

Organized Networks, Transdisciplinarity and New Institutional Forms

Ned Rossiter

Abstract

The network models of sociality made possible by information and communication technologies (ICTs) have resulted in new forms of social-technical systems, or what I am calling emergent institutional forms of "organized networks." While these networks can be called institutional forms insofar as they have a capacity to organize social relations, they are radically dissimilar to the moribund technics of modern institutional forms such as government, union, and firm whose logic of organization is predicated on vertical integration and representative tenets of liberal democracy. Such dynamics are profoundly unsuited to the collaborative and distributive culture of networks peculiar to digital communications media and their attendant socialities.

Despite the reform agendas of universities in advanced economies over the past 15-20 years, their efforts at adapting to information economies and networked socialities have proven to be largely ineffective in dealing with the challenge of innovation and problematic of contingency, due to the predominant adherence to the strictures of intellectual property regimes coupled with cumbersome bureaucratic systems.

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This paper investigates emergent social-technical dynamics of communication, production and organization in the network cultures of the education system. The paper describes and analyzes the emergence of "organized networks" as new institutional forms. Organized networks, in contrast to "networked organizations" (universities, corporations, government, even contemporary art institutions), are distinct for the ways in which the organization of social relations are immanent to the media of communication. The paper considers some of the ways in which organized networks facilitate the communication and production of educational resources across peer-to-peer, transdisciplinary social-technical networks.

The focus is to both analyze and invent new institutional
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forms that better enable the possibility of sustainability and security in a global information environment that is defined by uncertainty. Establishing mechanisms that distribute education resources common to networks is of central importance. Such an undertaking requires a transdisciplinary, distributive and collaborative institutional form – this form is called the organized network. Organized networks are emerging as the new institutional form best suited to address the uncertainties of labor and life in network societies and information economies.

Introduction

There is an urgent need for new institutional forms to address the uncertainties of labor and life within network societies and informational economies. The key institutions of the modern era – union, state, firm – have proven inadequate to the task of organizing and managing populations in the past 15-30 years. [1] During this period, many countries have undergone dramatic social change wrought by the force and impact of reforms peculiar to neoliberal governance and economic globalization. [2] The challenges of contemporary governance can be addressed through the creation of new institutional forms that are responsive to the logic of social-technical networks and non-representative democratic processes. [3]

It is essential to address these challenges in order to create structures of communication within networks that enable the distribution of both educational resources and the income they generate through what can be understood as collaborative economies. Economic models developed from such technics are immanent to the logic of network cultures and specific to the situation of communication and practice. In other words, there will be no universal model that applies to the dynamics of networks, which by definition are singular, albeit with patterns, tendencies, and resources that may overlap. Collaborative economies special to network cultures can also be distinguished from the service and delivery economies of the networked university and its educational commodities enframened within intellectual property regimes that endow education with informational-commodity properties. [4]

In the interests of a pragmatism that is necessary if network cultures are to undergo a scalar and organizational transformation, I at times adopt in this paper the unattractive language typically associated with the rhet-

oric of neoliberalism. Similarly, I speak very deliberately of hierarchical and centralizing tendencies of networks. [5] The social-technical dynamics of organized networks constitute organization in ways substantively different from networked organizations (unions, state, firms, universities). Of course ICTs are common to both of these forms of organization. There are some fundamental differences, however: organized networks are co-emergent with digital communications media, while networked organizations typically precede the advent of digital ICTs. [6] Of special significance is the tendency for networked organizations to adopt IPRs as the regulatory architecture for commerce and institutional partnerships whereas organized networks are often staunch advocates of open source software and culture.

These are some of the things I mean by the term social-technical dynamics of networks. And they are the kind of features and properties that imbue the educational encounter and structure of relations with qualitative differences. Primary among these are the experiences of sharing, of feedback, of flexibility, and of friendship. However, it is a mistake to think the horizontal, decentralizing and distributive tendencies of digital networks as free from hierarchical and centralizing modes of organization and patterns of behavior. Let us not forget that flexibility is also the operative mode of post-Fordist labor and its attendant double-edged sword of economic precarity and ontological precariousness. [7]

For political projects that wish to go beyond the comfort zones of consensus communities (as if they exist outside of fantasy, myth, and self-delusion, irrespective of whether one has anarchistic or social-democratic tendencies), I maintain that it is better to engage these discourses, exploit their political legitimacy, and confront the materialities of informational communication in order to make concrete the horizons of utopian speculation. [8] It would be easy to dismiss such an idea as a variation of Third Way politics, but to do so would forget the materialities of communication and sociality of networks that function as dissonances in the system, and as registrations of "the political."

I should make one thing clear from the outset: this paper does not discuss the numerous open source software and programming possibilities for distributive education. Nor does it discuss developments of social networks and the advent of the much-hyped Web 2.0 and Internet2, situated as they are within an uneven geography of information. There are others much better informed than myself who can contribute this important knowledge to the collaborative project I outline here. This paper is best taken as a general intervention that cries out for detailed case studies whose analytical empirics is immanent to the time and space of network collaborations. My interest in this paper is to say a few things about the process of scalar transformation and transdisciplinarity as they relate to the invention of new institutional forms. Having established these background

conditions, processes and practices, I will then move on to the topic of autonomous education.

Informational Universities and Neoliberalism as a Condition of Possibility

Over the past decade, it has become clear that digital technologies have opened up new possibilities in the production and distribution of content and are redefining the reception and creation of knowledge. Changes in the organizational capacities of institutions have accompanied these developments. Following Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins*, Kevin Robins and Frank Webster note how the modern liberal university was coextensive with the interests of the modern nation state and "the reproduction of national knowledge and national culture." [9] In a period of transnational capitalism, the capacity of the university to remain bound to such a national agenda is greatly diminished. Nowadays, the university, like so many institutions, must accommodate the complexities concomitant with global market economies. The problem is that the organizational form of the university is ill-suited to such dynamics. Despite the reform agendas of universities in advanced economies over the past 15-20 years, their efforts at adapting to information economies and networked socialities have proven to be largely ineffective in dealing with the challenge of innovation and problematic of contingency due to the predominant adherence to the strictures of intellectual property regimes coupled with cumbersome bureaucratic systems. In this respect, universities remain embedded within a national system, since it is the responsibility of the state and its legal organs to regulate intellectual property violations in accordance with the TRIPS Agreement of 1995.

Over the past thirty or so years, the university has advanced into and simultaneously conditioned the information economy, as witnessed by the connection between intellectual property (copyright, patents), publishing, the informatization of labor, and the commercially driven practices of the university. [10] This has created a tension between universities as public institutions and universities as private enterprises increasingly dependent on externally generated forms of income (consultancies, state and industry research funds, commercial applications, etc.). Furthermore, the concept of the university as an institution with an exclusive purchase on the administration and provision of knowledge and learning is undergoing transformation as countries with advanced economies open the "market" of education to private providers.

For collaborative research networks situated within the context of the European Union (EU), the project of constructing new institutional forms in the field of higher education holds a substantive relation to the Bologna Process. [11] The twin tasks of aggregating educational

resources common to network cultures and developing business models that enable the mobilization of these resources is central to the ambitions of the Bologna Process. [12] Despite the fact that organized networks do not register within such policy, it is strategic to recognize that universities do not hold an exclusive purchase on higher education and research. There is provision – rhetorical as it may be – for non-university networks to enter the field of formalized education. Key to such a development is an engagement with the accreditation procedures in order for organized networks to operate as new business forms in the field of education. [13] To realize this concrete ambition requires assembling a "network of networks" as unique platforms of delivery and dissemination of educational materials premised on open source principles.

Paradoxically, perhaps, neoliberalism – with its logic of outsourcing, privatization and disassembling institutional frameworks – conditions the possibility of organized networks. Moreover, neoliberalism has resulted in a weakening of collegial bonds and organizing capacities within the institutional form of the university.

The scale of administration associated with this task can very easily appear overwhelming, and the prospect of entering into such banality can be an immediate stumbling block to the process of scaling up. Yet incorporation as a legal entity is a necessary step if networks are to play the game of supranational funding in the EU. [14] In this regard there is much to learn from peer-to-peer migrant networks, media activism and border academy projects such as those coordinated by Florian Schneider and Susanne Lang. [15] In a conversation earlier this year about registering networks as corporate entities, Lang informed me that in Germany at least such a task can be performed relatively swiftly once the necessary procedures are understood and then coordinated as tasks distributed within the network. This is an instance where national and possibly subnational policies on the registration of an organization may cause tensions for networks of transnational orientation. A decision has to be made about national location. Take it as a matter of paper-work and then move on.

There's no question that the political stakes are high in such an undertaking, and there will be many who are quick to charge such a project as selling out. The reality is that organized networks will never be funded through state subsidies in the way that much of the cultural sector, along with NGOs for that matter, has and continues

to be, in Europe at least, along with its neo-imperial offshoots. As a result, organized networks have no choice but to come up with business models. Otherwise they can only amble along in parasitic mode, taking a bit here and bit there from their unwitting hosts (frequently universities). Entering the market of higher education as external providers of "unique" educational resources and programs is one obvious option for organized networks seeking to obtain relative stability and sustainability through economic autonomy.

Paradoxically, perhaps, neoliberalism – with its logic of outsourcing, privatization and disassembling institutional frameworks – conditions the possibility of organized networks. Moreover, neoliberalism has resulted in a weakening of collegial bonds and organizing capacities within the institutional form of the university. And this is where the story of organized networks as new institutional forms within the field of education begins.

The work of Marc Bousquet on the constitutive relations between informal economies and the information university is instructive here insofar as he locates the economic and managerial problematic of labor as key to understanding the co-incidence between neoliberal policy-making, the commercialization of education and informatization of social relations. [16] As Bousquet writes, "informationalization is about delivering labor in the mode of information." Thus labor and not the advancement in technological systems is the primary source from which surplus-value of the educational commodity form is derived.

There is nothing especially new in such an observation – how can we forget the insights of Marx? – but it is an important reminder that alternative models would do well to take on board when questioning the dominance of informatized education as a commercial undertaking that severs the sociality of production from the commodity form. Alternative models as advocated in this paper can learn from the histories of experimentation in organization as it relates to the institutional form. Organizations and the question of institutional form, it seems to me, are all too often neglected when thinking about issue of sustainability and collaboration within network cultures.

Transdisciplinarity and the Legacy of Form

Of course there is much to learn from how other networks are undertaking their autonomous education initiatives. The accumulation of best practices is perhaps the most important lesson of all. [17] National contingencies will undoubtedly shape the approaches adopted by different networks, since the advent of open education within an informational mode is conditioned by the crisis of the modern universities as they engage the neoliberal forces of commercialization, declining state funding and

the legal architecture of intellectual property regimes – all of which are regulated by the transformed sovereign power of the nation-state. [18]

The reason why there is variation across different countries has to do with the fact there is no single hue of neoliberalism, with different factors and policy responses coming into play that arise out circumstances peculiar to the nation-state. This alone presents perhaps the biggest challenge to networks seeking to collaborate in developing autonomous educational projects, since transnational alliances of networks wishing to intervene in the composition and experience of education are, to varying degrees, bound to the logic of their neoliberal states. There are precedents for independent educational networks across Europe, ranging from the autonomist learning centers in Italy and the numerous educational workshops run by migrant networks and activists (often in tandem with cultural festivals or social forums) to the more up-scale summer schools with celebrity theorists.

Rather than provide a taxonomy of examples such as these, at this stage I wish to point to what I consider two seminal moments in the pre-history of organized networks. And this brings us to the question of form. First, the work of Félix Guattari and others at La Borde, an experimental institution in anti-psychiatry founded in the 1950s. [19] Here we find the development of concepts such as transversality and the practice of transdisciplinarity, both of which are primary to a network of networks. And second, the period following World War II when the Institute for Social Research returned to Germany. This passage in which an institute travels from New York City and Los Angeles to Frankfurt interests me for the way in which the methods adopted by the Institute are shaped, or rather, have to reconcile with the political and historical situation in which the Institute found itself.

Existing in effect as a virtual laboratory with shifting residencies at Columbia University, the American Jewish Committee's Department of Scientific Research, and a bungalow in Los Angeles, members of the Institute for Social Research undertook a number of collaborative research projects that enlisted quantitative and qualitative methods along with philosophical critique and social theory. [20] The organizational role and diplomatic efforts of Max Horkheimer are incisive here. As someone astute to the material situation of intellectual labor, Horkheimer sacrificed much of his time to the tasks of administration. From his inaugural speech as Director of the Institute in 1931, Horkheimer set out a trajectory for interdisciplinary research that combined empirical studies of social phenomena with the "animating impulses" of philosophical analysis. [21] His ambition was nothing less than "permanent collaboration" between philosophers, sociologists, economists, historians and psychologists. Key to such "collective research" was a proto-network structure which saw the Institute manifest as a number of international branches at any one time, transvergence.rossiter.trandisciplinarity.04

ensuring also the maximum potential for survival should any node happen to collapse. Consider this as a form of data-backup or site-mirroring for the pre-digital age.

Horkheimer's institutional role contrasts that of Adorno who, as a devotee to critical theory, adopted with much reluctance and misgiving what he considered the reductive and internally contradictory empirical methods of "administrative research" championed by Paul Lazarsfeld and Berkeley's Public Opinion Study Group. But even Adorno, subsumed into an institutional persona, found it necessary to change tact upon returning to the situation of post-War Germany. While Adorno's derision for empirical research and its mechanized techniques continued throughout his life, the Institute – and especially Horkheimer – exploited its association with "advanced" American empirical research methods. Government, university, industry and US occupational forces perceived such methods as worthy of financial support for the reconstruction of cities, the reform of university disciplines, and the diagnosis of fascist, anti-democratic tendencies in an emergent consumer society. [22] Rolf Wiggershaus' comprehensive study of the Frankfurt School recounts one aspect of this engagement with authorities in the effort to secure funding for the Institute:

In 1950 the US High Commissioner, John McCloy, put DM 200,000 at the Institute's disposal, with a further DRM 235,000 for rebuilding. This energetic support sprang from a belief among those responsible for American policy in Germany that sociology, particularly when represented by American citizens [which Horkheimer and Adorno had obtained] and with its emphasis on empirical research, was a factor in promoting democracy. [23]

This strategy of advancing political and economic interests through client organizations has since become a hallmark of US foreign policy, which extends to the structural adjustment programs of the IMF and World Bank and auxiliary role often played by NGOs as civil society actors. And it was gamble that Horkheimer was willing to play in the mixed-up world of post-War Germany. Here was the opportunity for scalar enhancement that had been unraveling for some time in the US as the Institute's funds became increasingly scarce, coupled with fragile relations with collaborating individuals and institutions. By diversifying the sources of funding from a range of authorities the Institute sought not only to maximize its funding potential, but also to create a structure in which a prevailing discourse of practical research distributed across institutions gave legitimacy – or at least some protection – to the more speculative philosophical interests held by Institute members, Adorno in particular.

What we find here is an instance in which the institution itself takes on the capacity of an actor engaged in "immanent critique" – another key "meta-method" in

thinking the complex relations that comprise the transdisciplinary research of organized networks. This is an experimental methodology in which the time and space of research is inseparable from the labor and life of networks. At the theoretical level, immanent critique takes its primary lessons from Deleuze, Foucault and Adorno with important input from Canadian political economist and communications scholar Harold A. Innis.

Immanent critique is a method of post-negativity. It retains Adorno's insistence that contradictions and tensions operate as a constituent force within any idiom of expression and it recognizes that sociality within network cultures and creative economies is configured not according to dualisms, but rather to patterns of distribution, rhythms of tension, transversal social relations, modulations of affect and transdisciplinary institutional practices. In this sense, immanent critique understands the antagonism of the constituent outside as a processual force of affirmation as distinct from the "negation of negation." My position differs from Žižek on this point, who reads the Hegelian "negation of negation" as "nothing but repetition at its purest: in the first move, a certain gesture is accomplished and fails; then, in the second move, this same gesture is simply repeated." [24] Such a manoeuvre, I would argue, does not account for the indeterminacy of difference that attends the affirmative role of the constituent outside as it subsists within a network of networks. This amounts to a form of post-negativity in which the operation of a constituent outside permeates social-technical and historical conditions of the present.

Institutions function to organize social relations. It follows, then, that the social-technical dynamics peculiar to a range of digital media technologies (mailing lists, collaborative blogs, wikis, content management systems) institute new modes of networked sociality. It is easy to dismiss this process of emergent institutionalization. Many would assert that it simply results in a bureaucratization and rigidity of social-technical communication systems whose default setting is one of flows, decentralization, horizontality, etc. I would suggest such knee-jerk, technically incorrect responses risk a disengagement from the political and thus from politics. There is a passivity that attends this kind of position. Moreover, it is a position that fails the politics of reappropriating the psychic, social and semiotic territory of institutions. The process of instituting networks involves a movement toward the strategic rather than tactical dimension of net politics. Another reason to turn towards the strategic dimension has to do with the short-termism that accompanies many tactical projects. The logic of the tactic is one of situated intervention. And then it disappears. There are of course some notable exceptions – Indymedia, Makrolab and the Yes Men come to mind as quite long-term experiments in networks and tactical media; yet these exceptions are not, I would suggest, instances of transdisciplinarity.

The practice of transdisciplinarity preconditions the invention of new institutional forms. As Gary Genosko notes of the meta-methodology of Félix Guattari, transdisciplinarity is predicated on experiments in institutional formation. [25] In the case of organized networks, transdisciplinarity is constituted by "the political," by the tensions that underpin cross-sectoral, multi-institutional engagements that make possible new modes and new forms of research. Transdisciplinarity can be distinguished from interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary research. Despite all the claims in OECD reports and government and university policy rhetoric on research, interdisciplinarity is not about networks but rather clusters, and typically takes place in "private and public labs and research centres." [26] Such settings, and the institutional and political-economic conditions which shape interdisciplinary research, also results in another key difference with transdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinarity rests within the regime of intellectual property, which operates as an architecture of control. As such, the knowledge produced is locked up and contained; it refuses the social relations that make possible the development of intellectual action, and it therefore refuses the potential for social transformation because of the way knowledge is enclosed within a property relation.

This is not to dispense with tactics since tactics are the source of renewal. Interestingly enough, tactics parallel the logic of capital. We see this operation historically time and again. Just consider core-periphery relations and the ways in which capital has to incorporate or appropriate the margins in order to replenish and reproduce itself. Such movements are similar to what Brian Holmes identifies as the cooptation of the productive efforts of the artist, cultural critic, designer. [27] It is therefore important to remember that autonomists are not somehow located outside the state but rather operating as disruptive potentiality whose difference is defined by relations of negation, refusal, exodus, subtraction, etc. Certainly there are important qualitative differences in the relation individuals and peoples have with the state. Think, for instance, of the experience of migrants and so-called illegal movement of peoples across territories, or the precarious worker. Precarity, let's remember, is an experience that traverses a range of class scales, and may even be considered as a post-Fordist technique of border control that distinguishes "self-managed exploitation ... from those who must be exploited (or worse) by direct coercion." [28]

Collaboration and Governance in New Institutions

Two recent reports commissioned by international institutions highlight the central importance of new institutions if problems of democracy, accountability, fairness and sustainability are to be addressed in the twenty-first century. The International Labor Organization's World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization

"warns that we have reached a crisis stage in the legitimacy of our political institutions, whether national or international. There is an urgent need to rethink current institutions of global economic governance, whose rules and policies it says are largely shaped by powerful countries and powerful players." [29] Similarly, an OECD report titled *Governance in the 21st Century* highlights the challenges as follows:

Organizational and creative liberty [...] has very exacting preconditions. In the future, more diffused approaches to governance in all parts of society will only work if there are frameworks in place that assure very high levels of transparency, accountability and integrity. At the same time, for public authorities and society more broadly, the ability to put new forms of governance into the service of realising people's collective good will depend on a common commitment to democratic values, human rights and equality of opportunity. Even with these frameworks and values in place, the emergence of new forms of governance will still depend fundamentally on the capacity of individuals and groups to participate actively in making and implementing decisions. [30]

It is precisely the issues outlined here that organized networks, as a policy intervention and social-technical practice, seek to address. Through the primary vectors of inquiry – protocols, self-organization, scalability, sustainability – the project of organized networks both assesses and undertakes the construction of new institutions that engage diverse populations in creating mechanisms and resources for labor and life in information societies, bringing new models to international challenges of cultural diversity, migration, creative innovation and open education. The problem remains, however, that organized networks do not yet exist as recognized actors either within the stratum of policy discourse or as concrete potentialities. What we have, nonetheless, is a steady accumulation of energies, best practices, concept translators, situated projects, and so forth. Along with taking on board the lessons from pre-digital institutions of experimental research, there is also much to learn from international efforts and failures to coordinate cross-institutional encounters in the information society.

The collaborative project of inventing new institutions holds an affinity, remote as that may be, with the experiences, process and political form of "multi-stakeholderism" between government, business and civil society organizations (CSOs) during the UN's World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). However, multi-stakeholderism generates tension as it often requires CSOs and NGOs to institutionalize themselves to gain recognition from government and business

stakeholders, often decoupling decision-making processes from the grass roots networks that are these organizations' key constituency. Such an operation typifies the vertical system of communication and governance within networked organizations (as distinct from organized networks).

Again, this is not to say that hierarchies and centralizing tendencies are absent from or not intrinsic to organized networks. Rather, it is to recognize that conflicting, non-assimilable hierarchies distinguish organized networks from networked organizations. Herein lies the challenge of governance and indeed collaboration. The multi-stakeholderism model does not address these tensions, and is thus unsuccessful as a governance model for networks. The political concept of organized networks, however, understands conflict as a generative force in need of both collaborative methodologies and transdisciplinary frameworks. These are key problematics of communication and governance that organized networks must address if they wish to operate successfully as new institutional forms composed of diverse and fluctuating constituencies, where people have the freedom to come and go. [31]

The problem remains, however, that organized networks do not yet exist as recognized actors either within the stratum of policy discourse or as concrete potentialities. What we have, nonetheless, is a steady accumulation of energies, best practices, concept translators, situated projects, and so forth.

While the organized network has a relative institutional autonomy, it must engage, by necessity, other institutional partners who may often be opposed to the interests of networks. Organized networks share something with NGOs, CSOs, and even think-tanks. Yet there is a radical dissimilarity and qualitative difference between organized networks and these other institutional forms. Take NGOs and CSOs, for example, and the techniques of governance adopted throughout the WSIS process. Within any partnership there is of course a compromise. In order to obtain the necessary discursive legitimacy required to participate within the institutional settings of WSIS, NGOs and CSOs had to engage a model of organization that was antithetical to the self-organizing logic of networks. NGOs and CSOs were thus required to adopt the representational form known throughout WSIS as multi-stakeholderism – the primary model of governance for managing, if not realizing, relations between business, government and civil society. Multi-stakeholderism is predicated on representative models of liberal democracy, and such abstraction always refers to itself and thus frequently conflicts with the grass-roots networks that characterize the constituent dimension of NGOs and CSOs. Representation does not correspond with the logic of networks, which are better understood

as non-representational forms of politics.

In saying this I do not wish to valorize the horizontality of networks. The tendency to describe networks in terms of horizontality results in an occlusion of "the political," which consists of antagonisms that underpin sociality. It is technically and socially incorrect to assume that hierarchical and centralizing architectures and practices are absent from network cultures. At the technical level, one only has to look at the debates surrounding the information society and Internet governance: hierarchical and political-economic aspects of assigning domain names, location of root servers, politics of IPRs, uneven geography of information flows, determination of standards, effects of trade agreements on content production and distribution, etc. The hierarchical dimension to networked sociality is easy to account for: just consider the cohort of alpha males scheming in the back rooms of so many organizational forms. Even in the case of wikis, which on the surface appear to be exemplary non-representational forms insofar as labor on content production is anonymous, again we need only to venture through the backdoor to see the ringleaders at work. [32] Of course the technical and social aspects of ICT networks are not mutually exclusive, but rather interpenetrate one another in a plethora of ways. A challenge for organized networks is thus to address the software problem and the social problem.

The collaborative interest of organized networks is to consider what the scalar transformation of organized networks entails vis-à-vis the aggregation of educational resources distributed within and across networks.

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Networks have been fantastic at developing educational resources such as documentation of open source software, university course materials, health-care information, tips on political organization, etc. Obviously there's a lot to learn from NGOs and the revival of union organizing as seen in the "Justice for Janitors" movement in the US. [33] Certainly my position is not to dismiss these institutional forms outright. A focus on educational resources strikes me as a matter of tactics that feed strategic interests. Without the tactical, organized networks collapse into stasis. Here it is necessary to recognize the situation of informational politics. Just as NGOs and CSOs have filled the void created by the neoliberal

state's evacuation from the social, so too must organized networks seize upon the institutional persona of the "external provider."

Conclusion

What I am suggesting, then, is that networks intervene in the market of higher education. The university is a vulnerable institution actually. It is quite uncertain, and indeed could be characterized as a place of precarity. As many have experienced, the labor force of universities is predominantly composed of casual workers whose seasonal pattern of employment resembles that of the strawberry picker. Unions typically fail to represent the interests of casual workers, since their interest is to protect the security of those with tenured positions.

As far as I can determine, an intervention into education market is one of the few ways in which organized networks may obtain economic autonomy, which depends upon securing an economic base. Without this, organized networks have little chance of sustainability and little possibility of scalar transformation. There is a capacity for networks to mobilize their resources in transversal ways in the form of master classes, summer schools, and training programs that operate both internally to and externally from universities. Universities are undergoing a process of losing their expertise, their ability to bring in new knowledge and to transform the disciplines, which have become incredibly rigid and dull. Universities can be characterized by their deficiency of thought. They don't know how to move themselves in ways that incorporate what Bateson called "the difference that makes a difference." The strange thing is that neoliberalism makes possible the difference that makes a difference. This is the perversity of neoliberalism. The structural logic of neoliberalism makes possible openings, and openings invite interventions that begin to enable the financing of autonomous, precarious, experimental research and teaching that shows no sign of being catered for in current OECD, government and university policy directives.

My proposal can be easily criticized for appropriating the outside – the experimental elements that so often energize networks on the frontline of invention – and closing it down again. This is the classic critique of appropriation. We see this most obviously in the fashion industries. Remember punk? If you wanted, you could pay 200 bucks for a pair of jeans with a rip in them. Hilariously, there was no shortage of idiots who went out and purchased their damaged goods. The same can be said about knowledge. What functions against the closure of minds and resources is the fact that educational business projects undertaken by a network of networks is predicated on principles of open source software, society and culture. Obviously there will be fights over how best to redistribute funds within and across networks. But that's a matter that can be sorted out. Having

said this, a problem remains. There is only so much free labor that can be done within the networks. [34] Certainly it helps networks to have a parasitical relation with networked organizations (universities, for example). But eventually free labor exhausts itself.

Ned Rossiter
Centre for Media Research
University of Ulster

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References:

[1] See Paul Di Maggio (ed.), *The Twenty-First Century Firm: Changing Economic Organization in International Perspective* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2001); Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, "From Precarity to Precariousness and Back Again: Labor, Life and Unstable Networks," *Fibreculture Journal* 5 (2005), http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue5/neilson_rossiter.htm

[2] See Ulrich Beck, *The Brave New World of Work*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Polity: Cambridge, 2000); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2005); Nigel Thrift, *Knowing Capitalism* (Sage: London, 2005).

[3] Representation in its party-political sense is antithetical to the logic of networks. See Ned Rossiter, "Virtuosity, Processual Democracy and Organized Networks," *Cultural Studies Review* 11.2 (2005), pp. 110-128; Ned Rossiter, "Organized Networks and Non-Representative Democracy" in: Jodi Dean, Jon Anderson and Geert Lovink (eds.), *Reformatting Politics: Networked Communications and Global Civil Society* (Routledge: London and New York, 2006); Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. James Cascaito Isabella Bertolotti and Andrea Casson, foreword by Sylvère Lotringer (Semiotext[e]: New York, NY, 2004); Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter, "Dawn of the Organized Networks," *Fibreculture Journal* 5 (2005), http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue5/lovink_rossiter.html

[4] Here, I differ from Phil Agre who sees complementarities between what he calls the "commodity model" and the "community model" in the "institutional design of the university." While there is much that I agree with in Agre's essay, my position does not see an affinity

between the concept of communities and that of organized networks. Agre tends to conceive communities and new institutions as spaces of consensus, whereas I would take an opposite line: the social-technical dimensions of organized networks are better understood in terms of dissensus. Both economic and institutional design implications follow on from this distinction and are introduced in the course of this paper. See Phil Agre, "Commodity and Community: Institutional Design for the Networked University" in: Kevin Robins and Frank Webster (eds.), *The Virtual University? Knowledge, Markets and Management* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2001), pp. 210-223.

[5] A number of reviewers raised questions about my use of hierarchies and centralization to describe digital networks. So too did comments by Wendy Chun, Joline Blais, and Jon Ippolito on the ISEA symposium web forum, http://01sj.org/component/option,com_simpleboard/Itemid,149/. I thank these people for their input, apologize for not being able to respond online, and hope that this paper provides some clarification on these matters.

[6] The characteristics of different forms of networks were the topic of debate on the Nettime mailing list. See the archive for April, 2006, <http://www.nettime.org>.

[7] Ibid. [1], Neilson and Rossiter, "From Precarity to Precariousness."

[8] This is not to regress to the equally deluded position of social-democratic politics – an accusation enough so-called autonomist and anarchist activists have leveled against me in the past.

[9] Ibid. [4], Robins and Webster, *The Virtual University?*, p. 5.

[10] See Simon Marginson and Mark Considine, *The Enterprise University: Power, Governance and Reinvention in Australia* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2000); David Noble, *Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Education* (Monthly Review Press: New York, NY, 2002); Ibid. [4], Robins and Webster; Marc Bousquet, "The 'Informal Economy' of the Information University," *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor* 5.1 (2002), <http://www.cust.educ.ubc.ca/workplace/issue5p1/bousquetinformal.html>.

[11] An EU initiative since 1999 aimed at establishing uniform standards across European universities in order to encourage the movement of students, teachers, and researchers.

[12] Bologna Secretariat, <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/bologna/>.

[13] Admissions Officers and Credential Evaluators' (ACE) professional section of the European Association for International Education (EAIE), <http://www.aic.lv/ace/default.htm>.

[14] Of course NGOs and grass-roots organizations such as community networks have long histories of incorporation. But for some reason very few networks have done this. Thing.Net and xs4all are exceptions that come to mind. Yet these networks seem to have reached a plateau, and perhaps even stagnated, as just yet another option in the sea of ISPs to choose from, albeit with their own brand of special attractors.

[15] Projects Schneider and Lang have either participated in or initiated include Borderline Academy, Makeworlds, Incommunicado, Was Tun?, Noborder Network, and V2V Video Syndication Network. A full listing can be found at: <http://www.kein.org/projects>.

[16] Ibid. [10], Marc Bousquet.

[17] This was a point raised by Soenke Zehle and others at the close of Incommunicado.05: information technology for everybody else, Amsterdam June 16-17, 2005, <http://incommunicado.info/conference>. Geert Lovink and Christoph Spehr discuss the topic further in their text "Out-Cooperating Empire: Exchange on Creative Labor and the Hybrid Work of Collaboration," unpublished manuscript, 2006. Earlier incarnations of the topic can be found in the various texts associated with the Free Cooperation conference organized by Trebor Scholz and Geert Lovink, Buffalo, New York, April 24-25, 2004, <http://freecooperation.org/>. Collected papers from that event have been published in Geert Lovink and Trebor Scholz (eds.), *The Art of Online Collaboration* (Autonomedia: New York, NY, 2006). See also the Institute for Distributed Creativity, <http://distributedcreativity.org/>.

[18] This process is discussed and analyzed at length in Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2006).

[19] For a history of La Borde, see Gary Genosko, *Félix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction* (Continuum: London and New York, 2002); Félix Guattari, "La Borde: A Clinic Unlike Any Other," trans. D. L. Sweet in Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), *Chaosophy* (Semiotext[e]: New York, NY, 1995), pp. 187-208.

[20] My gloss here is derived from Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance*, trans. Michael Robertson (The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 1994). See also Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, 1996).

[21] Max Horkheimer, "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy" in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. G Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 1993), p. 9.

[22] Ibid. [20], Wiggershaus, pp. 431-435.

[23] Ibid., 434.

[24] Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: the Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (Verso: London, 1999), p. 74.

[25] Gary Genosko, "Félix Guattari: Towards a Transdisciplinary Metamethodology," *Angelaki* 8.1 (2003), p. 29.

[26] Ibid., p. 35.

[27] Comment made by Holmes at Finnish Social Forum, Helsinki, April 1-2, 2006. See video recordings of talks by Brian Holmes, Carlos Fernández, Ned Rossiter, and Stephen Shukaitis and the follow-up discussions at <http://www.m2hz.net/uusityo/index.php?title=Kommunikatio>

[28] Angela Mitropoulos and Brett Neilson, "Exceptional Times, Non-Governmental Spacings, and Impolitical Movements," *Vacarme* (Janvier, 2006), <http://www.vacarme.eu.org/article484.html>

[29] World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, *A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All* (International Labor Organization: Geneva, 2004), <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/fair-globalization/report/index.htm>

[30] OECD, *Governance in the 21st Century* (OECD: Paris, 2001), p. 4, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/41/42/35391582.pdf>.

[31] A point made in Spehr's contributions to Free Cooperation.

[32] In fact one can simply view the history link in order to see the names and IP addresses that comprise the distribution of labor.

[33] See Florian Schneider's documentary *Organizing the Unorganizable* (2002), downloadable at <http://wastun.org/organizing>

[34] See Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," *Social Text* 18.2 (2000), pp. 33-58.