



by Alison Ordnung on 12/03/2014

When your core medium is the Internet, studio visits are largely relegated to the (albeit expansive) browser and computer screen. But today I'm being given a glimpse into **Constant Dullaart's** Berlin space. It's an opportunity to snoop around: printed piles of some of his ideas, upcoming projects, and documents relating to his recently launched company, **DullTech**.

Spending three months in China on an artist residency and exploring the industrial urban sites of the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong province of the country's south, Dullaart decided to make his own company. DullTech primarily manufactures media players for showing video work in galleries and museums. The USB box syncs up wirelessly to project video work, offering what he sees as a much more effective alternative to other methods. It's produced in a factory in Shenzhen, where it isn't always easy to gain access: "In order to get into those factories you have to pose as a businessman but that felt so artificial", he says laughing at the idea that, as an artist, he could play that role convincingly. "Until I had an idea, and then all of a sudden I was a businessman and I could go in."



Constant Dullaart, 'The Death of the URL' (2013). Image courtesy the artist.

Similarly, the media player is a kind of Trojan horse, presenting Dullaart's own work as a default. It's a method of distribution that he says stems from the tradition of mail art—a movement built on the idea of subverting hierarchical art distribution networks through the postal service. When galleries test out the media player in the space, without their own content inputted, his work will automatically show up.

On a smaller scale, DullTech is also producing a device called 'Anti-Sleep.' It's a small radio that plays

loops from GarageBand on rapid shuffle. It works like a car radio that is continuously on scan: the perpetual starting over designed to keep you awake (and probably really annoy you).

Dullaart's work often deals with changing mechanisms of control in the online world. His piece 'The Death of the URL' consists of 38 'x's, followed by the porn domain name .xxx and is posed as a nostalgic commemoration of a foregone mode of interacting with the web and an acknowledgement that, increasingly, we spend most of our time online interacting with proprietary systems and corporate software. As a political and poetic gesture, Dullaart gave away his Facebook profile in a performance at the New Museum in 2012. His Facebook identity was taken over by someone else, asking them to change the password to block his own access. He then made a film – 'Crystal Pillars' – documenting his confusion in the aftermath: "it was like social cold turkey."



In 2008, Dullaart launched the first in a series of animated interventions into the Google site, thedisagreeinginternet.com. He was aware that the company's claims to neutrality were questionable at best and decided to give it an explicit opinion: so now it shakes its proverbial head ("the internet says "no"). Later, he made therevolvinginternet.com, which became a hit, even with Google itself. After disabling the hack but without explicitly acknowledging his piece (though it was spread widely on social media with #Google) the company implanted its own Easter egg into their search engine two weeks later: if you type "Do a Barrel Roll" in the search engine, the screen will revolve.

"Imagine that Rauschenberg would make a collage but with live content. You're manipulating a way of seeing something that is happening right now," Dullaart says, clearly passionate about the political impact of his work and excited by the idea of it becoming a collective project, "what the Internet stood for, for a long time, is something that I'm still nostalgically supporting. I think that was a beautiful system but it's gone, over."

aqnb: I'm interested in the politics behind your work: the Internet as public space and the way you critique the privatizing impulses that are taking hold. You occasionally mention your pessimism or skepticism about net artists today and their lack of politics,

in comparison to earlier movements in the 1990s.

CD: I think that only within the last decade people have been accustomed to the fact that they can self-publish very easily. When I was in art school, there was the Internet but it wasn't as common. If you wanted to have your video on TV you had to shoot in broadcast quality. You had to wade through a hierarchical system to get your stuff out there, from curators to journalists to editors. Suddenly, I realized I could find my own audience and get direct responses. I was on this network called "Delicious" where you could share your bookmarks. Through that community I met **Cory Arcangel** and a lot of people that were really inspirational to me.

Now I talk to my 13-year-old niece and she has just reached her 10,000th follower on Tumblr. I asked her how I could find her and she wouldn't tell me, she said it was her secret space. She has this audience but she also has a savvy way of dealing with the space and not connecting it with other identities.

There's a generation of artists now that has a fan-base and access to publishing but they also want the recognition from the hierarchical old system. They start to make very conventional art to be approved by the conventional art system, the gallery. And then you have 'post-internet': getting the visual and aesthetic things happening online and catering to the gallery.

Constant Dullaart. YIA 2013 install view. © Vinciane Verguethen. Image courtesy XPO gallery.

aqnb: In your piece 'the Death of the URL' you seem to be nostalgic about this bygone way of using the Internet. Do you advocate buying domain names and continuing to use the URL?

CD: I advocate this idealist system that it was built on because it was about access to publishing for all. That's the cultural revolution. The Internet was designed to be used by everyone. With a certain amount of technical knowledge –which of course depends on how much time, education and money you have –it was basically accessible. Now we're working in all these corporate backyards. These servers used to be private backyards connecting to each other, making a kind of artificial public space but now it's not public space but a fucking big shopping mall owned by Facebook. We follow their rules, in their proprietary system.

aqnb: You have this series of work exploring the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) economies. In some of your videos, like 'Niagara Falls, Special Economic Zone PRC 1994' (2013), you have footage of tourists at the Window of the World theme park in Shenzhen. Do they know they are being filmed?

CD: Well, there was a big camera there. I got permission to film in the park, officially, but there were some moments when it was a bit awkward. I have a few images –not many because I was kind of freaked out –of a field trip of Chinese soldiers at the park, posing with different sights. They asked me a lot of questions.

aqnb: Do you feel like there's a danger of creating a kind of paternalistic outlook on people in these countries in your work? You called the Internet controls in China "cute" and "naïve" – you might risk taking things out of context or underestimating the cultural struggles at work.

CD: Of course there's a sense of exoticism about another country's cultural artifacts, especially if you

don't understand the language. In this social commentary there's always a certain form of patronisation. I think you will always have that and I definitely don't want to shy away from it. Even talking about the first PhotoShopped image 'Jennifer in Paradise' and redistributing it because you feel that people should see it, has a kind of judgmental aspect: "Sure guy, you might have designed Photoshop but I see a cultural relevance that is larger than your own."

In China, I was trying to comment on the fact that people were relating to an artificial vision of Western society and how this artificiality is displayed. There are many photos of people behaving like tourists, which they are. I was doing the same thing. But I tried to reflect on it as well, and just by reflecting on it it takes on another dimension. But that doesn't mean that it's necessarily paternalistic.



Image courtesy Constant Dullaart.

aqnb: You had planned to do a ceremony around the World Trade Centre replica in the park.

CD: Yes, I think it really places the whole thing in time. It's a beautiful gesture. I wondered how much they had considered the decision not to remove it. If it was an obvious choice it becomes a beautifully placed in time sculptural vision of the world. Within a country where it's hard to travel out, you offer people a touristic version of the rest of the world: you bring it to them. By choosing not to update it, it becomes a record of how the world was at that time.

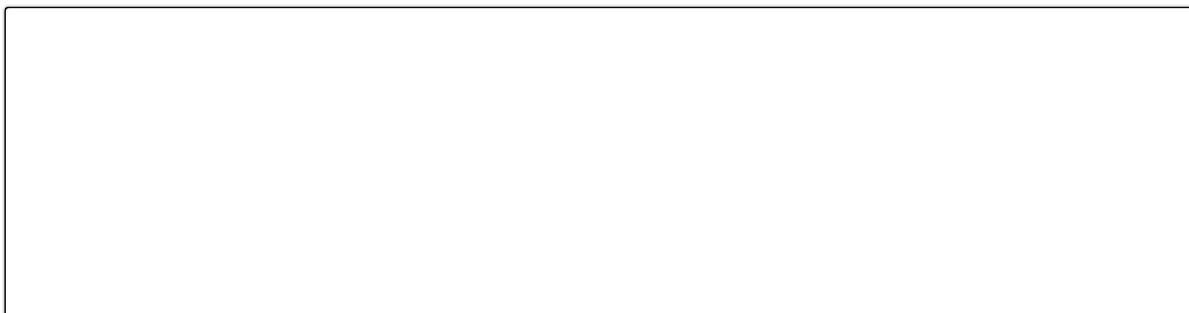
I suggested that when they planned to update it, that we should have a small ceremony where we would invite a couple people and there would be two minutes of silence in the entire park, because there's continuous background music everywhere. A recognition that something changed. The leaders of the park said they were not interested in keeping the park up to date. They like it as it is.

The park was built in 1994 and to me that was a beautiful gesture because my dad died in 1994. It was a vision of the world at the time when my dad was still alive.

aqnb: Tell me about your *open letter to the organizers of the Art Hack Day at transmediale 'Afterglow' this year. You declined their invitation to take part in the event, partly because people weren't being compensated for their work.*

CD: Yes but that wasn't my main problem. Although that did make it hard for people to travel to the event to make their work happen. My main problem with it was that people had 48 hours to prepare something and then they had one of the most interested audiences available in Germany and maybe in Europe. The amount of care they could put in to producing their work was minimal, and they were forced to do it like that. Why did they need to do it as an exhibition? They could have had Art Hack Day and opened it to anyone, the exhibition format was unusual.

I really felt there was a "creative" corporate system at work and it just produced these *Arduino* hacks. But what do we need at this time? We need considerate works. If you're going to collect all these people and have these wonderful talks, then put these works out as they should be and actually contextualize them with other pieces that make strong gestures. Instead of buying into an almost anthropological research into these "funny things" that people are doing, these hacker camps. We should be increasing the level of conversation in a conference like that rather than simplifying it.



aqnb: What are you preparing for the upcoming *Surplus Living group exhibition with km temporaer at the Alte Münze?*

CD: Shortly there will be a release of my manifest, which is called 'Balconism: Balconisation not Balkanisation' ...about how the Balkans is used as a term now, within art criticism, as a separation of certain niches.

We are at a point in time where we have to choose our target audience, we shouldn't just broadcast widely. We're going to stand on this particular balcony and choose to be out in public and we have to define cultural codes of how to do that, otherwise our children won't be able to choose when they are in public and when they're not. Everything is being watched and there are microphones and cameras ready to document everything.

That will be part of the lecture I'm making, which will be projected within a rave. I'll be playing the *BRIC mix* –a collection of local music from Brasil, Russia, India and China, the upcoming industrial economies once dubbed the BRIC countries, remixed to 'euro house'. Local music mixed into this culturally imperialistic structure of Western music. While I was travelling around, it was almost like in the 18th century when you had these 'Grand Tours' when artists would go to Italy and come back to show what they had learned. I felt like this was my contemporary Grand Tour. I'd go to all these up-and-coming industrial economies where they have the means to invite me as an artist and I could go through these music stores looking for music. So I will DJ this mix and initiate a rave. **