



## FCJ-115 Autocreativity and Organisational Aesthetics in Art Platforms

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### Introduction

Cultural production on the Internet has developed numerous dynamics and consistencies that drive considerations of creativity, organisation and the inter-relations of media. This article presents and briefly discusses the concept of an *art platform*, a particularly resonant form of such cultural production. The article enquires into the ways that powers of operation are constituted by particular kinds of social, technical, aesthetic and ethical forces. The media ecological approach to which this special issue is devoted can be seen as engaging with these forces. Such forces are discussed here via the concepts of *autocreativity* and *organisational aesthetics*. These concepts are in turn traversed and amplified by the particular qualities and potentials of art platforms. [1]

The concepts offered in this article, in particular that of autocreativity, allow connections to be made between diverse approaches to creativity: 'creative industries' jargon and psychological endeavors, philosophical accounts of aesthetics and autonomist Marxist analysis of current cultural production. Creativity is often discussed either with an expectation of exploitation or an overly optimistic sense of freedom found via collaboration (or market value), However, either way the actual practices that thrive on the energy that can be called creative are obscured and unappreciated. *Autocreativity*, as a concept, aims for a kind of vision that is able to see the creative activity that is repressed by both dominant celebratory discourses and overly critical discussions. There is another side to this. Creative cultural activity often takes place in zones that have not yet achieved significance. I will argue that creative activity can become capable of attaining cultural visibility—along with aesthetic brilliance—through the amplification provided by the energy of autocreativity. The theoretical apparatus offered in this article allows for a differentiation between, and recognition of, some of these various energies, as they are manifested in digital folklore and humour, and in absurd and inappropriate experimentation and research. At the same time, various forces and practices of organisation need to be taken into account. I will suggest that such energies, forces and practices in turn generate *art platforms* as new forms of cultural production.

Here aesthetics is understood, in a Nietzschean fashion, as a form of life. Artistic production becomes a mode of labour within, as well as an organisation of, life. Artistic production can be put to work in spheres far removed from the cultural realms described by traditional aesthetics, and exploited by interests far removed from any transformative artistic ethos (Guattari, 1995). How, then, is aesthetic production being constituted today, even as it is constantly appropriated? What are the processes that guide its development from an undefined and emergent state to its actualisations? In a response to such questions, I will discuss outline a general concept of art platforms. I will not describe any of these art platforms themselves in any depth. However, I will use online publication to link to some examples. Here, an 8-bit music platform, Micromusic.net, a software art repository, Runme.org, a network of people, Dorkbot, or 'doing strange things with software' or surfing clubs such as Nasty Nets or Supercentral, are given as examples of art platforms. I suggest that the practices, publics, and means of self-organisation involved in such art platforms, along with their ways of doing and making, and the languages born within these, are very much like those that an organism might produce in order to make an aesthetic difference. In short, art platforms help enunciate cultural forms of life. The clearest markers of art platforms are the in-between-ness of the work involved, and the way in which these art platforms emerge from the mundanity and repetition of culture, and head towards the brilliance of art at its best.

## Art Platforms

How does art become art? The ways in which culture in general takes place, how it disseminates, and in which art enacts itself within the general contexts of culture, are now irreversibly 'co-produced' by networked media technology. In order to understand this, we need to look at the ways in which aesthetic forms of life cut through processes of subjectification and organisation, how they mobilise and reinvent network systems and cultures, and how those, in turn, condition and co-create the forms of life involved. Everyday digital objects and gestures—such as file uploads and downloads, form filling, data submissions, postings, connection failures, protocols, scripts, software affordances and modification parameters—are all plugged in to contemporary aesthetics as I have begun to describe it here. All these digital objects and gestures co-construct the ways in which the individual, cultural, and social spheres are produced, organised and disrupted. Art platforms both conform to, and are part of, this overall development, but they also stand out from them in very striking ways.

Art platforms are complex but we can begin simply: an art platform is a network platform that produces art. An art platform differentiates itself from other portals and art entities by the number of the relations it establishes, and by those that emerge dynamically from within it. As a self-organised, and self-organising, institution, an art platform is flexible. It is also informed and co-developed by users and the aesthetic work that it propels. An art platform can also take the form of a crossroads at the intersection of several systems or actors of different scales and as such may be a momentary expression of creative power. In practical terms, for example, an art platform can be a stand-alone website that, together with other actors, forms an ecology of aesthetic production. However, it might also take place as a subsection of a large participatory platform, or even as a space in-between a corporate service, artists' work, hacking, collaborative engagement and a process of aesthetic generativity. In all these cases, whoever, an art platform engages with a specific current of techno-social creative practices and aims at the amplification of its aesthetic force.

The 'art platform' therefore describes a Website or other ensemble of human-technical objects in terms that are reflective of their own processuality. The art platform acts as a catalyst in the development of a vivid cultural or artistic current. As a locus of activity carried by such a current, it induces the propagation of aesthetic phenomena that transcend the inventory of their formation. As such it is a system for which the behaviour cannot be deduced from the trajectories of its elementary components.

The aesthetic phenomena that emerge through art platforms are of a character that is 'natural' to technical networks. Be it software art, 8-bit music, short stories, 'primitive' web pages, short videos, the scripted behaviours of 3D-objects or recorded re-enactments, the aesthetic phenomena that emerge through art platforms are integral to the art and cultures of the Internet age. More specifically, they delve deep into the exploration of the *materiality* of digital media.

Art platforms are also able to engage with living practices in their blurred and 'dirty' forms, often in-between the more commonly defined arenas of culture and art. Despite their name, art platforms often work with practices that may not conceive of themselves as art per se, but which might yet become art. As such, art platforms aim at mapping wide assemblages of ideas, territories, and invisible practices, in the processes of their emergence, yet these always in the possibility that things might fail to come to fruition. In order to make a successful emergence more likely, art platforms bring together human-technical creativity, repetition, aesthetic amplification, folklore, and humour to generate a cultural organisational mechanism powerful enough to disrupt some of the domineering and stratifying tendencies of digital media, culture and society. They are self-unfolding mechanisms through which cultural life may advance to produce fascinating aesthetic objects and processes. If art platforms seem a kind of displacement of the organisational forces of a previous era, this is because they are an array of forces with which to explore and map the characteristics of the organisation of a new type of cultural emergence.

How do art platforms, as a contemporary marginal avant-garde-like 'genre', relate to the participatory social platforms (aka Web 2.0) that have gained enormous popularity in the recent years? It would be just as misleading to radically divorce the two as to not distinguish between them at all. The task is intricate. Both art platforms and the participatory web feed on the same machinery of creative energy. They build algorithms that attempt to allow them to act spontaneously, in order to take on the warmth of this creative energy's 'throbbing' engines, at the same time making the energy involved more structured or functional, more pleasurable, or accelerated and intense. Both art platforms and the participatory web deal with the human capacities, aesthetics, technology and societal structures that generate what is known as culture. Therefore, this article tends not to distinguish in a hard and fast way between culture at large and art. It is focused on the grey, anomalous zones in which one becomes another and vice versa. Indeed my interest is driven precisely by these processes of conversion. It is through their different allowances for these moments that the participatory web and art platforms may differ from each other, both empirically and conceptually, as particular technical settings and ecologies whose metabolism produces diverging energies.

In general, participatory platforms are not always geared towards creating conditions that might allow for such an aesthetic amplification to occur, or transform itself and become something else. The logic of their operations can often be performed in a more stable manner, pacifying relations between different social systems and functions. It is, however, perfectly possible to create art platforms inside, and as parts of, participatory platforms of different sorts. An art platform may indeed implant itself in the body of the participatory web. Given this parasitic phenomenon, any constellation of code, creativity, sociality, anger, excitement, repetition and amplification may, under certain conditions, become

an art platform.

## The Differentiation of Networks

As a process of emergence, an art platform is then, firstly, an ongoing constellation of objects, codes, emails and the like, decisions, projects, databases, struggles, inspiration, explosive ideas, mundane work and conflict. An art platform is therefore a particular type of practice. Secondly, however, it is a type of network, a genre of network organisation. Thirdly, if the art platform is also a conceptual device, as described above, it is one that allows for a differentiation and problematisation of networks.

The concept of the network has a complex history and present configuration in the cultural sphere. More recently, and especially in the social sciences, and especially in the context of Latour's actor network theory (ANT), the network has been celebrated as a conceptual device that allowed for an acute analysis of the performance of transversal relations among actors of different types and orders that constitute the social as a certain kind of circulation rather than a fixed entity (Latour, 2006: 19). In ANT, the concept of the network was conceived as a means to address societal processes without withdrawing into a closed, cultured and mechanical universe of the traditional 'institution' and 'organisation'. Such an idea of the network has been at the core of the struggle against certain normative, essentialist and linear causality accounts of modernity. The concept has also carried with it the rhizomatic thought of Deleuze and Guattari. Rhizomatic thought is a conceptual practice introducing deformation, disequilibrium and asymmetry. It dissolves existing structures in order to compose different ones through non-linear processes of conjunction and change (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). The network, in the light of the rhizomatic, was conceived in terms of difference, transformation and heterogeneity.

More generally, however, the concept of the network stems from network theory. This was developed by a branch of applied mathematics called graph theory that studies particular relationships between objects. With Leonard Euler's first proof of the theorem dealing with the Königsberg Bridge Problem in 1736, a concept of the graph as a mathematical object was formed. This consisted of discrete nodes (vertices) linked together by lines (edges), to be studied in terms of connectivity, disembodied from any other characteristic (Barabási, 2003). In the 1950s, sociology went on to borrow and adapt the conceptual apparatus of graph theory to apply it to the quantitative analysis of data. In doing so, sociology coupled the structural and the behavioural characteristics of networks (Newman et al., 2006: 6). Over the last decade, more or less, a radical update on these developments was undertaken. Using the name network theory, the update was most prominently popularised by the work *Linked* by Albert-László Barabási. Network theory aims to describe the general topological features of different kinds of networks including, but not limited to, biological, ecological, technical, social and communication networks. Network theory is a rapidly developing field, which no longer seems to be reproachable for its purely spatial approach (devoid of the dimension of time), or its level of general abstraction (the God's eye perspective) as it was previously. [2] Further developments in the field have urged the examination of the properties of particular, 'real-world' networks in empirical terms, and the recognition of the dynamic properties of networks that evolve over time. This included both the behaviour of nodes and the changing character of the links between them (Newman et al., 2006: 4-7). A typology of networks, accounting, for instance, for hierarchical structures, is a new direction, one pursued for its ability to address heterogeneous networks, as well as the heterogeneity of networks. [3]

Curiously enough, however, when it comes to networks, the social sciences form a terrain of imagination where the exact sciences meet the humanities in order to effectively misunderstand each other. Such ‘misunderstanding’ is based on sets of beliefs concerning how one strand of thinking and acting, which is quantitative and mathematics-based, can make use of another, which is qualitative and at its best a poetic act of hacking the process of formalisation, or vice versa. Throughout the twentieth century, a number of disciplines were formed to work on the translations between both sides. These included such disciplines as operations research, simulation or, to an extent, organisation theory. It is worth noticing that, throughout all of this, network theory is ultimately a quest to understand the systems whose underlying structures are networks (Newman et al., 2006: 415). In this endeavour, a kind of network theory ‘family photograph’ develops, with its step-grandmother in the second row, namely systems theory (with organisation theory on its lap). Here, the younger instantiations of network theory aspire to be a cybernetics of the twenty-first century. They wish to provide a mode of thinking based on the successful application of a number of abstract conceptual instruments to the analysis of diverse fields, in order to understand them at a sufficient degree of generality, while often subjecting what is thus analysed to the rigours of greater efficiency and control. Such sciences can acquire a dubious reputation—as mere pseudo-sciences. However, this does not stop them, at the same time, having an enormous impact on, and efficacy in the development of, practical applications within the like of military research, engineering, agent modelling systems, robotics and bio-technology, to name a few.

So far, I have discussed two concepts of the network. First, there was the network as an emergent ensemble, elusive and heterogeneous in its inclusivity of actors, and producing an ongoing resonance (as drawn from actor network theory). Second, there was the network as a topological distribution producing coefficients of connectivity (from network theory). Of course, these do not exhaust the means of thinking networks, of imagining them in both heterogeneous and non-linear ways, or of being able to differentiate between them. There are a growing number of other ways of developing concepts related to networks that have no need to be marked as the sole property of a specific discipline. These concepts can be unfolded as openly shared and enriched by the combinations of different disciplines, from the exact sciences to the humanities, biology and philosophy, as Gilles Deleuze both practiced and argued (Deleuze, 1995: 29). Such approaches have given us concepts of network production such as bifurcation (Prigogine, Deleuze and Guattari), networks as assemblages (DeLanda) and ecologies and media ecologies (Guattari, Bateson and Fuller), to name a few. It is in this context that we can discuss media ecology and networks.

Media ecology can be understood as a ‘green metallurgical concept’ that is both modest and mad (Fuller, 2005). Its modesty is found in its close and quiet attentiveness. Media ecology is submerged in the material, which we listen to while it is given space and the means to speak. Media ecology’s madness is found in its explosiveness. It is a way of working that not only wipes away traditional tools of understanding but also disassembles the world to the state of a cosmic soup, in order to further reflect on its phylogeny in action. Media ecology is formed by and often about networks. However, these are networks which are never found in equilibrium but are instead forever disassembling to become ‘something else’; networks that mutate into objects, resonances, pictures, people and organs. In fact, from a different perspective one could argue that networks have in the end nothing to do with media ecologies. The latter are rather ‘chemical constitutions’, involving processes of differentiation and amplification, for which networks, with their accumulated flavour of pernickety tracing, cannot account for or work with. At the least, when it comes to media ecologies, we can say that we are caught between the sometime abstraction of networks on the one hand, and material processes on the other.

To put this another way, media ecologies are processes of emergence of particular assemblages, which are discovered and participated in by following the activity of material processes. They are also conceptual devices that ques-

tion the evolving couplings of humans, animals, networks, machines, the like of blog posts and emails, air and 'ether', and art, in order to fight the claustrophobia of fixed structures. In addition, media ecologies are not especially preferential towards humans. Nor is much of the vitalist philosophy from which they partially derive.

What then, in this context, are art platforms? They do seem caught between the sometime abstraction of networks on the one hand, and material processes on the other. Are they particular types of networks? Seeing them as such allows us to talk about how they are constructed, how they operate, and what their actors, agencies, and publics are. What is it that gets produced by their circular exchange of energies? Or, are art platforms a particular type of media ecology, whose constituent components are to be isolated, described and analysed, as if by a taxidermist? Or should we talk instead of a media ecology of art platforms? We could discuss what human-technical processes emerge as art platforms, how they evolve, disassemble, change appearance, or set things off. This would be useful, as media ecology is first of all a relatively open way of looking and seeing, of doing and making. At the same time, this might sometimes conflict with the fact that an art platform is a rather unrecognised entity, an unplanned activity, an evolution that digresses. Perhaps we should start from the dynamics of the art platform. Ideally, an art platform is also a conceptual practice that is inclusive of a reflection upon its own media ecology (and its networks). A number of concepts might thus be used to address the phenomenon of the art platform from this complex set of perspectives. It is worth developing an approach that would allow for an art platform to manifest all its facets and particularities. This article now moves to equip the idea of an art platform with its own baggage—to enable it both to run free and to find something new to trip over.

## Creativity

What is at the core of art platforms? Creativity and some form of sociality. What is at the heart of participatory, social platforms? Sociality and some form of creativity. In recent years the concept of creativity (and freedom as inseparable from it) has become highly charged, with a large amount of contradictory attention, very detailed description, financial investment, along with a distrust and hatred that it made it barely possible to discuss creativity at all in some contexts. The triumphant uses of the word, it seems, are those that turn creativity into a dull and sleek object, albeit with magic qualities. An object, because one can learn to manufacture it through specific training, sleek in its production of something new, beautiful and useful. Magic, as it turns out to have always been there and is able to instantly saturate life with satisfaction, freedom and happiness. However, this creativity is also dull because it involves a training system that aims to create a kind of creative fitness: in, short, cognitive capitalism.

In order to produce this creative fitness, psychology and other cognitive sciences research individual mental activity, build models of creative processes, and analyse creative individuals, creative products and creative environments. The focus is often on creativity as the production of something innovative and applicable to multiple contexts (Negus and Pickering, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Sternberg, 1999). Such studies are put to work in developing 'techniques of creativity' and in working out the organisational aspects that would allow for an increasing number of employers to discover and apply creative capacities for innovation (Nickerson, 1999). Creativity, although somehow deeply rooted in the production of the individual, is thus a function that is only perceived in terms of its successful realisation. It becomes something that can be refined by machinic processes to produce higher quality, dependable results. This flattening of aesthetic activity or 'desiring production' into a thin crust of the actualised severs creativity from its teeth, nails or any other sharp (and sometimes potentially vicious) body parts. Such creativity is devoid of

thickness, duration, or even folly. What is left in *residuo* is lobotomised optimism.

Another curious trick played on creativity involves its transubstantiation into the bodily quality of an elitist democracy. Creativity is seen here as, on the one hand, something every child is immersed in—as a state that embraces everyone creativity is inherently democratic. However, on the other hand, it often seems that few adults or events in human history are creative (Bohm, 2005). As a result, we find ourselves trying to account for the loops and holes in which creativity gets exhausted or lost on the way. The story goes that, when these are fixed, the *demos* will fatten the ranks of the creative elite (although this is something autonomists were anticipating as the end of capitalism). Those who are nauseated by this story point towards child labour, ecological collapse, increasing inequality or the reliance of such an elitist *demos* on the displacement of hard labour to those that are the more disadvantaged members of society, or simply elsewhere, from the Europe to Asia, for example (Holmes, 2008).

There are excellent critiques of neo-liberal, post-Keynesian ‘creativity’, in which areas of human life previously considered thoroughly personal, communal, or intimate are translated into the sphere/speak of economic transactions (Oudenampsen, 2007). The creative class, creative cities, and creative industries are all actualisations of new economic and political orders, which are simultaneously social formats. They are also mechanisms of subjectification, devised to stratify and commodify the ‘creative impetus’ immanent to both human and non-human forms of life. The expansion and mutation of modes of production involved is understood to devour all living energies, bringing them into measurable flows of capital. there are more than enough unknown or unpredictable factors or behaviours to influence the balance of complex systems. Yet nothing has been able to construct a mechanistic totality out of creativity, certainly not one explainable via a clear set of laws. Perhaps one unintended legacy of the attempt to regulate creativity will be poetic counter-visions, visions that not only respond negatively to the constriction of this regulation, but fit well with the apocalyptic ecological prospects that are the general darker side of contemporary capital.

At the same time, such critical approaches do not necessarily help give an account of creativity as such. We need perhaps a broader, more open, if messier, understanding of creativity, one that can account for all the different faces under which freedom/creativity is sensed and lived through—under various regimes. This would include, for the example, the creativity of Nietzsche and other philosophers, or those that speak loudest in the face of tyranny. Regarding the latter, we can consider two examples from the Soviet Union. Creating and memorising poetry became a means of survival in the Stalinist camp as did a kind of creative ‘inner emigration’ (a mental and spiritual, but not physical emigration) for many in the Soviet Union.

In the light of all the above, how then to rethink creativity? Perhaps it is better to think creativity as thick (like a fog or like flesh), chaotic, ‘dirty’ and conflicting, as a force of aesthetic desiring production that becomes both conceptual and subjective at a very late moment of its unfolding. Such creativity should not be mistaken for its realisations, its art-works or inventions. Such creativity is rather aesthetic in terms of the unfolding of sensation in desiring production. It is, crucially, self-organising. Indeed, in order to think creativity outside of the dominant, capturing, redundancies currently at work, I would like to suggest the concept of *autocreativity*. This is not to seriously claim the grandness of introducing an alternative ontology. However, autocreativity may come to be a lucky device—one that is both humorous and distancing. Autocreativity is a means beyond the determination of technics according to need and utility. It provides for the emergence of new conceptual tools, new ways of seeing and describing the present and its potential futures. Autocreativity is an autopoietic, autonomous, and automatic creativity. Unlike individual, human creativity, it propels aesthetic desiring production in the very constitution of the human, the cultural and the

social. It unleashes processes of subjectivation that are not solely locked into anthropomorphism but rather play out dynamically and recursively, in the different registers of the technical, natural and pre-individual. Autocreativity feeds the aesthetic operation that human-technical ensembles co-construct, while also being perturbed and effected anew by them.

The twist in the concept of autocreativity is in its double superfluity. First, it distinguishes between creativity as a functionalist category—an ontological quality put to work in the mines of the production of the new by creative capitalism—and a superfluous creativity that cannot allow itself to be so simply located, or categorised, even by itself. The latter certainly does not allow itself to become a training programme (so autocreativity as a term can be seen to be introducing a superfluity which undoes the reduction of creativity in functionalism). Second, autocreativity is actively opening to the superfluous in itself. Operating as machinic production, it is abundant and heterogenic. As a force of becoming rather than being, it moves and operates, beginning from the pre-subjective (not the 'creative individual'), through many layers brought together in events of creativity. These include networked media ensembles, but in autocreativity these share the condition of superfluity with the sun's energy, biodiversity, madness and desire.

Guattari uses creativity to think the root of every differentiation, of the fields of work and of thought, of their in-betweens and, necessarily, of art (Guattari, 1995: 91). However, art is made and operated by forces that are not always so eager to keep themselves open in relation to the fearless exploration of creativity. On the other hand, aesthetic production thriving on (auto)creativity does not necessarily result simply in the generation of art. Autocreativity has the energy to cross thresholds, to effectuate a change, and to divorce itself from the plane of any current stratum. This does not mean, however, that autocreativity has the structural functionality to execute a great (and finished) work of art. It is rather something 'pre', something making the world up. Autocreativity transcends diverse states and horizons as something to be joined in with, discovered, followed and worked with in order to become. Autocreativity is a machinic creativity that is not smoothly talked to; it does not operate in terms of either mundanity or newness. It is self-organising because this is the way it processes itself, the way it advances. But as it advances, it can also take on, or harbour, forms that are other than autopoietic.

Autocreativity as action is impossible to localise or subjectify. So the potential of autocreativity is not simply located on the biological level. It exceeds the potential of labour-power in so far as this is inseparable from a living body. It also exceeds this potential as it acquires the status of a commodity (Virno, 2004: 84). It is also found distributed within technical systems, objects, human beings, the fields of culture and of society. Unclean, outside in all weathers and stained with the mucus of different births, autocreativity also, of course, traverses digital networks. In digital networks, it is a dynamic process occurring in the relationship between network systems, software features, events, cultures, objects and human beings. The concept of autocreativity does not individuate creativity and lock it into humans. Nor does it locate it solely in inorganic systems. Autocreativity allows us to think creativity as a process of becoming in-between the human, technical and the social, and to investigate the roles performed within creativity by the resulting ensembles. As such, the pre-individual quality of autocreativity does not lock out the possibility of talking about the subjective and the social, and its technical dimension does not make it deterministic (Simondon, 1980). Thinking in terms of autocreativity, we can move across registers and scales to enquire into the unfolding of aesthetics, and only with this unfolding to account for different actors or roles being performed. In short, *autocreativity is a tool to think aesthetic genesis in its changes in state and position*. Autocreativity becomes a vehicle to move through and with technicity, subjectification, society and the production of art or non-art. The concept allows for sliding between the pre- and the meta-, the scales of micro and macro, hardware and software, art and folklore.

Autocreativity can yield a series of explosions through a particular combination of forces; *art platforms work as its catalysts*. Through art platforms a traversal of the common, the agreed, and the domestic is not only induced but also enunciated publicly—and perhaps cooperatively performed. Art platforms work autocreativity through mechanisms that are not defined or assigned with any stability, but develop themselves to contaminate the environment, to produce moments of differentiation that can become a kind of general aesthetic brilliance. As autocreativity is about becoming, it can allow for various human-technical ensembles in which people and things can become something they do not expect, or even want, understand or require. Here, to paraphrase Lacan on love, such assemblages create something they do not possess and give it to someone who does not need it. [4] Autocreativity can thus be as catastrophic as love in its creation of spaces that are alien, or dramatic in their un-decidability. In amplifying the alien, or the ambiguous, autocreativity expands into or creates extra spaces, other worlds, or other kinds of beings. In all this, the construction of value is enabled without operating according to any prior logic. Autocreativity lays out a few, or many, spaces of possibility without offering them up for immediate co-option. It is a process that establishes a possibility of something else, of heterogeneity, of the outside, where the self-organised dynamics of the unfolding of additional realities is the basis for freedom.

This certainly does not mean that every user is creative and autonomous or every creative act or project is 'free'. Neither is the above meant as an anthem to art platforms. As mentioned, autocreativity cannot be pinpointed and located in human beings, objects, projects or machines. Rather it is evident in their inter-relationships. Autocreativity is dynamic, as are art platforms that continuously invent and remake themselves, although the continuity involved has nothing to do with speed or a fast-turnaround. The relation of the art platform to autocreativity is one example, if an important one, of how autocreativity is prone to relationships with other kinds of organisation. In coming together with autocreativity, these themselves become aesthetic processes (for example, organisational aesthetics as introduced below). Any kind of 'digital aesthetics' can be seen in this light.

Yet how is it that something is simultaneously a self-organising entity and an assemblage? How are we to understand the 'auto' in autocreativity?

### Self-Organisation

The concept of self-organisation has a kind of poetic richness. Deleuze and Guattari, among others, have shaped this into a tool with which to think the morphogenesis of stable structures, and of singularities (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004; DeLanda, 1997). Guattari in particular suggests that when human beings join in the constitution of machinic assemblages with technical machines, institutions, and fields of the possible, they may form autopoietic ensembles (Guattari, 1995: 35, 40). Yet self-organisation has long faced a conceptual problem. This involves the fact, as put forward by Maturana and Varela (1972), that autopoiesis can seem to have no neat input/output system at its core. [5] This would be a system that would traditionally function to define an entity itself, and its relation to other entities or processes, even as it separates this self from these other entities or processes. Guattari solves this problem. In his work a different autopoiesis appears, one based on disequilibrium and complementarity in relation to the exterior. Such *autopoiesis operates with/in relations of alterity*. Machinic assemblages, while produced in relation to other structures, other components and other machines, are not locked into these entities. Machinic assemblages produce their consistencies in singularities that cannot be articulated through any unifying grammar that would allow for a neat input/output system. Thus, via alterity, autopoiesis is 'collective'. In fact, autopoiesis operates with, and across,

infinite forms of machinic alterity: the alterity of proximity, of material consistency, of formal consistency, of scale, of agonistic alterity and the infinite variations of these alterities (Guattari, 1995: 45).

Guattarian autopoiesis differentiates eco-systemically (concerning functions in relation to other machines and elements), phylogenetically (concerning positions in relation to future machinic mutations). It creates a zone of 'self-belonging' ('machine/Universe coupling', some actuality rather than pure virtuality). Yet at the same time it provides a threshold to cross for other machinic assemblages, one plane, one scale among others. In this way, autopoiesis becomes an interface for *ongoing* 'embodiment', upon which a richness of various systems of value (rather than the dominant, capitalist value system) depends for its continuous existence in complexity. Birth as a process in-between 'the necessary actual' and 'the possibilist virtual' is an obvious and important example of the autopoietic (Guattari, 1995: 50-56).

With the ability to provide an account of the means of continued existence in the face of changing complexity, self-organisation has sometimes come to replace some of the prior conceptual tools of the revolutionary production of subjectivity, such as cooperation and mutual aid. Although these can be seen as earlier attempts at something similar, based as they are on cybernetic feedback mechanisms, or collective self-rule and self-government that, conceptually, are a few centuries older. Autopoiesis as discussed above promises the possibility of renewal through complete dissolution, and across different kinds of event (whether in relation to DNA, ecology, weather or individual variation). As in the example of a butterfly self-assembling from a soup produced by a caterpillar, concepts and practices of self-organisation are able to access and articulate change, alternation and assembly, and this on a much deeper level than any radical ideas of management—of at least the kind detailed above in relation to cognitive capitalism.

Such concepts have had a kind of pre-existence. For example, the metaphor that *The Internationale* anthem is built on is the destruction of the old world through demolition. Yet as a political device this is a somewhat architectural and industrial figure, one that seeks the clear destruction of old worlds, and the completion of a new world in its entirety, a world of better, perhaps more balanced structures. In that self-organisation arises from chemistry, physics and biology, and looks at, for example, cells, neurons, proteins, or thermodynamic systems, it concerns events and systems that are far from equilibrium. There is a sense in which all self-organisation is embryogenetic and as such it includes aspects of uncertainty, along with the ongoing 'miracle' of the becoming of something. While emerging in relation to certain codes, this becoming still cannot be entirely circumscribed.

Crucially, unlike the worlds of either cognitive capitalism or perhaps *The Internationale*, self-organisation as discussed here is not about a degree of external control, relationships of input and output, or costs. It is about how autocreativity operates and builds itself, how media ecologies emerge to become networks that are specific to themselves, and perhaps distant from each other, if in relation to their common process of production. Also unlike the worlds of either cognitive capitalism or perhaps *The Internationale*, self-organisation cannot be forced to occur. It is a process of embryogenesis, of ticklish layers that can affect the process at any moment. There is a risk, for example, of it becoming something that while never completely predictable can still be suspiciously mundane—it does not always achieve its promise.

Autocreativity is not enough. Or, to put this differently, it can be nudged from within its own ongoing constitution. A

variety of elements may couple with (or within) the process of self-organisation to launch chains of reaction that become part of the process. Self-organisation does not go unaided. Such aid can take many forms, from 'tools' fused into codes, to memes, or social fits of hysterics. It is here that I have positioned the art platform. However, there are certainly also other technical objects and processes that engage with the self-organisation of autocreativity.

Again, we can consider the rise of the social web, in which new social tools are seen as generating sufficient momentum to allow for certain hitherto indistinct or unrealisable forces to reach the surface and offer themselves to be immediately employed as something longed for as interpreted in Clay Shirky's good popular account, *Here Comes Everybody* (Shirky, 2008). Such social tools are formed in the couplings between networks, repetitions, protocols, mobile telephones, software, platforms, software functions, laptops, software cultural habits, and a general amplification. In the case of much social media, this all co-constitutes self-organisation *more self-evidently* than before (thus perhaps locking it down, or at least trying to, for example, onto a platform such as Facebook). Yet self-organisation also describes the means by which autocreativity works through art platforms to achieve a moment of aesthetic brilliance, of singularity or differentiation. What interests me in art platforms and the self-organisation of autocreativity is not this nascent becoming through return found in general social media, but processes of self-intensification to the point of brilliance, of the differentiations art platforms can produce.

Art platforms work with self-organisation, producing a means by which an aesthetic machinic current organises itself. In fact one could say that if the platform is not traversed by currents of self-organisation occurring at different levels, from the interaction of contributors to the generation of cultural forms, the art platform remains a hollow framework. Since their becoming relies on a combination of factors, art platforms are saturated with elements of self-organisation, or triggers towards it, that appear not exactly randomly but in a way that cannot be exactly planned. Art platforms further their existence if they happen to enter into relationships with elements of self-organisation and develop through these energies. But these elements or processes stream from the self-organising flow of autocreativity. They are not just applied as instruments in the service of the art platform.

An art platform is not only this flow of autocreativity. An art platform is always, of course, in some ways also devised, negotiated and redefined. It short-circuits itself as it traverses the energies it works with, in the process however becoming contaminated by these energies and their short-circuiting, and inventing its own form of self-organisation. It would therefore be more precise to say that art platforms work with the different kinds of organisation that autocreativity may sustain itself on, the "higher" level of self-organisation included. As such, art platforms do operate with a certain organisational aesthetics. In the case of platforms such as those linked to at the beginning of this article, this organisational aesthetics steers self-organisation and autocreativity toward an aesthetic becoming that has become known as digital aesthetics.

### Conclusion: Organisational Aesthetics and Art Platforms

The case of art platforms allows us to understand organisational aesthetics both as a practical process of working within emergence and as a mode of enquiry. Both sides of this allow for a different way of understanding how phenomena such as a digital 'object' or process or (increasingly digital-influenced) body construct or operate

themselves. Organisational aesthetics delve into the changing manner in which the various strata of existence involved are actualised, along with the move towards these strata's assimilation within aesthetic registers (that is, the organisation of sensation or signification). Of course, aesthetic registers such as those of sensuality or signification form planes that intersect with other planes inhabited by social, economic and political forces. Yet the process is as exciting as it is grim. It opens new horizons of the possible, even sometimes while enhancing stratification and capture to unforeseen levels.

Through all this, organisational aesthetics conceptualises aesthetics as a register of becoming, a flow of production, a sphere of experience and a mode of engagement. Such an aesthetics does not directly relate to the sensual apparatuses as we know them, or to art as we know it. Rather, it is about differentials in action. This involves a kind of contemplation which stages a passage, via routes of diversion, a peering through, collapse, despair, humour, pain, flight, dream, trial, contrivance and experiment. The expansion or evolution that results within this contemplation endures throughout the process of structuration that attempt to fix the events involved, retaining at least some of their fluctuating intensity. Such an understanding of aesthetics in some ways resonates more with what Deleuze and Guattari describe as a desiring-machine (rather than with an apparatus in Jacques Rancière's terms, one of 'making sensible'). [6]

So, thus equipped, art and aesthetics are directly plugged into the electric waves of life. For Nietzsche, nature itself has an 'art-state', in which there are: 'artistic energies which burst forth from nature herself, without the mediation of the human artist – energies in which nature's art impulses are satisfied in the most immediate and direct way ... as intoxicated reality...' (Nietzsche, 1995: 17-19). Such intoxication is an abundance of 'life-force' that overflows into creative advance. Such an abundant generation of intoxication is the ontogenetic quality that I am looking for. From such a perspective, all aesthetics is a machine generating material variants of reality to enable knowledges, practices and perceptions to constitute and affirm themselves. In this it partakes in the overflowing of creative elaboration and surges with the energy and growing pains of coming into being.

Art draws both from this source and from historically acknowledged and institutionalised forms of creativity as this becomes tangible, socially acceptable, limited to cultured society. The central problem of contemporary aesthetics, and certainly aesthetics of those involving the digital and networks, is the recognition of the multiplicity of other forms and currents involved. I have here presented autocreativity as a response to this, as the lifeblood of networks as well as other objects and processes that stem from and define the topology, architectures, densities of amplification and equilibriums of creative emergence today.

I have also suggested that the organisational aesthetics of art platforms involve a practice and speculation on the forces that structure and channel their emergence and in the process enable them to make themselves available for varied practices, uses and logics. Art platforms exhibit a capacity to become eventful, to reach a threshold that amplifies the material inhabiting them into force of brilliance, enabling a transition into a different reality. In such a context, organisational aesthetics is not primarily occupied with previous institutions destabilised by network logic, or restructured and rearranged as leaking organisations. It is true that art platforms often mimic certain aspects of the structuring genealogy of organisations, partly due to their partaking in the sphere of organisations and networks dominated by forces and interests of particular kinds. It is also true that art platforms have to fight against, or learn to subtly deploy, the reflections and projections of such forces. It is also true that as these forces enter and leave art platforms, they may leave behind traces that contaminate and recompose the logics being actualised within an

art platform's specific organisational aesthetics. Yet all this is why, in the end, the organisational aesthetics of art platforms primary activity concerns generating its own effects in the field of power. Art platforms may even play a role in the field of power's ongoing constitution. They may generate effects within diverse vectors of valourisation, allowing for the composition of different objects, forces and relationships.

Organisational aesthetics starts by looking in two directions. On the one side, it looks into the bare, the chaotic and the turbulent plateau of emergences. On the other, it traces how these get pictured and mapped, restricted, capitalised and exploited, but also how they revolutionise the structured, the possible and the different. This account of the organisational aesthetics of art platforms concentrates on an experienced yet relatively unseen, everyday but relatively unknown reality. An organisational aesthetics of art platforms allows us to notice processes of creativity that are often lost in discussions of a general creative ability, whether seen from the point of view of neoliberal creative industries policies of cognitive capitalism or from that of a totalising Marxist critique of the latter. Instead, via an organisational aesthetics, and a consideration of art platforms of networked and digital media, we can focus on what forces are brought to us with the profound turmoil of the new types of networks. We can understand how human-technical ensembles pass through cycles of becoming, and differentiate between the specificities of these cycles. We can describe what the experience and generation of cultural forms involves. In the process, we will be able to enhance the ruptures this ongoing generation is able to produce and co-create moments that make us more alive.

### Notes

[1] This argument is further developed in a forthcoming book, Goriunova, Olga. *Art Platforms and Cultural Production on the Internet*, (Routledge, 2011).

[2] Eugene Thacker's criticism of the concept of network stemming from network theory as essentially a Eulerian-Kantian enterprise seems to be overcome by the most recent developments in network theory (Thacker, 2004). See also Newman et al. 2006.

[3] Whilst the World Wide Web is found to be a hierarchical network, on the level of sites joined into larger modules, the router level Internet network is devoid of such hierarchical characteristics. See: Réka Albert, Hawoong Jeong and Albert-László Barabási, 'Diameter of the world-wide web', *Nature*, vol. 401, November, 1999 (130-131), reprinted in Newman et al., 2006.

[4] Rosi Braidotti uses Lacan's formulation of love in this way (Braidotti, 2003).

[5] According to Maturana and Varela, a living system produces and reproduces itself as a unity of components that in turn reproduce the processes of their own production and generate the living system through the realisation of a network of production (Maturana and Varela, 1972). Autopoiesis is a framework with quite a strict structure. An

autopoietic system possesses a topological unity. It produces its constitutive relations through the production of the components that act these relations out, and as an autonomous unity, it is closed, meaning there is no import or export of components, relations or structures. In the fields of physics, chemistry, and certain areas of biology, self-organisation is seen as a process of acquisition of structure both in living and non-living systems through relations internal to the system (See Camarine et al., 2003; Kauffman, 1993). The disparity between demands set by the precision of the term in the exact sciences and the adaptations it needs to undergo to fit thinking culture is what everyone who starts thinking societal and cultural self-organisation seriously has to consider.

[6] In his contribution to the philosophy of art, Rancière reflects on the political function of the aesthetic spectrum. This spectrum is composed of ways of 'doing and making', their 'forms of visibility' and ways of thinking about their corresponding articulation. Here, forms of visibility (the distribution of the sensible) define the range of possibilities and modes of doing in a particular setting, a setting which may itself be an artwork, and it is precisely at this point that aesthetic practice becomes political engagement. If traditionally aesthetics is a function of perception, than the first thing to question is certainly the subject of perception. Is it human, animal or technical? What is it that constitutes a percept and how does it carry itself? See Rancière, 2007: 10.

## Biographical Note

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