or less dependent on technologies and, worse, more or less informed by them (in the sense of taking their form): we need to stay vigilant and avoid falling into technological fetishism, i.e. considering technology as a goal in itself. **This is probably the biggest challenge for the artistic domain: knowing, using wisely and calling into question information technologies, without succumbing to technological**

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.wired.com/2014/11/the-internet-of-things-bigger/>



**fetishism** (as, for instance, some followers of [transhumanism](#) do). Our creativity must not automatically take the form that technology imposes with its possibilities and impossibilities. **Technology must remain a tool and one of many possible forms and it should remain at the service of creativity – not the other way around!**

**CB:** *Talking about challenges and possible threats - the digital era opened many doors in terms of audience development, artistic tools, variety of media, marketing and interaction or participation. But at the same time it brought along many concerns for art makers and producers - audiences seem harder to catch, digital instruments seem superficial; we are afraid technology is killing the analogue and digital tools seem harder to keep track of and be updated. But the most persistent of all seems to be a widespread concern that technology is suffocating live performance, prevailing in people's choices as a medium over direct experience, changing people's appetite for the stage while winning more territory for the screen. Do you think it is the case? Should theatre makers be afraid that live experience, emotion and performance is endangered by mediated content that people prefer to consume at home, in front of the screen?*

**MB:** I don't know the artistic and theatre scene well enough to give an opinion about the current situation or to foresee the

future in this field. However I could offer some parallels with television as food for thought.

Actually if we look at the medium of television it's clear that information technologies and the web have transformed usage habits. Before, viewers gathered together in front of the television at fixed hours to watch certain programmes that were available on a limited number of channels. Today we're in the era of the 'à la carte' and hyperindividualism (to use the philosopher [Lipovetsky's](#) term) and each person decides to watch what s/he wants, when s/he wants, on the screen s/he wants, mainly by her/himself and choosing from an incredible number of programmes and channels. It is not surprising that streaming and on demand services like Netflix are so successful; they mirror current tv habits. The viewer doesn't want to be dependent on a specific timing and on a fixed screen to watch the programmes; s/he wants to be 'free'.

There follow several consequences. First, tv is not the medium it used to be and it has been completely revamped: by the way, borders between traditional and web diffusion are fading, the same goes for the genres that are being reinvented (tv series' vs web series', documentaries vs interactive documentaries, etc.). Certain programmes

are only available on the web while more and more traditional tv programs are also available online, on demand. Certain programmes, watched especially by young people, are followed much more online than on the 'classic' tv. Tv habits change together with technologies: for example, we now watch tv series' one after another, 2-3 episodes in a row, instead of waiting until the next week for the next episode. **Do we see more 'individualism' here? That's for sure. However, some socialising phenomena are also appearing...**

One of the phenomena that few specialists had foreseen is the popularity of giant public screens (in cinemas, performance spaces, in bars and restaurants etc.) to watch tv programmes in a group. Whether sports matches or the final episode of a series like *Game of Thrones* (which was screened simultaneously in cinemas and on tv in the USA), viewers (or are they all cybernauts nowadays?) again want to gather to collectively participate in a media experience. **Like before, we watch tv together because the energy of a group, of a crowd, is irreplaceable.**

The same happens with music: listeners listen to their music online, 'à la carte', but they still go to concerts. The shows have an added value (to use an economic term) that individual online listening will never offer: seeing one's favourite singers and stars, listening to a unique sound quality, sharing a specific experience with other fans, etc. Yet the music industry has taken a (too) long time to adapt to the transformations brought by information technologies and the web, and for many years while they were denying these changes, illegal file sharing spread (for example through Napster and the torrents). Criminalisation has not been a viable solution: the industry had to adapt and propose a new model, fitting in with new listening habits (e.g. with iTunes), making concerts the main source of income for the artists (the price of tickets is increasingly high and yet they still sell very well...) or offering exclusive products (e.g. vinyl records signed by the artists). Instead of controlling music-sharing, the circulation of music and video clips is seen as promotion and the more they circulate, the more the marketing campaign is effective.



Watching by the people (source: [Surveillance in Canada](#))

What parallels can we establish with the performing arts? As you know this field much better than I do and you have worked in it for years, I'd like to return the question to you. Instead of 'killing' the performing arts, do information technologies allow for a multiplication of genres, to provoke hybridisations, to explore new theatrical forms and performances? These technologies certainly transform the habits of the audience, especially among young people, but do such changes replace the 'classic' spectator or do they propose 'new' spectators, be it in theatres or on the web? Could we think that, as with television, we will always want to gather in order to live through some shared experience in the same physical space? Or, instead of transforming at the same rhythm of technical devices, must the performing arts – which have always been a privileged place for social and political critique – resist this technological tidal wave by keeping their traditional form (i.e. being subversive by resisting to change)?

**CB:** I see that the usage of digital media is still in many cases a comfortable and handy option for many artists to affordably create a space and visual context that otherwise could be hard to create, especially in terms of costs and production time. Many use video, sound and image produced digitally for the same reasons artists use the body as a form of expression – because it's cheap and it comes in handy. This observation, though, is not to underestimate the power of these tools on performing arts: **the inclusion of digital technologies as a medium of expression has opened many perspectives and has created a space of innovation and creativity in the arts maybe more than any other.** Another territory I see holding great openness is also that of **collaboration** – when your artistic options draw you towards fields you can not control or have limited knowledge about, the drive for collaborating with those who are into technology, science, theory, etc. comes naturally. I think artists increasingly collaborate with insiders from different other fields – whether geeks, scientists, thinkers...

**No matter what the reason for choosing to work with digital technology might be, this definitely opens up towards a certain hybridisation of genres and media,** and we

*will surely see more and more of these hybrid forms of expression in the future in performing arts as well, which might demand a new baggage of critical thinking and theory and which might be hard to digest by the more conservative among us, attached to traditional forms more than to innovation. And if it's not as a response to the wishes and tastes of our audiences, the performing arts will change because its makers will change. They are already the digital natives we might see as our 'fresh audience', but who are already the 'fresh makers' in the arts. Those who are attached in their day-to-day life to digital technologies, will also bring them on stage; it is an undeniable reality which we already see happening.*

*I think a certain resistance will also exist, just as there was always resistance, no matter what the changes in the arts have been. But we might also over-rate the rhythm and the impact of these shifts if we are assuming we don't change but only the world around us does. I think technology impacts our way of seeing and 'using' the world in such a way that we are already well equipped for whatever novelty might appear, and we are fit to adapt. **Some things are hardly endangered though – such as our need for live-ness, for human connection, for sociability, for physical space, which are still strong points in the choice of audience for live performance.** In one article I read recently that analysed audience profiling in public theatres in the US, the top reason why people said they wouldn't go to a theatre was not having someone to go with, not because a better show would be on tv or because they would prefer to stay on Facebook. Maybe we have bigger worries in our societies and we are just looking at the wrong answers, or questions...*

On the other hand, performing arts is a field where the audience plays an important role and shapes our work, and even if we as artists or producers keep the same habits, our audiences do change in this sense<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> 'We've got to open up the definition of what theater is... If the show happens at midnight on Friday night, instead of starting at 8 P.M., that means what? What if the show is 10 minutes long? Or an hour long? What if you dance for 45 minutes before the show begins? Create a space that turns the rules on its head... This audience isn't one that 'goes to the theater'—they go out at night. They want to be

*A lot of our young public today is made of digital natives, and we probably should ask ourselves how much that influences our work and approach to audience development...*

**MB:** I don't think that denying the changes in the habits of cultural consumption brought about by information technologies (as done by the music industry in the 1990s and 2000s) is a good strategy, in the long term, for the performing arts, especially if the goal is to attract new audiences and to increase audience numbers. Of course there is no good answer nor a single solution, but **understanding the technological universe of the younger generations and the meaning they give to their practices would certainly help the performing arts scene to adapt to our current age** – whether regarding marketing, the themes tackled, the forms of the performances, the role of the venue, communication with the audience or the place of the technical devices in the performance etc. You're absolutely right to say that in any case the sector is, and will be increasingly made up of digital natives who were born with these technologies and understand them differently. Technologies will definitely be integrated intuitively in all parts of the sector and will continue to evolve as tools of expression, protest, political and artistic resistance for the creators.

**CB:** The topic of politics is precisely where I was thinking to go next. As the internet, the digital in the broad sense, is a terrain filled just as much with political meaning as the 'real world', in the same way we have drawn the conclusion that the line between real and virtual is far from being as thick as we generally assume it is. We have on one side the neoliberal, individualistic side of the story, the interest of private owners who control much of the digital space, while at the same time

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*in the presence of others, to socialize; they need that release—which theater can provide, like the mosh pit of Shakespeare's Globe Theater, or the festivals of fifth-century Athens. The theater needs to be something where you feel: "I have to experience it." Not just read or see it. People are craving experience—they are desperate for experience.' Diane Paulus, artistic director of the American Repertory Theater, in: <http://harvardmagazine.com/2012/01/the-future-of-theater>*

it is also a space of extremely creative forms of cooperation, exchange, sharing, etc. Do you see in this sense something worth learning from on a political level in the way things work in the digital space rather than how we are used to see them in the real world? Do you see any potential of change in the long term that could be a direct result of the way digital technologies impact our existence?

**MB:** If the neoliberal approach and massive surveillance unfortunately dominate the web, this is also an incredible place for the diffusion of information (staying informed is the key for any political action), for gathering (we can easily communicate with citizens, artists and activists around the world) and for coordination of actions. Of course activists are easily 'watched', even by democratic governments, but certain technologies allow encryptage of communications and doing things that were not possible in the past. For example some Iranian bloggers have been able to talk about their daily lives to cybernauts. Increasingly powerful groups can also act to inform the population (e.g. [Wikileaks](#)) or to defend civil liberties (e.g. [Anonymous](#)).

The solidarity economy, for example, has been able to develop to a certain extent – although not yet enough – partly thanks to the internet, since it allows citizens to spread information about economic alternatives (in spite of what they would have us believe, alternatives to capitalism do exist!); to coordinate actions, for example organising collective activities or exchanges of goods and services; to facilitate certain actions, for example by developing [apps for smartphones](#) which help workers or foster fair consumption by suggesting, at the grocery, which foods should be avoided and which to choose (e.g. [sustainable fishing](#)).

For artists, information technologies represent an immense playground. As you mentioned, digital works or works that use such technologies for diffusion are ever more widespread and show an increasing command of technologies. The messages these technologies transmit, the experiences they arouse and the emotions they provoke can impact on big audiences in a unique way. However **we have to remain vigilant and protect this digital space**



*'...the best solution will always be to consider carefully what we send online – information, pictures, discussions: once it's uploaded, you'll never be 100% sure it will stay private!'* (picture: Malcolm Campbell, [The Whisper](#))

**from the neoliberal will to control it to the advantage of the economic world, and to the detriment of the civic world.** Repeatedly, activists everywhere in the world have to fight in order to protect this public space, and we – as citizens, even if we're not activists – have to be aware of the stakes. The weight of neoliberal interests is very heavy and it threatens citizens' rights.

**CB: It's precisely these threats that I feel we should put in balance with our frequent naivety that makes us take for granted some of the technological developments we embrace.** *As we discussed before these are not neutral and need to be taken with a certain critical and cautious eye. Let's talk a bit more about this - do you have some concrete examples in mind? Can you see some connection with the 'creative' sector and any territories where creativity plays a role we should pay attention to?*

**MB:** What worries me most is the almost systematic diversion of all that we do towards some private economic interest. For example, we now speak of '[communicative capitalism](#)'<sup>4</sup>, i.e. making profits out of our communications. The economic model of Facebook, for example, is based on this logic: the more we communicate via Facebook, the more content we share there, the more we're active, the more the enterprise gains profits. If all the cybernauts left that platform, the enterprise would collapse: then it's not surprising that big consortia like Google, Apple, Facebook, Microsoft or Amazon try to diversify their services so that we use them more and more. **The more active we are, the more they'll get rich! We have to understand that they capitalise on our social relationships** – something quite new in history!

<sup>4</sup> See this talk by Jodi Dean on 'The Limits of the Web in an Age of Communicative Capitalism': [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ly\\_uN3zbQSU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ly_uN3zbQSU)



In the same way, while we install more and more free or very cheap apps on our telephones, we have to understand that the developers have to make profits: the economic model consists in giving the application to the users, taking in return a certain amount of personal information (including geolocation, very valuable information!) that is sold to third parties (e.g. data brokers), who in turn sell this data to companies interested in knowing as much as possible about our habits. A sentence which summarises this system is well known: **'if it's free, you're the product!'**

For a long time now we have been talking about capitalism based on innovation, meaning that capitalism needs novelty in order to renew itself and to sell new products non-stop. For example, innovations and creations of individuals are largely taken over by big enterprises when they become profitable. The crowdfunding platforms perfectly demonstrate this model: some individuals take risks and propose their inventions; other individuals take the risk to finance such innovations in order to support them. Then, when certain projects stand out and become 'profitable' they're bought by enterprises that consequently cash in on the profits. In this sense, the risks are collectivised (the individuals funding it assume the risk) and the profits

are privatised (the big enterprises buy only the projects which become successful and profitable). This system also provides an argument for the disinvestment of the State: I've even seen that, in the middle of the Greek crisis, a [crowdfunding campaign](#) was created to reimburse the [Greek debt!](#) For you in the arts this phenomenon should be of particular interest especially since it's becoming more and more frequent in the arts field.

On these topics it is interesting to mention **a few alternatives to the current trends** – not 'global and radical solutions', but at least some chances to act.

First of all, as I already said (but we'll never stress it enough!), [the first step is to be informed](#): the more we understand the stakes and the techno-economic mechanisms, the better we can take action in order to defend our individual and collective rights.

Then there are some tools to act more concretely: the Electronic Frontier Foundation offers a very interesting '[self-defence project](#)' to begin with.

Of course, there's also the whole [open source movement](#), providing informatics solutions with an openly accessible code

and allowing for the development of alternatives to 'proprietary' products that are increasingly opaque. So, for example, why not browse with [Mozilla's Firefox](#) instead of Explorer or Chrome? And why not search via [DuckDuckGo](#) instead of Google?

Plug-ins like [AdBlock](#) prevent targeted advertisements from opening and bypass (at least partially) the commerce of personal data aimed at profiling.

By the way, when it comes to privacy protection, one should be careful with the 'solutions' offered by more and more companies, as [some are lures](#). Others instead are really interesting, like Mozilla's plug-in [TrackMeNot](#). However, the best solution will always be to consider carefully what we send online – information, pictures, discussions: once it's uploaded, you'll never be 100% sure it will stay private!

Finally, if you want to dig further, [other possibilities](#) are offered by e-mail systems, online chats etc.

In other words: we can (quite) easily adopt some of the numerous alternatives available, if we're willing to!