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In *Homo Deus*, Yuval Harari states that the twentieth century was the age of the masses. According to Harari, the issue of the masses has disappeared because armies no longer need millions of healthy soldiers and economies no longer employ millions of workers. As the danger – and power – of the masses has dissipated, so have terms such as 'mass media' and 'mass communication'. Whilst the world population is still growing at an exponential rate, the masses are no longer perceived a threat. The crowd is pacified. We are no longer afraid of the pack. Jean Baudrillard was one of the first to theorise the 'implosion' of the masses into the media. Management techniques, aimed to keep the flow going, effectively eliminated the potential for the mob to transform into the mass. They also domesticated consumers by turning them into atomised subjects. Deindustrialisation and neo-liberal individualism did the rest.

In this interview with Jaap van Ginneken, we are tracking these changes by looking at the (dis)appearance of 'mass psychology': a small and short-lived discipline shaped by figures such as Gustave Le Bon, Gabriel Tarde, and Sigmund Freud. For most of his life, Dutch academic van Ginneken has both utilised mass psychology's methods and written its history. His latest contribution is the biography of the German-Dutch Kurt Baschwitz (1886-1968), who can be considered The Netherlands' most influential mass psychologist

(*Kurt Baschwitz, A Pioneer of Communication Studies and Social Psychology*, Amsterdam University Press, 2018).
Baschwitz was an instrumental player in the creation of post-war scholarly networks in the then-new field of mass communication. He pioneered public opinion research and supported the creation of a computer center for the social sciences. But he has since faded into obscurity. Part of the reason for Baschwitz's obscurity, van Ginneken suggests, was his focus on journalism and his wish to address non-academic audiences. It can also be explained by his personal history. Van Ginneken portrays Baschwitz as a liberal Jewish European intellectual. He was neither a Freudian nor a Marxist and, evidently, not a member of the Frankfurt School. In 1933, he fled Germany for Amsterdam – not one of the Anglo-Saxon countries – and did not return after the war. On top of this, Baschwitz did not speak English until later in life and none of his work has so far been translated into English.

Van Ginneken's new book helps to correct Baschwitz's omission from the story of social, political, and mass psychology, as well as mass communication and media studies. This is only the third attempt to document Baschwitz's life. The first was an MA thesis from 1983 by Vera Ebels-Dolanová, written in Dutch. The second was an MA thesis by Dieter Anschlag, written in German. At the same time as the English edition, van Ginneken has published a shorter version of his book in Dutch. The next step will ideally have to be a translation into English of one of Baschwitz's books – his magnus opus on witch hunts perhaps – and the republication of his works in German.

As van Ginneken noted during his book launch, there is still the problem of the widely-felt lack of historical consciousness about the communication science discipline in Amsterdam. Why is there such disinterest? Van Ginneken confronted the audience – filled with eminent communication professors – with the fact that there is not a single course that teaches the philosophy and history of science, although there is some attention for models and history of communication and the discipline itself. Is this the price that Amsterdam pays for its exclusive focus on the Anglo-Saxon quantitative approach? Working as an independent researcher out of Nice, France, van Ginneken has long positioned himself as an outsider. His own studies on contemporary mass psychology have been relatively successful non-fiction titles, albeit outside of academia.

Can a revival of Baschwitz only happen as part of a 'renaissance' of mass psychology? We need an ambitious 'history of ideas' about the rise and fall of

this traumatic discipline that lasted for less than a century, yet managed to map the very core of the last century's troubled psyche. In this respect, ground work has been done by the British documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis, whose *Century of the Self* (2002) features Sigmund Freud's cousin Edward Bernays, who left Austria to found the science of public relations in the United States, based on Freudian notions such as unconscious sexual desires that were addressed in advertisements.

The preoccupation with mass psychology has resurfaced in contemporary media culture. In social media studies we see a renewed interest in the role of psychology and behavioural science in the way Silicon Valley employs unconscious 'addiction by design' techniques that distract billions of users. Scandals such as Cambridge Analytica's use of Facebook data in the 2016 American presidential election have brought the question of 'mass manipulation' back into the popular consciousness. The rise of the Alt-Right and other movements has revived the fascisms and Nazism of the past century, only 'memefied' for the present one. To understand the power dynamics of this moment, there have been calls to return to the work of Nazi Jurist Carl Schmitt. We could instead also look at 'mass psychology'. It is time to return to this mostly-forgotten discipline and to ask what its present can teach us about ours.

Geert Lovink: In your biography, you've painted a picture of Baschwitz as a careful, sometimes-liberal, sometimes-conservative journalist-turned-scholar who believed that the majority of people are decent. It was through his personal experiences after the First World War, the inflation, and the crisis years that he turned his attention to media and mass psychology, like so many of his generation.

Jaap van Ginneken: His life was dramatic and his works are often fascinating. His books were a reflection on his own personal experiences. As a young journalist in Hamburg, he was suddenly sent to become a foreign correspondent in neutral Rotterdam halfway through the First World War, because his predecessor had been arrested [and] accused of being a spy. After his return to the Weimar Republic, he rose to become the editor-in-chief of an influential weekly for newspaper publishers. But when Hitler came to power, he was suddenly 'discovered' to be an ethnic Jew (his children did not even know) and had to scramble to flee to Amsterdam. After some lobbying, he became a largely unpaid 'private lecturer' in press studies at the Municipal University (now UvA). He also joined an 'Information Bureau' documenting

anti-Semitism in Germany – a forerunner of a major Holocaust museum in London – and the International Institute of Social History that smuggled archives of leftist luminaries out of Germany.

During the war, he was arrested in a razzia and brought to the Dutch transit camp Westerbork for deportation to the East and certain death. His daughter got him out with a mix of real and false papers. He went into hiding; she joined the resistance. After the liberation, he became a regular lecturer, then professor, of press studies. He founded a string of institutions in the field: both nationally and internationally. A renovated press museum, a press library, a press studies department, and also journalism courses. But the common denominator of his six books can be brought under the broad heading of 'mass psychology'.

Baschwitz's 1923 work on propaganda and enemy images was praised in the Ph.D. thesis that Harold Lasswell did on the subject (in 1927) for Charles Merriam at Chicago; they became the founders of political science, political communication, and political psychology in the U.S. This and other pre-war works by Baschwitz did also already hit on several notions that were later rediscovered and developed further by post-war American social scientists – often also with Jewish and/or German roots. One example is his 'hierarchical principle', related to 'opinion leadership' and the 'two-step flow' of communications, developed by Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld. Another example is his 'evening out', our tendency of bringing thoughts, feelings, and actions in line with each other, related to 'cognitive dissonance reduction', developed by Leon Festinger. But Baschwitz got stuck in The Netherlands. None of his works were translated into English, and he remains largely unknown to the present-day international world of his colleagues.

Lovink: The similarity, but also the contrast to, Siegfried Kracauer is striking. Last summer, I read the impressive Kracauer biography by Jörg Später. Kracauer was a journalist too. He ended up in the Frankfurt School circles and managed to migrate to America, whereas Baschwitz remained in The Netherlands and went into hiding. Can you contrast the two for us?

van Ginneken: I am not very familiar with Kracauer, more with other authors of the Frankfurt School (and also, for instance, the younger Wilhelm Reich); with whom, during the seventies, I felt closely connected, like many others of my generation. Although they dealt with somewhat similar themes – such as mass media, mass movements, and fascism – Baschwitz seems to have been mostly unaware of the Frankfurt School's work, both before and after the Second World War. Baschwitz was, in essence, not a critic of modern

society. He was an erudite who came from economics. He was not really a sociologist or psychologist, although he dabbled in both. In his books, he was first and foremost a mass psychologist – a strange and ill-defined, in-between field. Furthermore, he never felt attracted to Marxism and remained imbued with the anti-communism and anti-socialism of his middle-class milieu.

Lovink: 'Mass psychology' as a discipline started off with conservatives, such as Le Bon [*The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*]. Baschwitz published his first book in 1923, around the same time as Sigmund Freud's essay on the topic appeared [*Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*], although his own book on mass politics came out only fifteen years later. Can we read this latter work as an attempt to neutralise the ill-understood power of the mob? What exactly was the original task of 'mass psychology'? Do we have to read it as the well-off middle class primal fear of the mob that is after their wealth?

van Ginneken: The field was originally inspired by the primal fear of the mob, of social revolutions. For Jewish authors like Baschwitz and, particularly, Freud, this was also linked to an unspoken fear of the pogroms in Eastern Europe. But there was a wide range of different approaches, and they were not all conservative. The first monograph on the subject, *La folla delinquente*, was an 1890 Master's thesis by Scipio Sighele, an Italian irrendentist and, later, a nationalist leader. The work was inspired by his professor, Enrico Ferri – a noted leader of the socialist party. As a lawyer, Ferri had defended many proletarians caught in riots, using mass psychology as an attenuating circumstance. He argued that those people were only 'occasional' offenders, not 'habitual' ones, let alone 'born' criminals. Ferri belonged to the new 'positivist' school of criminology founded by Cesare Lombroso, who pleaded for a 'scientific' study of crimes and criminals, not a moralistic one. But all original mass psychologists – also the Frenchmen Henry Fournial, Tarde, and Le Bon – felt that the crowd tended to lower the moral and intellectual level of the individual caught in it.

Baschwitz argued against this. He tried to show that in many major instances of psychological derailments, it had been by contrast the authorities and the silent majority who had capitulated before a terrorising minority. After the fact, they would then tend to exaggerate 'the dark unstoppable force' of the crowd, to exculpate themselves; as a result of the mental mechanism of 'evening out' – an early version of Leon Festinger's later 'cognitive dissonance reduction', where we tend to bring thoughts, feelings, and acts more in

line with each other. Gradually, however, the field of mass psychology widened: from the study of mobs and crowds to social movements and opinion currents.

Baschwitz said that whereas 'visible' crowds presupposed physical proximity, 'invisible' masses just presupposed a psychological connection. They might be spread out, but communicated through various channels. He mentioned newspaper audiences that were far larger than a crowd on an average city square. In the course of time, all kinds of volatile phenomena turned out to have certain aspects in common: financial manias and bubbles; fashions and fads; moral outrages and social panics. Rumors and hearsay are interesting related fields. Today, 'meme' theory has enriched our understanding, whereas internet research allows tracking the spreading of new terms and specific new stories around the world. One should add that early American approaches to 'collective behavior' had already contained less of a value judgment than the earlier, European ones. This holds for the 'natural history' approach of emergent social phenomena postulated by Robert Park and the Chicago School of Sociology; and the 'symbolic interactionist' approach postulated by Herbert Blumer and his pupils. In my student days, we read the overview books by Neil Smelser, by Kurt and Gladys Lang, by Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian. Meanwhile, the old mass psychology of the Roman or Latin school had been superseded by the deindividuation approach to crowds and mobs formulated by social psychologist Philip Zimbardo [more familiar for his famous Stanford Prison Experiment].

Lovink: Baschwitz's first book, *Mass Delusions* – on mass propaganda and enemy images – is an as-yet-unknown classic. Evgeny Morozov's first book, from 2011, is titled *The Net Delusion*. This topic is for all times. We're duped by words and images; they mesmerise us. What was Baschwitz's prime concern at the time? Was it anti-communism and the fear of the 'red danger'?

van Ginneken: It began as, simply, a polemic against allied propaganda during the First World War and the Versailles negotiations after it – both disastrous for his own Germany. But the interesting thing is that it gradually veered into a very early reflection on the socio-dynamics and psychodynamics of enemy images. In mainstream social science, this only returned to the fore half a century later, during the Cold War. New social-psychological theories about conflict, escalation, and attribution of motives to people and causes to events had by then prepared the ground for 'polemology' – or war studies – and 'irenology' – or peace studies – both in North America and

Western Europe. Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung was a prominent exponent. At the end of his life, Baschwitz took notice of the work of a major Dutch exponent of these studies, Bert Röling, who was a professor of international law at Groningen University. But the latter's intellectual heritage was mismanaged by his successors and the initiative petered out there, although it was taken up by Leon Wecke in Nijmegen. But mainstream political and military authorities in all NATO countries resented the relativist slant of the entire field and opposed it as 'non-objective', although some of it now survives within the wider domain of the 'psychology of politics' or political psychology. This has an international society and annual meetings, a scholarly journal, handbooks, and endless monographs about various sub-domains. Mediation studies, in a variety of fields, are also a spin-off. With regard to state conflicts such as Malaysia/Indonesia, Turkish and Greek Cyprus, Palestine and Israel, Morton Deutsch and Herbert Kelman were early exponents.

Lovink: Mass delusions that run into violence, orchestrated by small groups and elites, haven't gone away. In the current Facebook debate, we hear Cambridge Analytica executives explain their clients now operate on the 'emotion center' of users. This sounds very similar to categories Baschwitz developed, such as 'inhibition of thought' and 'emotional arousal'. We seem to be as surprised as a century ago about the instrumentalisation of psychology. Experts in marketing and 'perception management' seem to know this. Many others, even journalists, seem clueless. Could we explain this lack of insight with the disappearance of 'mass psychology' as a discipline? Why do we forget psychology all the time, and what would Baschwitz have to say about this?

van Ginneken: During my own career, I have closely followed 'persuasion studies' and the very latest developments in those fields. One of my popular books in Dutch is named after Vance Packard's *Hidden Persuaders*. It does not only deal with commercial and marketing techniques, but also with political and propaganda techniques. In recent years, the rise in 'brain studies' has of course played a major role.

American psy-ops techniques have proven extremely sophisticated and successful over the last few decades in cultivating new animosities whenever they were needed. With a little effort, one can easily document this, but the mainstream media and politicians do not want to recognise how easily they can be and have been manipulated, time and again. All major military interventions abroad to which our governments and parliaments adhered have, for instance, been preceded by 'fake news' stories: from the invented 'Tonkin

incident' in Vietnam to the invented 'baby massacre' in Kuwait during the First Gulf War to the invented 'weapons of mass destruction' in Iraq during the Second Gulf War. Radical critics such as Noam Chomsky, Edward Herman, and groups close to them, have documented all this. Only if one is well-informed about such techniques can one recognise them. But they are widely ignored.

I tried to publish articles about those hoaxes at the time, but the major media simply weren't interested; they did not want to know and neither does the public. Yet, these interventions have all predictably turned into huge unmitigated disasters. Yesterday, I saw another serious estimate that the Iraq invasion alone cost trillions, something like 25,000 USD per American household, not to mention Iraqi and other households. The same holds for other conflicts, like the never-ending Afghanistan war. Together, they account for a large part of the U.S. deficit. But we seem to be unwilling and incapable of learning the lessons. Parliamentarians come and go; they never build enough critical capacity, experience, and knowledge on these scores.

History may well repeat itself under Trump after he has replaced his former adviser Bannon with his latest adviser Bolton: both far-out, delusional war-mongers. But these are my own pessimist views, not those of Baschwitz. He believed in the optimistic post-war claims of 'the free world'. He might even have subscribed to the 'end of history' illusion propagated by Francis Fukuyama, if he had still been around.

Lovink: In 1948, Baschwitz became professor at the University of Amsterdam. In what? Could you reconstruct the terms that were used back then, in Dutch, German, and English, and tell us how these terms evolved over the decades?

van Ginneken: The terms were always evolving and imprecise. Baschwitz's second book dealt with 'the newspaper through the ages'. One half of his field thus became 'press history', then 'press science', and then 'publicistics' (Publizistik in German), making things public – which later evolved into mass communication and media studies. Note that in 2018 his University of Amsterdam has risen to the number one spot worldwide on the QS word university rankings for those two domains – although they have considerably transformed themselves since his days. Baschwitz's third book was his 1938 *You and the Crowd*, which had warned not to relativise national socialism and to decidedly counter it before it was too late. So, the other half of his field was the Continental European domain of 'mass psychology' run-

ning from mobs to social movements to dynamic phenomena in media audiences and public opinion: bubbles, fads, manias, outrages, scares, et cetera. His portfolio soon also entailed early mainstream opinion polling, which was only introduced to the European continent after the Second World War – whereas it had developed in the U.S. just before it, and during it. For instance: with studies about attitude change, military or civilian morale, both at home and abroad.

Lovink: In the first half of the 20th century, numerous mass psychology studies were conducted, yet they did not result in a separate sub-discipline. Is that correct? The term 'press studies' (*Publizistik*) does not exist in English. Neither does 'publicistics'. At the same time, there was a substantial rise in public opinion research in which Baschwitz played a significant role. In the early 1950s we see the arrival from the US of the term 'mass communication'. The term 'media' only comes into play in the early 1960s and was popularised by figures such as McLuhan. Did Baschwitz talk about 'media' and how did he see implications of the evolutions of these terms?

van Ginneken: No. Baschwitz retired in the late 1950s, before these changes took hold here – although he still played a key role in the preparation and establishment of the International Association of Mass Communication Research, or IAMCR, at UNESCO in Paris in 1959, which remains one of the major global scholarly societies. 'Mass psychology' is a different and interesting field, which, by contrast, has never found appropriate institutional roots anywhere or consistent backing. It primarily deals with very volatile phenomena in a range of different fields: economic, social, political. There is usually an acceleration and intensification of mutual interaction within a large group leading to some kind of outburst, but they soon fade away again thereafter.

After a major crisis, a government committee is often appointed to investigate some resulting tragedy. It comes up with an elaborate case report after three or four years, when everything is already mostly forgotten, so it is then easy to put it all away in a drawer. But there are very few lasting institutions dealing with the specific particularities of such phenomena, for instance their fundamental capriciousness, similar to chaos and the sudden emergence of new patterns within 'complex adaptive systems' – think of the weather. Nonlinearity plays a role: immeasurably small differences may have immeasurably large consequences. These phenomena do not fit in with the widespread superstitions of 'positivist' and mechanic social science, of precise 'measurement', leading to cocksure prediction and ultimate control. They presume

proportionality. Of course, these researchers are 'naive empiricists'; also because epistemology and science history are often not included in the curriculum, they remain happily unaware of that.

My own work is in part focused on the history and successive paradigm shifts within social, political, and 'mass psychology' (for instance in my books on crowds and on mass movements); or even on the hidden assumptions of polling (for instance in *Collective Behavior and Public Opinion*, which deals with seemingly incomprehensible 'rapid shifts'). In recent years, I have also taken a critical look at mass psychology and the myths concerning 'charisma' and 'hubris' (in *The Profile of Leaders*, and *Temptations at the Top*). These studies are closer to Baschwitz's original approach of 'comparative social history': spelling out different instances of a phenomenon, laying them side-by-side, trying to distill recurring processes at work. That's what he did in the latter half of his work, for instance, on mass persecutions and witch hunts.

This work began with a 1941 monograph on the Weighing House in the small Dutch town Oudewater, which exonerated presumed witches from being 'too light'. At the time, implicitly, the monograph was of course also a reflection on other more contemporary forms of mass persecution – in particular that of Jews. After the war, this was followed by a wider ranging book about 'The struggle against the devil'. And after he had retired, it was followed by his ultimate study, *Witches and Witch Trials*. This study exerted influence in the Germanic world and was translated into French and Japanese, but not into English. Needless to say, the mechanisms of witch hunts survive up to today in many different forms.

Lovink: Baschwitz died in a turbulent period, in early 1968 – before the Prague Spring and the Paris student revolt. Soon after, an institute that had been founded within the social and political science faculty of the University of Amsterdam was re-named after him. It did not have any connections with the psychology discipline. Can you tell us something about the atmosphere there? What where the concerns of staff and students? I arrived in 1977 and remember that it was considered very cool. The preoccupation there with the difficult, big traumas of the 20th century was clear. Was it a politicised intellectual environment?

van Ginneken: Baschwitz's heritage had been split. On the one hand, there was the press studies heritage, later brought under a 'seminarium' for the study of the means of communication led by Maarten Rooij, a former editor-in-chief of the respectable daily *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* (later joined with the Amsterdam *Algemeen Handelsblad*). On the other hand, there

was the seminarium for 'mass psychology', public opinion and propaganda led by the younger social psychologist Marten Brouwer, who had done a doctoral dissertation on stereotypes. It was this latter part that was later temporarily relabeled 'The Baschwitz Institute'. Both were inside the faculty for Political and Social Sciences of the University of Amsterdam. The staff of this latter institute grew to a dozen people or so, each with different individual interests; for instance from book reading to broadcasting organisations. I came in 1967 as a student assistant, and did all three practical parts of my 1970 Master's exam in social psychology on the Provos – the highly innovative Amsterdam anarchist-utopian movement of those days. A few colleagues were radicals like myself, but the whole group was somewhat 'socially engaged' in one way or another, as when we did a common study on the newspaper coverage of the student occupation of the Maagdenhuis administrative center of the University in 1969. It was a wonderful group, and an interesting time.

Lovink: Baschwitz used psycho-analytic terms and methods and combined these with less scientific journalistic writings and early forms of public opinion research. His approach, we could say, has fallen between the cracks, as he was neither a hardcore mass communication scholar nor a media critic in the Frankfurt school tradition. These days, there is no place anymore for Baschwitz, precisely because of the US-centric positivist approach that dominates the highly successful Amsterdam Media and Communications program. In that sense, your book seems untimely. At the book launch, you said that Baschwitz himself would never get a job in the communication department of the University of Amsterdam today, let alone get tenure. There is neither much interest – as of yet – on the humanities side of media studies for this work elsewhere nor for the legacy of mass psychology at large, although Baschwitz would fit into media studies in a better way. Is this all just irrelevant disciplinary noise or is there more to this?

van Ginneken: Times have changed. But it is also the major tragedy of present-day social science and communication studies, in my opinion. They are 'gamma' fields, but aspire to be 'beta' hard sciences around a cult of numbers – the implications of which are often ill-understood by those who constantly invoke them – and largely ignore the 'alpha' side of the meaning of words and images – including inevitable layered-ness and ambiguity, that is to say inescapable complexity. This reductionism is a grave illusion. It ultimately tends to favour the status quo and current clichés that are simply taken for granted, without thorough inspection. Although I should admit that

in recent years there has been marginally more room for qualitative research and discourse analysis. But the main question now is of course how research can best be legitimised to the outside world as quasi-objective and definitive. Government services and commercial corporations have become the dominant funders of academic research. The pendulum has entirely swung back from the 1960s and 1970s, when younger scholars felt it their obligation to try and criticise such established institutions and their ways of doing and representing things. I myself tried to do so in my media books *Understanding Global News* and *Screening Difference*, in which I deconstructed the representation of intercultural encounters in major blockbuster movies that falsely claim to be based on a simple truth about historical or topical events. But this was not Baschwitz's 'cup of tea': it was typically the preoccupation of a later generation of baby-boomer scholars at the one-time 'Baschwitz Institute'.

Lovink: My period in 1983 at the Baschwitz Institute was formative. We read and discussed Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* and Klaus Theweleit's wild, two volume psycho-analysis of the German male fascist, *Male Fantasies*. Can you tell us why the institute was closed soon after? I found the remainders a decade later inside the UvA communication library. Thirty years later this episode is completely forgotten. You revived it with your biography. What could be possible next steps concerning the Baschwitz legacy and that of his related institute?

van Ginneken: There was a lot of interest in Frankfurt School-like approaches among us, but we ourselves produced little on this score. I myself moved to Paris for my doctoral dissertation, followed some lectures at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, but also by Michel Foucault at the Collège de France. This got me interested in structuralist and post-structuralist critical thought – often also inspired by neo-Marxist and/or neo-Freudian approaches (by Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan, and many more). I had long been interested in questions of ideology and hegemony, culture and socialisation. But it took me some time to digest this all, and by the time I returned to The Netherlands, the interest in that type of societal critique was already fading. There was an attempt to get back to 'normal'.

At one point, the higher academic authorities felt that the common focus and method of the entire 'mass psychology' group remained unclear and probably also that Marten Brouwer had failed in his management tasks and instead engaged in too many sterile polemics with colleagues elsewhere. So, it was decided to reintegrate the two parts of Baschwitz's heritage into a new ensemble that became 'communication science'. British historian Dennis

McQuail had lifted the field to another level of reflection there and further connected it to the Anglo-American world. But he was no manager either. For this purpose, Jan van Cuilenburg and a group of mainstream scholars were brought in, from the protestant Free University – also in Amsterdam.

Lovink: How can we encourage the young generation to stand up against the uncritical Anglo-Saxon quantitative approach and the related 'paperism' and ranking madness? The pressure on them to conform is real. Would it be strategic to dissolve the difference between humanities and 'social science' in this respect? To be honest, I have roots in both. In some places, this is a non-issue; in others, such as Amsterdam, these have become galaxies that are light years apart, and within different faculties. What's to be done?

van Ginneken: It's a widespread tendency. After the unruly and overly critical 1960s and 1970s, it was difficult to 'restore order' within academia. So, over the years, a number of 'disciplining tactics' were introduced. One had to find outside funds for research, from commissions at established institutions. One had to legitimise oneself through papers condoned by, published in, and quoted by, mainstream Anglo-American periodicals. Not German or French or other ones. The continental European traditions were marginalised.

A few years ago, I did a study of psychological practice in The Netherlands, where the trends are the same. I personally have opted out at an early stage. I have kept only a 30% academic job, usually one teaching trimester per year, enough to pay the rent. I tried to get my own individual research and book projects going, to follow my own agenda, year after year. I look for foundations with an interest in a new subject and a different approach to it. I tried to get those books published both in Dutch and by serious Anglo-American houses, for a minimum degree of acceptance and recognition. I became a professional speaker along the side, a freelancer. What one loses in financial security, one wins in job satisfaction – that's how I survived. At the same time, I tried to keep away from the jargon of critical studies, or at least to always explain it in common sense terms and everyday language. Rather than introducing abstract models, I preferred to start from interesting recent events and case studies, that a wider public more easily relates to. Salient, unexpected, concrete, credible, and emotional stories, according to the 'success' formula of storytelling. For this purpose, I built clipping archives, some 48 movers boxes in all, that I am now discarding. The internet and Wikipedia have meanwhile become convenient sources, although some of the very weirdest true stories and details cannot always be tracked down easily.

I got money for the Baschwitz project from a ‘university history’ fund (before it was disbanded) and the ‘Democracy and Media’ Fund, initiated by the Amsterdam daily *Het Parool* – a former resistance newspaper during the war. Then I ran into vicious circles with Dutch publishers, reviewers, and bookshops: ‘Baschwitz? Never heard of him. Sorry, we’re not interested.’
Baschwitz was an old-fashioned *comparative social historian* rather than a quantitative scholar in his approach of the 4 P’s: press, politics, propaganda, and persecution. He organically extended mass communication to the study of persuasion. This is where his interest in the strange subfield of ‘mass psychology’ came in. He picked up where the widespread superstition in the holy trinity of precise measurement, confident prediction, and ultimate control failed, describing somewhat capricious phenomena, which ‘hard’ science tends to overlook, simply because it cannot deal with them.

Author

Geert Lovink, founding director of the Institute of Network Cultures, is a Dutch-Australian media theorist and critic.