FCJ-029 Dawn of the Organised Networks

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2 At first glance the concept of “organised networks” appears oxymoronic. In technical terms, all networks are organised. There are founders, administrators, moderators and active members who all take up roles. Think also back to the early work on cybernetics and the “second order” cybernetics of Bateson and others. Networks consist of mobile relations whose arrangement at any particular time is shaped by the “constitutive outside” of feedback or noise.[1] The order of networks is made up of a continuum of relations governed by interests, passions, affects and pragmatic necessities of different actors. The network of relations is never static, but this is not to be mistaken for some kind of perpetual fluidity. Ephemerality is not a condition to celebrate for those wishing to function as political agents.

3 Why should networks get organised? Isn’t their chaotic, disorganised nature a good thing that needs to be preserved? Why should the informal atmosphere of a network be disturbed? Don’t worry. Organised networks do not yet exist. The concept presented here is to be read as a proposal, a draft, in the process of becoming that needs active steering through disagreement and collective elaboration.[2] What it doesn’t require is instant deconstruction. Everyone can do that. Needless to say, organised networks have existed for centuries. Just think of the Jesuits. The history of organised networks can and will be written, but that doesn’t advance our inquiry for now. The networks we are talking about here are specific in that they are situated within digital media. They can be characterised by their advanced irrelevance and invisibility for old media and p-in-p (people in power). General network theory might be useful for enlightenment purposes, but it won’t answer the issues that new media based social networks face. Does it satisfy you to know that molecules and DNA patterns also network?

4 There are no networks outside of society. Like all human-techno entities, they are infected by power. Networks are ideal Foucault machines. They undermine power as they produce it. Their diagram of power may operate on a range of scales, traversing intra-local networks and overlapping with trans-national insurgencies. No matter how harmless they seem, networks ignite differences. Foucault’s dictum: power produces. Translate this over to organised networks and you get the force of invention. Indeed, translation is the condition of invention. Mediology, as defined by Régis Debray (1996), is the practice of invention within the social-technical system of networks. As a collaborative method of immanent critique, mediology assembles a multitude of components upon a network of relations as they coalesce around situated problems and unleashed passions. In this sense, the network constantly escapes attempts of command and control. Such is the entropic variability of networks.

5 The opposite of organised networks is not chaos. Organised networks routinely intervene into the radical temporality of today’s mediasphere. Short-termism is the prevailing condition that inflicts governments, corporations, and everyday life. Psycho-pharmacology is the bio-technical management of this condition (Bifo, 2005). Organised networks offer another possibility – the possibility of creativity, invention and purpose that is not determined in the first instance by the creaking, frequently bewildered grasps at maintaining control, as witnessed across a range of institutions that emerged during the era of the modern state and persist to this day within the complex of the corporate-state, which continues to maintain a monopoly on legitimate violence.

6 Network users do not see their circle of peers as a sect. Users are not political party members. Quite the opposite. Ties are loose, up to the point of breaking up. Thus the ontology of the user, in so many ways, mirrors the logic of capital. Indeed, the “user” is the identity par excellence of capital that seeks to extract itself from rigid systems of regulation and control. Increasingly the user has become a term that corresponds with the auto-configuration of self-invention. Some would say the user is just a consumer: silent and satisfied, until hell breaks lose. The user is the identity of control by other means. In this respect, the user is the empty vessel awaiting the spectral allure of digital commodity cultures and their promise of “mobility” and “openness”. Let us harbour no fantasies: sociality is intimately bound within the dynamic array of technics exerted by the force of capital. Networks are everywhere. The challenge for the foreseeable future is to create new openings, new possibilities, new temporalities and new spaces within which life may assert its insistence for an ethico-aesthetic existence.

Notworking is Networking

7 Organised networks should be read as a proposal aimed to replace the problematic term virtual community.[3] Organised networks also supersede the level of individual blogging, whose logic of networks does not correspond with the concept we develop here. It is with some urgency that internal power relations within networks are placed on the agenda. Only then can we make a clear break with the invisible workings of electronic networks that defined the consensus era. Organised networks are "clouds" of social relationships in which disengagement is pushed to the limit. Community is an idealistic construct and suggests bonding and harmony, which often is simply not there. The same could be said of the post-911 call for "trust".

8 Networks thrive on diversity and conflict (the notworking), not on unity, and this is what community theorists are unable to reflect upon. For community advocates, disagreement equals a disruption of the "constructive" flow of dialogue. It takes effort to reflect on distrust as a productive principle. Indifference between networks is one of the main reasons not to get organised, so this aspect has to be taken seriously. Interaction and involvement are idealistic constructs. What organised networks also do is question the presumed innocence of the chattering and gossiping networks. Networks are not the opposite of organisations in the same way as the real is not opposed to the virtual. Instead, we should analyse networks as an emerging social and cultural form. Networks are "precarious" and this vulnerability should be seen as both its strength and its weakness.

9 In the information society passivity rules. Browsing, watching, reading, waiting, thinking, deleting, chatting, skipping and surfing are the default conditions of online life. Total involvement implies madness to the highest degree. What characterises networks is a shared sense of a potentiality that does not have to be realised. Millions of replies from all to all would cause every network, no matter what its architecture, to implode. Within every network there are prolonged periods of interpassivity, interrupted by outbursts of interactivity. Networks foster and reproduce loose relationships – and it's better to face this fact straight in the eye. They are hedonistic machines of promiscuous contacts. Networked multitudes create temporary and voluntary forms of collaboration that transcend but do not necessary disrupt the Age of Disengagement.

10 The concept of organised networks is useful to enlist for strategic purposes. After a decade of "tactical media" the time has come to scale up the operations of radical media practices. We should all well and truly have emerged from the retro-fantasy of the benevolent welfare state. Networks will never be rewarded and "embedded" in well funded structures. Just as the modernist avant-garde saw itself punctuating the fringes of society, so have tactical media taken comfort in the idea of targeted micro interventions. Tactical media too often assume to reproduce the curious spatio-temporal dynamic and structural logic of the modern state and industrial capital: difference and renewal from the peripheries. But there's a paradox at work here. Disruptive as their actions may often be, tactical media corroborate the temporal mode of post-Fordist capital: short-termism.

11 It is retrograde that tactical media in a post-Fordist era continue to operate in terms of ephemerality and the logic of "tactics". Since the punctuated attack model is the dominant condition, tactical media has an affinity with that which it seeks to oppose. This is why tactical media are treated with a kind of benign tolerance. There is a neurotic tendency to disappear. Anything that solidifies is lost in the system. The ideal is to be little more than a temporary glitch, a brief instance of noise or interference. Tactical media set themselves up for exploitation in the same manner that "modders" do in the game industry: both dispense with their knowledge of loop holes in the system for free. They point out the problem, and then run away. Capital is delighted, and thanks the tactical media outfit or nerd-modder for the home improvement.

12 The paradigm of neoliberalism is extensive throughout the bio-technical apparatus of social life. And this situation is immanent to the operation of radical media cultures, regardless of whether they are willing to admit it. The alarm bells will only start ringing when tactical media cranks up its operations. And when this happens, the organised network emerges as the modus operandi. Radical media projects will then escape the bemused paternalism of the state-as-corporation.

13 But make no mistake, the emergence of organised networks amounts to an articulation of info-war. This battle currently revolves around the theme of "sustainability". It is no accident that sustainability is the meme of the moment, since it offers the discursive and structural leverage

required by neoliberal governments and institutions wishing to extricate themselves from responsibility to annoying constituencies. Organised networks are required to invent models of sustainability that go beyond the latest Plan of Action update, which is only then inserted into paper shredders of member states and "citizen friendly" businesses.

14 The empty centre of neoliberalism is sociality. The organised network is part of a larger scramble to fill that void. The competing interests that surround the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) debates and activities is just one example. On a more mundane, national level, one only has to cast an eye toward the new legitimacy granted to the church as a provider of social "services". Civil society, in short, is replacing the ground of the social. But the assertion of the social is underpinned by ongoing antagonisms. The rise of rightwing populism is an example of how open the empty centre is to a tolerance of fundamentalism.

New Institutional Forms

15 Organised networks compete with established institutions in terms of branding and identity building, but it is as sites of knowledge production and concept development that primarily defines the competitive edge of organised networks. These days, most bricks and mortar institutions can only subtract value from networks. They are not merely unwilling but in fact incapable of giving anything back. Virtual networks are not yet represented in negotiations over budgets, grants, investments and job hiring. At best they are seen as sources of inspiration amongst peers. This is where the real potential of virtual networks lies – they are enhancement engines. When they work well, they can inspire new expressions, new socialities, new technics.

16 The organised network is a hybrid formation: part tactical media, part institutional formation.[4] There are benefits to be obtained from both these lineages. The clear distinction of the organised network is that its institutional logic is internal to the socio-technical dimensions of the media of communication. This means there is no universal formula for how an organised network might invent its conditions of existence. There will be no "internationalism" for networks.

17 While we have outlined the background condition of neoliberalism as integral to the emergence of organised networks, it also has to be said that just as uneven modernities created vastly different social and national experiences and formations, from the East to the West, from North to South, so too does capital in its neoliberal phase manifest in a plurality of ways. The diversity of conditions attached to free-trade agreements is just one example of the multiple forms of capital. From the standpoint of analysis, the understanding of capital is always going to vary according to the range of inputs one defines as constituting the action of capital. Similarly, no two organised networks will develop in the same manner, since their conditions of emergence are always internal to the situation at hand.

18 Eventually organised networks will be mirrored against the networked organisation. But we're not there yet. There will not be an easy synthesis. Roughly speaking, one can witness a "convergence" between the informality of virtual networks and the formality of institutions. This process, however, is anything but harmonious. Clashes between networks and organisations are occurring before our very eyes. Disputes condition and are internal to the creation of new institutional forms. Debris spreads in every possible direction, depending on the locality. The networked multitude, one could say, is constituted – and crushed – as a part of this process. In this sense, a new political subject is required, one that emerges out of the current state of disorganisation that defines the multitude. It is naïve to believe that, under the current circumstances, networks will win this battle (if you want to put it in those terms). This is precisely why networks need their own form of organisation. In this process they will have to deal with the following three aspects: accountability, sustainability and scalability.

19 Let's start with the question of who networks represent, or if indeed they hold such a capacity, and what form of internal democracy they envision. Formal networks have members but most online initiatives don't. Let's face it. Networks disintegrate traditional forms of representation. This is what makes the question 'Did blogs affect the 2004 US-election?' so irrelevant. The blogosphere, at best, influenced a hand-full of TV and newspaper editors. Instead of spreading the word, the Net has questioned authority – any authority – and therefore was not useful to push this or that candidate up the rating-scale of electoral appeal. Networks that thrive higher up will eventually fail because they will be incorporated and thus degenerate into the capitalist mainstream. No matter what you

think of Derrida, networks do not deconstruct society. It is deep linkage that matters, not some symbolic coup d'état. If there is an aim, it would be to parallel hegemony, which can only be achieved if underlying premises are constantly put under scrutiny by the initiators of the next techno-social wave of innovations.

20 The rise of "community informatics" as a field of research and project building could be seen as an exemplary platform that could deal with the issues treated here.[5] Yet for all the interest community informatics has in building projects "from below", a substantial amount of research within this field is directed toward "e-democracy" issues. It is time to abandon the illusion that the myths of representational democracy might somehow be transferred and realised within networked settings. That is not going to happen. After all, the people benefiting from such endeavours as the World Summit of the Information Society are, for the most part, those on the speaking and funding circuits, not people who are supposedly represented in such a process. Networks call for a new logics of politics, one based not just on a handpicked collection of NGOs that have identified themselves as "global civil society".

21 Networks are not institutions of representative democracy, despite the frequency with which they are expected to model themselves on such failed institutions. Instead, there is a search for "non-representational democratic" models of decision making that avoid classical models of representation and related identity politics. The emerging theme of non-representative democracies places an emphasis on process over its after-effect, consensus. Certainly, there's something attractive in process-oriented forms of governance. But ultimately the process model is about as sustainable as an earthworks sculpture burrowed into a patch of dirt called the 1970s. Process is fine as far as it integrates a plurality of forces into the network. But the primary questions remain: Where does it go? How long does it last? Why do it in the first place? But also: who is speaking? And: why bother? A focus on the vital forces that constitute socio-technical life is thus required. Herein lie the variability and wildcards of organised networks. The persistence of dispute and disagreement can be taken as a given. Rational consensus models of democracy have proven, in their failure, that such underlying conditions of social-political life cannot be eradicated.

Money Matters

22 Organised networks have to be concerned with their own sustainability. Networks are not hypes. We've passed the nineties and that potlatch era will not return. Networks may look temporary but are here to stay, despite their constant transformations. Individual cells might die off sooner rather than later but there is a Will to Contextualise that is hard to suppress. Links may be dead at some point but that's not the end of the data itself. Nonetheless networks are extremely fragile. This may all sound obvious, but let's not forget that pragmatism is built upon the passions, joys and thrills of invention. Something will be invented to bridge time and this something we might call the organised network. Time has come for cautious planning. There is a self-destructive tendency of networks faced with the challenge of organisation. Organised networks have to feel confident about defining their value systems in ways meaningful and relevant to the internal operations of their social-technical complex. That's actually not so difficult. The danger is ghettoisation. The trick is to work out a collaborative value system able to deal with issues such as funding, internal power plays and the demand for "accountability" and "transparency" as they scale up their operations.

23 So let's get monetary. Organised networks first and foremost have to keep their virtual house in order. It is of strategic importance to use a non-profit provider (ISP) and have backups made, or even run a mirror in another country. Also, it is wise not to make use of commercial services such as Yahoo!Groups, Hotmail, Geocities or Google, as they are unreliable and suffer from regular security breaches. Be aware of costs for the domain names, e-mail addresses, storage and bandwidth, even if they are relatively small. Often conflicts arise because passwords and ownership of the domain name are in the hands of one person that is leaving the group in a conflict situation. This can literally mean the end of the project.

24 Networks are never 100 per cent virtual and always connected at some point with the monetary economy, which, in case we've forgotten, is in so many ways a material culture. This is where the story of organised networks start. Perhaps incorporation is necessary. If you do not want to bother the network with legal matters, keep in mind what the costs of not going there will be. Funding for online activities, meetings, editorial work, coding, design, research or publications can of course be

channelled through allied institutions. Remember that the more online activities you unfold, the more likely it is that you will have to pay for a network administrator.

25 The inward looking free software world only uses its paradise-like voluntary work rules for its own coding projects. Cultural, artistic and activist projects do not fall under this category, no matter how politically correct they might be. The same counts for content editors and web designers. Ideally, online projects are high on communitarian spirits and are able to access the necessary skills. But the further we leave behind the moment of initiation, the more likely it will be that work will have to be paid. Organised networks have to face this economic reality or find themselves marginalised, no matter how advanced their dialogues and network use might be. Talk about the rise of "immaterial labour" and "precarious work" is useful, but could run out of steam as it remains incapable of making the jump from speculative reflection to a political agenda that will outline how networks can be funded over time.

26 Organised networks are always going to face great difficulty in raising financial resources through the traditional monetary system. It is not easy to attract funding from any of the traditional sectors of government, private philanthropy or business. Alternatives need to be created. Arguably, the greatest asset of organised networks consists of what they do: exchanging information and conducting debates on mailing lists; running public education programs and archiving education resources; open publishing of magazines, journals and books; organising workshops, meetings, exhibitions and conferences; providing an infrastructure that lends itself to rapid connections and collaborations amongst participants and potential partners; hosting individual web sites, wikis and blogs, etc.

27 All of these activities can be understood as media of communication and exchange. This quality lends itself to translation into what Bernard Lietaer – co-designer of the Euro and researcher of "complementary currencies" – defines as currency in its multiple uses and forms: 'an agreement within a community to use something as a medium of exchange' (Dykema and Lietaer, 2003). Lietaer says there are over 4000 forms of complementary currencies worldwide, from the customer loyalty systems of frequent flyer memberships to community development currencies in Bali. The LETS system is perhaps one of the better known alternative forms of complementary currency for those in the West.

28 In Japan, credit-for-care tickets can be accumulated for services not supported by the national health insurance system. Credits can then be used to pay for university tuition fees, or they may be transferred to another family member who is in need of domestic assistance. Lietaer makes reference to a survey in which elderly people in Japan preferred care services paid for with "fureai kippu" (caring relationship tickets) over services paid for in yen. Such a form of affective labour addresses many of the problems and difficulties faced by aging populations.

29 The primary difference between conventional and complementary currencies rests on the different regimes of value inscribed upon the mode of labour and the logic of exchange. Lietaer: 'Conventional currencies are built to create competition, and complementary currencies are built to create cooperation and community…'. The tension between multiple currency systems constitutes a form of mixed economies, and mitigates any tendency to get washed away by the euphoria of feel-good complementarity.

30 If there is a decision to be made, and an enemy to be singled out, it's the techno-libertarian religion of the "free". It's high time to openly attack the cynical logic of do-good venture capitalists that preach giving away content for no money while making millions of dollars in the back room with software, hardware and telco-infrastructure, which the masses of amateur idiots need in order to give and take for free. Organised networks are wary of the gurus on high consultancy fees who "inspire" others that they should make a living out of selling t-shirts: 'You poor bugger, fool around with your funky free content, while we make the money with the requirements'. It is time to unveil this logic and publicly resist it. Knowing is not enough.

31 The key point of networks is not so much their form of organisation but the fact that the business model has been on the agenda. The networked organisation, however, is setting the terms for entry into economic sustainability. Whereas the precursors to the organised network – lists, collaborative blogs, alternative media, etc. – are used to being on the vanguard of inquiry and practice, at the same time there is an undeniable distrust towards the networked organisations. For too long the ghetto of list cultures has resulted in a self-affirmation that is now a major

obstacle to the possibility to scalability. What is required for the organised network to scale up? A transparency of formalisation and shift in the division of labour? It is well known that formal networked organisations are the darlings of funding bodies, whereas real existing networks miss out because they fail to undertake the proper lobby work and cannot adequately represent themselves. It is ironic that it is exactly the global nature of networks that makes it next to impossible to fund them. There are no global funds for global networks – despite all the nineties rhetoric.

Scalar Relations

32 Let's turn, now, to perhaps the least investigated aspect of scalability. Why is it so difficult for networks to scale up? There seems to be a tendency to split up in a thousand micro conversations. This also counts for the "social software" blogs like Orkut, Friendster and LinkIn, in which millions from all over the globe participate. For the time being it is only the geeky Slashdot that manages to centralise conversations amongst the tens of thousands of its online users. Electronic mailing lists do not seem to get above a few thousand before the conversation actually slows down, heavily moderated as it often is. The ideal size for an in-depth, open discussion still seems to be somewhere between 50 and 500 participants. What does this mean for the networked multitudes? To what extent is this all a software issue?[6] Could the necessary protocols be written up by women? Well, of course, but what protocols would be adopted in such a case? Can we imagine very large-scale conversations that do not only make sense but also have an impact? What network cultures can become large transformative institutions?

33 Perhaps organised networks will always remain virtual. This option should never be dropped. There is no secret plan to institutionalise in the brick and mortar world. Maybe organised networks cannot work in collaboration with existing institutional structures. If so, how might the virtual be formalised? By this we don't mean formalisation in the old sense whereby the network takes on a hierarchical structure made up of a director, an elected secretariat, and so forth. Such a model was adopted by the grassroots movements of the 60s and 70s, and is now the primary reason why such entities are unable to deal with the demands and realities of networked sociality. Against this mode of formalisation, how might informality acquire an organised response to the unpredictability of needs and crisis and the rhythms of global capital?

34 As unstable as this model may sound, perhaps it is the form best suited to the habitus of networks, as we've sketched out above. It is necessary, after all, to identify the characteristics, tendencies and limits – that's to say, the short history – of the network, and develop a plan from there. There's no point assuming that established patterns of communication and practice can somehow be evaporated and entirely new projects started afresh. To do so would mean the invention of a new network, and that would mean undertaking that time-consuming work of defining practices and protocols through experimentation, trial and error. By all means, let's see new networks emerge – they will in any case. But the solution is not to abandon the hard labour, accumulated resources, and curious network personas – or brand, if you like – that have already been cultivated. Let's take the next step.

35 While it seems that we're forever in some perpetual crisis and phase of transition, now really is the time for the organised network to establish the ground upon which new politics, new economies, and new cultures may emerge within the dynamics of the social-technical system. In this way, the network opens up to an entirely new range of external variables that in turn function to transform the internal operation of the network. Such is the work of the constitutive outside – a process of post-negativity in which rupture and antagonism affirms the future life of the network. The tension between internal dynamics and external forces comprise a new ground of "the political".

36 Radical democracy theorists are still so slow and far away from recognising this new field of techno-sociality. Where they posit a negation of social antagonisms within ideologies such as the Third Way, and thus identify the disintegration of liberal democratic principles, the emergence of organised networks, by contrast, are constituted precisely in this denial of antagonisms by the culture of liberal democracy. The institutional structures of liberal democracy have become disconnected from the field of sociality, and in so doing are unable to address the antagonisms of the political. Antagonisms do not evacuate the scene so much as take flight into new terrains of communication. The organised network is open to the antagonisms that comprise social-technical relations. For this reason, it is urgent that organised networks confront the demands of scale and

sustainability in order to create new institutional horizons within which conflicts find a space of expression and a capacity for invention.

37 Accompanying such a transformation is the recognition of power structures and the fact that organised networks will always be shut out of them. There are also internal informal power structures – a recognition of which is the first step towards transparency. Too often the denial of existing structures prevents a discussion of how new forms of organisation could emerge. The prevailing assumption of decentralisation shuts down debate and imagination of how things could be done differently. Moreover, it reproduces the absolute power of the geeks. For them, it's not an issue because they can safely continue their engineering class without having to confront the urgency of translation that accompanies networks seeking to deal with the turmoil of new socialities.

38 Similarly, the structures that call themselves networks deny how centralised they are. Here, we are thinking of the proliferation of "research networks" within universities. There is an amazing confusion about what networks are within these settings. In many ways, such obfuscation is quite deliberate: since the institution of the university – a networked organisation – is beyond repair and unable to deal with the complexities of an informatised society, it is no wonder that we see this latest attempt at window dressing. There is a bizarre assumption that if governments and funding bodies throw money at projects that demonstrate a correspondence with networks – whatever that might mean – then, by some peculiar magical process, "innovation" (another quite meaningless term) will emerge. And what do you know, the procedure for submitting proposals, developing research partners, justifying budgets, outlining time schedules, undertaking research, and so on and so forth is exactly the same as the previous year of harvesting. The result: the existing elites are rewarded, and power is consolidated through the much more accurate model of the "cluster" (a rather ugly word that finds its birthplace in the school playground). There is no chance for these so-called networks to encounter infection. Quarantined inquiry is what these research networks are all about. Why? Because there is a complete failure to engage the technics of communications media in the first instance, to say nothing of the dependency model of funding which simply functions to reproduce the same.

Libertarian Legacies

39 Organised networks have their own problems to confront. Because of the lack of transparency about who is in charge of operations and project development, they are considerably slowed down. This is also a question of software architecture – the fact that we can't vote every month for who is the moderator for the month. There's no technical reason why we don't have this. Rather, it points again to the culture of networks – these can change fast in terms of applications, but not in terms of ideologies. To illustrate these issues, we'll turn now to a discussion of blogs, wikis and Creative Commons.

40 The blog is another technology of networks, one whose logic is that of the link. The link enhances visibility through a ranking system. This is how the blogger tackles the question of scale. But the question of scale cannot be reduced to one of scarcity. The technics of the blog don't add up to what we're calling organised networks. The blogger does not have infinite possibility but is governed by a moment of decision. This does not arise out of scarcity, since there is the ability of machines to read other machines. Rather, there are limits that arise out of the attention economy and out of affinity: I share your culture, I don't share you culture; I like you, I don't like you. Here we see a new cartography of power that is peculiar to a symbolic economy of networks.

41 Quite importantly, the decisionism of the link constitutes a new field of the political. This is where schizo-production comes to an end. The naïve 90s Deleuzomania would say everything connects with everything. Technically speaking there's no reason why you can't include all the links of the world – this is what the Internet Archive does. The blog, however, is unable to do this – not due to a lack of space, since space is endlessly extensive through the logic of the link. Nor is this really an issue of resources. Instead, it is an issue that attends the enclave culture of blogs. They are zones of affinity with their own protectionist policies. If you're high up on the blog-scale of desirable association, the political is articulated by the endless requests for linkage. These cannot all be met, however, and resentment if not enemies are born. The enemy is always kept on the outside. They remain invisible. As such, the blog is closed to change. Blogs can thus be understood as incestuous networks of auto-reproduction.

42

Since organised networks comprise new institutional forms whose relations are immanent to the media of communication, we can say that ultimately the blog does not correspond with the organised network. The outside for organised networks always plays a constitutive role in determining the direction, shape and actions of the network. This is not the case for the blog, where the enemy is never present, never visible, since the network of the blog is the link, and the link is the friend.

43 Having said this, why is the blog visible in the mainstream media in a way that the organised network is not? Blogging started as a commentary on the mainstream media: TV, newspapers and their websites. At a discursive level the blog was operating internally to mainstream media. In a genealogical sense the blog was part of the news industry. The main controversy within the news industry has been whether or not bloggers can be considered as qualified journalists. This is part of a broader problem of categorisation of the blogger: they are not poets, writers, scholars, etc. Nowadays, the blogger has become a profession with a professional code of ethics and job description, yet they are still working in conditions we associate with post-Fordist flexible labour. Paradoxically, then, the blogger is currently expunged and questioned by the networked organisation.

44 The deep necessity or precondition of the blogger is not so much their networking capacity, since they are performing the self. Networking is secondary. But if you had a blogger who is self-performing without linking, they would remain invisible. Without the link you are non-existent. Thus their self-performance is identical to linking. However, there is a difference between networking and linking. There is a strong social network amongst bloggers, one that is highly intimate and highly disclosing of personal details. In that sense we can see a correspondence between the blog and reality television – the latter, of course, is pretty much completely opposite to the logic of networks. So in terms of remediation, to what extent does this anti-networking character of reality TV carry over to blogs?

45 This is where we need to readdress the idea of the political. As we have noted, with the blog, the political corresponds with the moment of linking, which is technically facilitated by the software, how it works, and the decisions that need to be made. Just as the blog is a self-performance, so too is the instantiation of the political. Both are an invisible undertaking. The fact that I do NOT link to you remains invisible. The unanswered email is the most significant one. So while the blog has some characteristics of the network, it is not open, it cannot change, because it closes itself to the potential for change and intervention. With the blog, you can comment but you cannot post. Your comments might even be taken down.

46 The blog, along with other social networks such as Friendster, Orkut and so forth, is finally characterised in terms of the software that refuses antagonisms. The early version of Orkut had a software interface that cut straight to the issue: 'Are you my friend? Yes/No'. Only very few have the courage to tell someone straight in the face: 'No'. Seriously, what choice is there here, except to create an inflation of friends? We all want them. We find ourselves back to the 17 stages of joy. Nirvanaland. This is New Age revivalism at work, desperately insecure, and in search of a "friend".

47 The wiki offers another example of organised networks with its own specific social-technical characteristics. Here a collective intelligence is created, produced as a resource immanent to the media form. Yet it's important to understand that the wiki model will not work in all cultures and countries. The wiki is specific. It is a collaborative operation. You can have as many ideas as you want but this doesn't mean they will translate into a resource. The technical facilities on their own will not explain the story. Japanese and Chinese cultures, for example, do not like full visibility: to be seen, heard, or read. Why would they collaborate on these projects? Then think of the political histories of countries. The wiki presumes there is a willingness to work in the public and share knowledge. These are not universal values or aspirations.

48 The key to networks is the tension between open and closed systems of communication, ideas and action. For the most part, e-democracy folk are unreconstructed techno-libertarians. The Creative Commons movement is also caught up in this persona, as if it's still 1999. Increasingly, we are seeing advocates of the Creative Commons license claiming they are "not political", as if this gesture will somehow enamour them to old-style institutions and publishing industries they are seeking to coax over to the other side. There is a naïve assumption that if Creative Commons can dissociate itself from leftist movements in particular, then they will have greater success in

promoting Creative Commons as a dominant alternative to the strictures of IP regimes. There is, however, no escape from politics, and the libertarian ethos of Lessig and his cohorts would do well to be more clear about this.

49 The rhetoric of openness, shared by advocates of Creative Commons and libertarians, has purchase on governments who also trade in political populism. Yet it disguises the political motivations and economic interests at work in these projects. The libertarian geek elite has so far effectively stopped networks from mobilising their own financial resources. Most famously, there is the inability of networks to effectively work with micro-payment systems in the form of membership fees, software, etc. The libertarian geek option gives you one option: you give everything away for nothing and we'll take the money. Academic databases are an exception, where content (business data, reports, articles, etc.) can be accessed for substantial subscription fees. Institutions are fine with this arrangement, and don't seem too concerned about subsidising these information services and publishing industries. The telcos also do okay – it's the poor hackers, activists, artists and amateur intellectuals that get burnt.

50 The provocation of organised networks is to unveil these mechanisms of control and contradiction, to discuss the power of money flows, and to redirect funds. The organised network struggles with its own informality. This isn't a case of wanting a piece of the pie – organised networks don't even get a taste. No, organised networks want the whole bloody bakery! They are not examples for the network economy. Even in the case of Creative Commons, which do have a beta model of redistributing finance, this in fact is incredibly retrograde since it multiplies the necessity of intermediaries – a function eradicated in post-Fordist economies. You cannot earn money from content, only provide services around it. In this 90s model of an information economy, the thing itself borders on being an untouchable sacred object, despite its banality. Again: the organised network has to break with the "information must be free" logic in order to move towards sustainability.

Angel Investors

51 The libertarian ideology hides its own mechanisms of making money. Libertarian open source movements are no different at the level of structure, organisation and financing from the monopoly of corporations involved in video game production. Tactically they focus on the right to remix, the basis of all creativity. Sure, this is nice. It goes back to the idea that all culture is distilled from a basic, common source. Organised networks wish to undertake projects, and to do this requires resources and financing beyond simply a capacity to mix code. In this sense, there is a parallel here to organised crime, whose aim is to redistribute stolen resources and property.

52 Organised crime is involved in translation. In terms of what networks are and ought to be, this element is consciously excluded in the software architecture and beyond. The repurposing and redirecting of financial resources appropriated by organised criminal networks is precisely what enables them to proliferate. Organised networks have a lot to learn from the creativity of criminal industries if they wish to address the problem of sustainability (see Gye, 2004). So here's your "get out of jail free" card: criminal networks can be understood as an equivalent resource to the 'presence of organised networks of individual angel investors' (ELF, 2002).

53 Since organised networks are seemingly in a condition of perpetual exclusion from conventional, institutional modes of financing, then there is really only one option left: to leave the network, or alternatively, to understand the logic of crime. There isn't much to obtain from the open source gurus. At least they have not totally captured the attention of so-called Internet culture and research. Instead, they have migrated over to traditional cultural institutions, which now consider open source as the primary model. This will be an interesting experiment to observe, since the open source model goes against the border controls of the traditional institution. Whether such institutions are able fully to embrace the logic of open distribution and retain both their brand and funding capacity remains to be seen.

54 Given that the organised network has no financial basis for its activities, why, then is accountability an issue here? This, of course, relates back to the question of transparency, governance and control, and thus the structural dynamics of networks. This is a matter of making visible the capacities of the network to undergo transformation precisely due to the way in which accountability reveals limits. What does accountability mean outside the framework of

representation? What does representation mean within a post-representative political system? How does it work?

55 Networks represent themselves and not an external constituency whose interests require distillation within a party-political form. There is always the temptation to present networks as constituencies that are somehow obliged to be capable of articulating the needs and interests of what is by definition, at the social-technical level, a mutable formation. There is no permanency here. People come and go according to what holds a passing affinity and interest for them. This, perhaps above all else, is the primary condition networks must address if they are to undertake the passage of organisation.

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Geert Lovink is a Dutch-Australian media theorist and activist. In January 2004 he was appointed as senior researcher/associate professor at Amsterdam University (HvA/UvA) where he founded the Institute of Network Cultures [www.networkcultures.org]. He is organiser of numerous new media conferences, festivals and (online) publications and the co-founder of numerous Internet projects such as Nettime and Fibreculture. He recently published Dark Fiber (2002), Uncanny Networks (2002), My First Recession (2003) and The Principle of Notworking (2005).

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Notes

[1] For elaboration on the concept of the "constitutive outside" as it relates to media theory and the politics of information, see Rossiter (2004).

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[2] See the discussion on the Fibreculture mailing list about list governance, censorship and organised networks in November/December 2004: www.fibreculture.org, go to: list archive. More recently, discussions on the Spectre mailing list on media art and culture in Deep Europe have broached the topic of new institutional forms and models of organisation in the field of media art. See the thread on 'ICC and for the media art center of 21C', August 2005: list archive.

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[3] See also the introduction and conclusion of Geert Lovink's My First Recession (2003). The theory of organised networks should be read as a follow up of this book.

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[4] Jeff Juris (2005) describes similar tensions between what he terms "horizontals" (self-organising activist movements) and "verticals" (traditional institutions) as they played out across the various Social Forums in recent years. In reality, all forms of techno-sociality combine both horizontal and vertical forms of organisation. Our argument is not so much that a hard distinction separates these modes of organisation as a degree in scale.

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[5] One of the many crossovers between computer science and humanities, as proposed by Michael Gurstein and others. Some of their texts can be found at https://www.netzwissenschaft.de/sem/pool.htm.

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[6] Here we're thinking of collaborative, peer-to-peer "software solutions" such as Paper Airplane https://paperairplane.us. Thanks to Soenke Zehle for bringing this site to our attention.

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