

WINTER CAMP 09: FROM WEAK TIES TO ORGANIZED NETWORKS

Ideas, Reports, Critiques

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Winter Camp 09 Visions

Wherever we look, there is a Will to Network. In most areas of the (post-)industrial world, networks are becoming a ubiquitous feature - of life, work and play. If they can - and are allowed to - teenagers spend hours texting, blogging, dating, chatting, twittering and social networking. In fact, the network addiction transcends age and cultural barriers, with business men and women hooked to their CrackBerries (Presidents too!) and older folks texting away on buses. Garbage men in the Chinese city of Ningbo check out commodity prices of waste copper from their mobiles each morning. Activists organize transnational campaigns online. Web 2.0 companies profit from the free labor and attention provided by the networks of users.

If we take these network technologies seriously, we have to ask ourselves: what's next? What happens after the initial excitement, after we have linked up, found old classmates, become 'friends' and have even met up? Will networking produce a dispersed, weak level of sociality or will the ties become more substantial? What long term cultural transformations

might emerge from networked interactions? Will we constantly move from one platform to the next initiative, following the global swarm? Do we really wish to carry our social network with us, wherever we go? How do we cope with the hype surrounding the 'social web'? Do the constant requests to be linked turn into a plague? Do these sites function more like a modern version of the White Pages rather than a 'revolutionary' platform that fosters new forms of cooperation? Will we return to our busy everyday life after the hype recedes or strive for a deep commitment to the Techno-Social? As artists, researchers, activists, educators, and cultural workers are drawn into the network paradigm, it is urgent to collectively analyze what happens when networks become driving forces. How can networks maintain their critical edge while aiming for professional status? Does anyone want to get paid for their 'free labor'?

These and other questions inspired the organization of Winter Camp 09, which took place between the 3rd and 7th of March 2009, in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Hosted and organized by the Institute of Network Cultures, the meeting brought together twelve networks that worked on their own projects during the day (although some continued deep into the night) and collectively engaged in analyzing questions regarding the past, present and future of organizing networks during plenary sessions in the evening.

In their early stages, most networks are loose and unstructured, but over time, as they settle and grow, new challenges always emerge. Perhaps the most pressing question is whether informal networks should transform into a so-called 'organized network'. Organizing a network does not necessarily mean the end of spontaneity and the rise of rigid rules and hierarchies. An organized network can provide an environment for sustainable knowledge sharing, production, and perhaps most importantly, reproduction. As we all know, face to face meetings are crucial for a network to maintain momentum, revitalize energy, consolidate old friendships and discover new ones, recast ideas, and plan further activities.

There is no single organizational or political model for (online) networks to become sustainable. Winter Camp was an opportunity for members of a range of networks and (potential)

networks to gather in person to conspire, discuss and make the necessary steps forward to pose questions of sustainability, informality and growth. And even though Winter Camp did not have an (academic) educational or training component, there is a lot to be learned from the interactions, discussions and debates occurring during the event, which inspired these reflections.

The primary focus of Winter Camp 09 was not on established organizations, such as universities and newspapers, but on the sustenance of emerging networks. Crucial to the concept of the Winter Camp was the intention of 'antagonistic encounters', not simply for the sake of critique but to generate knowledge that can aid a group's survival and dynamism. It was not an in-crowd event. The hosts were not previously acquainted with half of the networks and participants. Existing and emerging networks need to be challenged and interrupted by their own members and by contributions from outsiders. Self-referential ghettoization is a danger to the vitality and political potential of organized networks.

The political importance and urgency of organized networks is clear in that we aim for the invention of new institutional forms immanent to the logic of networks. Sustainability is key, and should not be quarantined within ecological, bio-evolutionary, economic and developmental discourses. It was intended for Winter Camp to be an exploration of how to do that, of what such institutions might look like, of what they might do, of how they might operate in different geopolitical contexts, of how they are financed, relate to other institutions and each other. This is the scalar dimension of organizing networks: How can we scale and keep-up, not become insulated and not only invent and innovate but, in the end, use the network form in the implementation of changes we envision on a society-wide level? Conceived primarily as a catalyst, the event aimed to produce an overview of network strategies that hold a combinatory potential for trans-network collaborations.

At the same time, and particularly with the advent of the neoliberal state over the past decades, space has been created for new institutional players. Witness the renewed role of religious organizations in the management and provision of social services, or the continued rise of NGOs and community

organizations. Civil society has not so much 'withered', as Michael Hardt once put it, but rather has proliferated due, in part, to a logic of outsourcing that has spread from the economy proper across the social spheres.

Where then, does all of this leave the culture of networks? This is in many aspects one of the guiding questions that has shaped the organization of Winter Camp 09. It seems both sensible and strategic that organizing networks is a process of instituting new social-technical relations, that have unique and special capacities to do things in the world - to engender change and ultimately to transform subjectivities. How might networks take advantage of this new institutional condition - retaining their strengths, which include the culture of free distribution and sharing - while securing or, more likely, inventing the possibility of real sustainability in social and economic life?

Logistics, Format, Early Assumptions

By organizing Winter Camp, the Institute of Network Cultures intended to create a space for rethinking the role of institutions in networks and for networks to work on their own self-directed projects. Winter Camp 09 provided resources - space, food, a place to sleep, travel, lots of strangers to talk to and recruit into your network - to support encounters within and across networks. The hosts thought this kind of interdisciplinary exchange is still rare but worth the effort, even if cross-network interactions are demanding and may, if only at first sight, seem to divert precious time and energy from the core agenda of each network.

The 150 participants within the twelve networks included programmers, activists, academics, writers, designers, cultural workers and artists. A few of the twelve participating networks emerged from the context of the Institute of Network Cultures, such as the MyCreativity/ Creative Labour network. Others were already established (Dyne.org, Upgrade!) or on the verge of becoming a network (Bricolabs). The networks attending ranged from the highly informal (Goto10) to the more formal (blender.org, FreeDimensional) with participants mainly from Western Europe, North America and a smattering of participants from other parts of the world (e.g. Mexico, El Salvador, Cameroon, India) and a small core from New Zealand and

Australia. With a few exceptions (notably within the FLOSS manuals network), the groups were not all that intergenerational in so far as participants were fairly young (20 to 35 years old). The gender balance was mostly evenly distributed across the networks. Though the majority was male in some networks, one was entirely composed of women (Genderchangers).

The Winter Camp format was a mix of largely improvised, conference-like presentations and working sessions, with an emphasis on getting things done. The intention was to find a balance between the intensive sessions of groups, plenary sessions and mid-size meetings while leaving ample opportunity for informal interaction. Winter Camp featured parallel workshops. Once a day the people in these workshops convened for (public) lectures and debates. The outcomes varied from code and interfaces to research proposals. Plenary sessions were held during this working conference in order for the participants to discuss and contextualize the limits and possibilities of the attending networks. The program ended with a public session on Saturday afternoon in which the networks presented the results of their working groups.

The Winter Camp Meta-Group was responsible for the programming and production details of the event. This group of researchers reported and reflected on the network dynamics that unfolded during the event. The research of the Meta-Group revolved around the two objectives of Winter Camp: to give existing (online) networks the possibility to unite and work on their own issues, and to collectively develop sustainable network models. The group facilitated the plenary debates and theorized - collectively in the context of Winter Camp, individually as an ongoing concern - the pitfalls and possibilities of the 'networked condition'. Members of the Meta-Group were tasked with holding on to the floating ideas and reflecting on the insights, challenges and debates that emerged at Winter Camp.

The Winter Camp Meta-Group also conducted interviews - all now online - with almost thirty members of all networks, focusing on issues such as conditions of emergence, tension between informality and formality, financial and material resources, and business and political relationships to other networks and groups. The interviews were produced for educational and archival purposes. They provide a historical resource for the

Winter Camp networks as well as for anyone who wishes to think comparatively and analytically about these networks.

Before the start of the event, the Meta-Group compiled a list of questions and framing issues that helped guide in-depth interviews, plenary sessions and informal observations. Rephrased here, the list has become a mix of presumptions, questions, reflections and outcomes.

>> Scaling up or down

To stay active and vibrant, should a network scale up? What does growth mean to the core of dedicated contributors? Sometimes, for no obvious reason, networks remain too small. Research has shown that a network with 50-150 active members can go on for many years. So, is expansion always the answer to a stagnated network? What procedures and policies should groups institute, if at all, to integrate new participants? What role do conferences and face to face gatherings play in allowing networks to scale? Sometimes networks just need time, often years, to find their productive synergy. However, the massive involvement in Web 2.0 platforms and social networks indicates that the critical mass is reached much sooner now than five or ten years ago. Internet culture is now mainstream culture. Social mobilization is carried out so much easier these days. Networks can be fooled by the erratic ruptures of today's online engagement. Are large networked conversations, with sometimes over five hundred participants, doomed to fall apart? Would 'small is beautiful' be the correct response to the Facebook masses?

>> Dealing with conflict

Networks can get caught up in recurring instances of social conflict between participants (e.g. flamewars, territoriality), which can lead to the collapse of the larger network. How do we overcome such obstacles? Is it enough to let some time pass? Is it a good idea to bring in new people, hoping they will overrule the ongoing differences? What role might codes of conduct or other procedures play in mitigating these types of interpersonal conflicts? In the era of 'trust' conditioned by information overload it has become extremely easy to unsubscribe, filter out people you do not like, ignore e-mails and leave networks. What is the

consequence of this for the potential of online environments to not only resolve but also raise and work through conflicts? Moreover, there is enormous research to be done on the geo-cultural variations of how conflict manifests itself in networks. Sure, networks are often international, but with this comes vast cultural differences in how to negotiate in the event of conflict. Indeed, a topology of conflict prevails across the culture of networks. In other words, conflict is often mutable in form and affect. People have different ideas about what it is and when it has happened. So how is a network going to deal with this on its own terms, let alone when it enters in relation with other organizational forms?

>> Collaborations

How do organizations form alliances and collaborations with other like-minded groups? What coalitions are possible? How to relate to the brick and mortar institutions? Is membership an option? How does this relate back to the question of finance and legal structures, but also to the modes of relation that define the network? Collaboration has become one of those terms ubiquitous to the age of networks and, it must be said, the ideology of neoliberalism. Across the spectrum of institutional forms, budgets are cut and organizations find themselves forced to pool resources, engage in 'knowledge-transfer', multiply the outputs or productivity of labor force through syndication (in the worst cases) and grapple with the reality of international cultural and communicational flows. It is no wonder that for many, collaboration is a dirty word. There is no doubt that it takes time and energy and is prone to failure. So why would networks bother to go anywhere near this sort of engagement with the unexpected? Well, for a start, collaboration has been a default condition of networks ever since they emerged within online settings. While the horizontality and distributive structure of networks tends to invoke excessive celebration and to lead to frequent analytical error, however, it can be said that it has facilitated modes of relation that engender collaboration. What, after all, is a network without a relation? As we see it, the power of collaboration lies in the capacity to renew networks and feeds into processes of scalar transformation. At the level of organizing networks as emergent institutional forms,

the practice of collaboration forces networks to address related questions of governance and the constitution of protocols, whether formal, informal or both.

>> **Financial matters and legal structures**

Suppose you hope your network will survive more than a few years. It is fun and you all develop the right vibe. There are tons of plans. Would writing a grant proposal be the way to go? Most networks do not have a legal structure. However, you need to become a legal body in order to enter the money economy or funding systems. Online networks also have to deal with money, even if it is just site hosting and the cost of a domain name. It is a farce to believe everything can and will be free of charge. What then, are the most suitable legal forms for distributed collaboration? What if you do not want to have a board, or a director? Or on the contrary, what if you are tired of the 'terror of the casual'? Is the legal road a way out, or the perfect recipe for disaster? Can we escape such predicaments? Would it be possible to operate as a parasite institute? Piggyback on an existing NGO? Or even snatch a (dead) legal body? Perhaps there are unexpected opportunities in the society of fakes.

>> **The politics of culture**

What role might culture - interpreted loosely - play in the constitution of networks? Free and open source software emerges from and helps consolidate geek culture, whose history precedes this mode of production and which may account for the strength of these particular networks. Are similar dynamics at play with other networks, or is this not the case? Moreover, there is a political side to these networks, which ranges from anarchist/left to liberal/reformist. How do these political philosophies shape the constitution of these networks? What sort of political and institutional prehistory might register the continuum of political culture in networks?

>> **Ownership and copyright**

While there are current alternatives to copyright (such as copyleft licenses and those of Creative Commons), what are the limits, pitfalls, and problems in implementing these or any other legal solution for creative and knowledge

production? The core lies at the level of the individual participant, and the ownership over his or her ideas. If the network accepts the idiom of intellectual property, what are the models that allow personal attribution as well as award recognition for the group effort? Is it a major issue for the network to have legal discourses pressed upon their mode of production? How might the genre of creation (e.g. software versus photography) change the efficacy of current alternatives?

>> Software and the technology fix

What tools are suitable for collaboration? What are the limits of current communication protocols (i.e. e-mail, mailing lists, web pages, social networking sites)? What new tools are being created to address the needs? How can we keep the network together without getting caught up in difficult or differentiated channels of communication? How does a network of non-experts learn a new language of programming? Is this an opportunity to expand the network, invite the experts in, or is this an occasion of getting to work and acquire new skills? Perhaps both are necessary. Either way, it seems the software question has to be addressed for those networks wishing to enter the world of open source cultural production and political invention.

>> Dissemination

What type of publications and series can be developed? Without too much trouble, networks jump into the grey zone between print and online publications - what are the opportunities here? The question of labor, again, has to be central in any strategy of dissemination. Who will do the work? For a publication you need designers, writers, coders, editors, copy-editors, readers, and so on. Many publications in the field of network cultures are available free of charge, and regarding sustainability and finance issues, this becomes a problem that somehow has to be addressed. Piggybacking off other institutional forms - whether they be universities or cultural organizations - is a common practice that helps relieve some of the problems around resources and expenditure. The process of dissemination, like that of open source programmers, is something done outside office hours. But this does not really help advance the development of networks. Sooner or later this position

is going to wear thin. One of the main reasons to keep up the practice of dissemination is that it often serves as a binding force for networks and their participants. A collective memory is important to all institutional forms and social pleasures.

>> Definitions and typologies

Winter Camp's overall aim has been to strengthen the network(ed) form of organization. It might also be important in this context to go back to basics and to ask how an (organized) network defines itself. What could a network institution look like? What are its dynamics and how might it become a source of power vis-à-vis the production of new standards and social relations? What forms of reflexivity and translation are part of these modes of relation? How does the network learn to institute sharing, democratize its own production of expertise, establish collaborative forms of decision-making and address the question of borders?

Ongoing Observations, Random Ruminations

We opened Winter Camp with a plenary session in which participants of each network introduced themselves. One hundred and fifty people presenting themselves: it was clearly program overload - and very diverse. But it also gave people a sense of how difficult it may be for networks not only to scale up but to create meaningful communication channels across networks. And while the question of translation of network-specific jargon was raised more than once both as a practical concern and a possible model for collaboration, the English language continues to be the *lingua franca*.

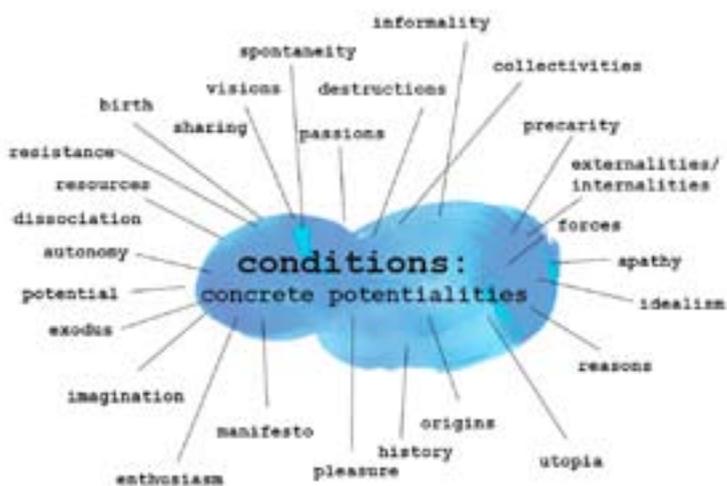
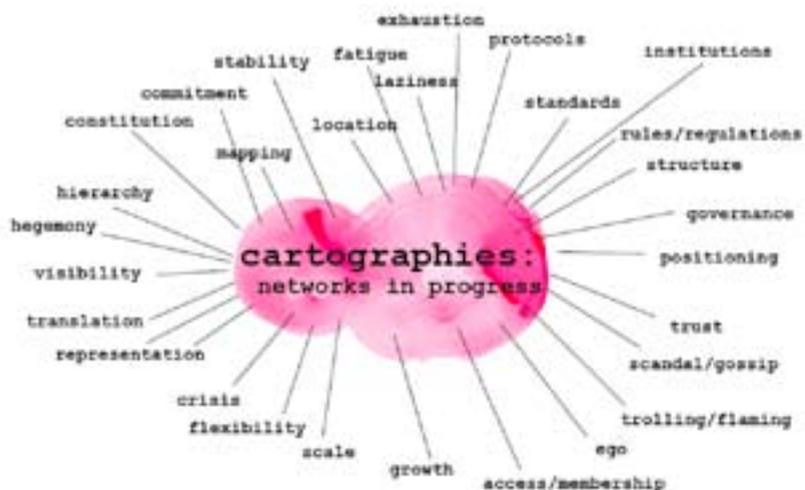
The venue for this opening night, a 70s-style movie theatre, shaped the plenary session naturally, for better and worse. It was a reminder of how networking, even if done online, is a spatial practice and requires the creation of spaces (tools, user interfaces, services) that are supportive of the networked condition, and of new forms of collaboration.

Indeed, sometimes it is merely the architecture that encourages us to maintain traditional forms of sociality and debate. Clearly meeting face to face is a key condition for networks to thrive, and one of the reasons for hosting this kind of

event. However, an important consideration are the costs to accommodate such meetings. Urban space is a commodity of which the value is rising as the information economy shifts to creativity as the next big thing. Gentrification accompanies the transformation of creativity from an experimental practice into the economic paradigm of policy frameworks. There is a number of concrete implications here: It is now more expensive than ever to rent spaces to gather, to talk, to organize. It is a curious detail that most of the Winter Camp budget was spent on rent. The event was organized in the first week of March because this proved to be the cheapest week of the year for plane tickets, hotel rooms and conference accommodation in Amsterdam.

The plenary sessions were our main feedback channel during this event. Instead of thematic emphasis, we drew on the concepts, terms and idioms of the texts submitted by each network - these are some of the terms groups use to describe their work, to situate themselves in the world of networks. We grouped the terms around three main phases each network goes through - the conditions of its emergence, the trials and challenges of being (and staying) active, and possible futures that may (or may not) call for collaborations beyond network boundaries.





'If I can't dance to it, it's not my revolution'.

The Winter Camp mix - artists, activists, academics, programmers - is one that has a certain history in local net cultural events (at least since the Next Five Minutes conference series, held in Amsterdam in September 2003). There are clearly points of overlap and synergy between the political activists and the coders, or the artists and academics. And yet, the points of contact are certainly partial and often contentious as well. Different networks organize around different political cultures - anarchist, liberal humanist, hybrids and so on. Moreover, affective logics have a strong shaping power in the sociality of networks, and more broadly, groups. As people from various backgrounds and professions are placed in one (composite) space, distinctions between art and activism, academics and the work of software development appear to become more entrenched. Borders are not completely permeable, and the very possibility of translation between and among the many idioms - jargons - particular to each effort seem to constitute yet another limit to the very idea of a network of networks.

For a brief moment, the diversity of Winter Camp 09 participants seemed to be reduced to primarily one distinction: you are a techie or not, with the implications that people who work on seemingly non-technological issues of social justice, human rights, and other forms of more directly political engagement are somehow closer to a real and authentic world of emergencies than those who sit in front of the blue screen and churn out code. Time and again we have seen that programmers, designers, activists and theorists need each other. Take one of them out of the equation and you will immediately notice the missing element - yet the need for such multidiscipline has to be affirmed time and again as it can never be taken for granted.

We were surprised at the strong - and almost group-like - desire in and across some of the networks for a common, universal vocabulary, a desire reminiscent of liberal fantasies of universal communication and subjectivity. This came through in the numerous calls for 'jargon-free' talk. But if such commonality merely means a world of perpetual self-affirmation where everything is a predictable, reiteration of the same (we think of dull jobs, canned sitcoms, and consumer products), dynamic networks certainly beg to differ. So we wondered: How do they

deal with difference, both internal and external? If it is not quips against 'high academic theory' (whatever that means, since you would be hard-pressed to find much high theory in universities these days) that is supposedly 'disengaged' from 'doing things', then there's the charge against the impenetrability of geek-speak. But what is this will-to-total knowledge all about? Who wants to know everything? Let's remember, less can also be more. These issues concerning difference and unity provide an important reminder of the fallacy behind the possibility of a grand 'we-are-in-this-together' situation. In fact, the opposite seems to be the case, and serves as an important reminder of why the questions of borders, differences and translation continue to matter.

Yet, such distinctions behold their own dangers and limits - fragmentation is probably the single most evident shortcoming in the contemporary landscape of networked politics. Politics, even radical politics, are well and alive online but their topography is one of pods, ponds and silos. While there is a certain degree of strength in autonomous nodes and decentralized networks, there are serious limits to this current geo-spatial arrangement. Without contact zones, without some degree of collaboration, without federation, groups are left to compete for attention, for members, and for resources. Certain political efforts require numbers and thus require groups to conjoin forces, at least momentarily. The 21st century has born a vibrant sphere of organized networks and as these mature and travel forward, it is imperative to alter the topography to allow loose federations and stable contact zones to grow and take root.

However, we can still remain skeptical regarding the desire for a return to a seemingly simple language of self-evidence or universality. The challenge is to create spaces for cross-border pollination and labor without the illusion that they will be total and frictionless. They require sustained work and energy, perhaps even more than the creation of any single network.

The Limits of Collaborative Reflection

Let's discuss the plenary session in which we convened after the first day of work. At first resisted by a number of participants who wanted more time to work, the idea of one event that

everyone checks into did take on a life of its own, as questions and comments and counter-comments both illustrate the tremendous diversity of efforts, including commonalities, as much as tensions and mutual misunderstandings.

Terminology is something that quickly emerged as important to understanding the social metabolism of these groups. Some groups do not refer to themselves as networks, others describe their collaborative efforts with terms drawn from a broad, overwhelming array of conceptual and political practices: *community*, *autonomous collective*, *network*. These idioms - languages, vocabularies, ways of speaking and doing - by which to reflect on network activity vary widely, including friendship and the desire to create spaces of comfort to act and learn in common as well as the attempt to elaborate translation as a new mode of relation.

Interviews with participants were held through the entire event and yielded some surprises. Perhaps one of the most contentious but also not so surprising issues was representation: who gets to be spokesperson for the group? Some groups welcomed the opportunity to broadcast their agenda through the video interview and blogging, which can contribute another resource to sustain and perhaps stabilize their efforts. Others were uncomfortable to speak on behalf of others at all, suggesting that the very idea of representation may in fact weaken the very effort to relate and sustain their common effort.

At the same time, the permanent state of emergency around is creating an urgency that almost threatens to overburden us, making us impatient with discussions that do not seem to relate to the world of social change directly yet are necessary to identify and chart future paths of collaboration. There is so much to do, to be engaged in, we can only pick and choose and then hope that others will join. And while all of the networks at Winter Camp have social and political agendas, it seemed that a disproportionate number of them were 'technological' networks dedicated to the creation of new infrastructures.

Another way to look at this, however, is to recognize that many networks have adopted and appropriated technological tools and idioms because they are useful in describing and

sustaining what they do. In other words, there are affinities between a sociological network and technological network. But the relationship is not deterministic. The techie/non-techie divide is not only misleading, it also threatens to obscure the extent to which many of these efforts have already developed, subverted, and recreated mainstream technological idioms that have little to do with social justice, and put the question of justice back into them. This is the task at hand of many free software projects, for example, they reject the neutrality of proprietary solutions and make visible the extent to which intellectual property frames the kinds of politics we can engage in.

Unsurprisingly, one of the various linguistic or terminological debates was around the term 'network'. Ton Roosendaal of Blender memorably proclaimed 'So what is a network!?' Others referred to the term community, suggesting it connected much more closely with the people they work with. Others insisted that their network was too large, too decentralized, too far flung to use the term community. There can be no consensus over what terms mean or do not mean, but it did become clear that 'community' corresponded to an issue of scale. In a community, you know folks personally, but at Winter Camp, many participants met for the first time, They suggested the networks had 'abstracted' into the online, virtual realm, and quite likely done so in the first instance.

There was no debate concerning the constrictive nature of 'community' as a term that corresponds with the reproduction of repressive traditions. Perhaps this is just a (critical) European response to community as distinct from other regions in the world that do not associate 'community' with this type of baggage. Perhaps it also has something to do with the relatively new entry of the term 'network' into our social-technological vocabularies. Community is a (Christian) term that has circulated within society for considerably longer, and thus holds a familiarity that the term network perhaps still does not. This could be one explanation for the layperson, who is not especially invested in the formation of techno-socialities, but it does not make so much sense for participants of Winter Camp 09 who, generally speaking, have a pretty strong familiarity with the 'update and upgrade' world of high-tech.



Future Questions

Whether we like it or not, institutions are part of our daily life - a fact that 'nomadic' thinkers who celebrate 'difference', 'multitude' and 'globalization' often tend to ignore. It is necessary but not enough to dream up new concepts. The trick is to translate them, together, into new institutional forms. Networks become part of the problem if we do not present them as forms of organization and if we let them become seamless with capitalist imperatives. Just as economic globalization has massively transformed the world on a seemingly ongoing basis, so too have institutions as we usually understand them - those whose foundations are built from concrete and steel, bricks and mortar - been subject to considerable change in the age of electronic networks. While many primary institutions of social and political life (the state, firms, unions, universities) have struggled to adapt to changing circumstances, they have nonetheless made recognizable and frequently substantial changes. Indeed, many have reinvented themselves as 'networked organizations'. While it could be said that many of those established institutions are in a crisis - in terms of legitimacy, sustainability and ontology - it would be a mistake to suggest their hegemony and power has in any way diminished. Network surveillance through data-mining and user-profiling is only becoming more sophisticated as a bio-political technology of control. That dominant institutions have increasingly become networked does not mean they operate in a more soft, benign manner; to provide effective alternatives to such entities, we still need to create counter-sites of power. And yet we must not be complacent about existing alternative networks and simply celebrate the mere existence of the latter.

As sociality - the ways we communicate, relate, work - is becoming more technological, it is now more important than ever to address the uneasiness network technologies appear to trigger. Does this become a question of reclaiming 'the social' that is always already technological? Can the technological somehow be withdrawn, detached or kept at some kind of manageable (and knowable) distance? Probably not. So it would seem crucial to find ways of knowing the technological in order to negotiate the social.

Organized networks move between informality and structure, and it is this unexplored terrain that Winter Camp sought to investigate. It could have been a totally 'structure'- free event, but for us that would defeat a central purpose of this meeting, namely the cross-pollination of ideas and practices across the various networks, most of whom do not know each other, and with whom the organizers are also not acquainted.

The study of network cultures is the core concern of the Amsterdam-based Institute of Network Cultures, the initiator and organizer of Winter Camp 09. It is in this light that we aimed to gather both practical and conceptual knowledge from networks themselves, document these ideas and make them accessible to an ever-growing range of groups and individuals that have started to work under the 'network condition'.

Networking academies, camps, or schools of various kinds have always existed, but it seems to us that in the post-Seattle moment, their role and integration with a broader agenda of social transformation has to be redefined. This is even more urgent as Web 2.0 social media, produced by well-funded Silicon Valley start-ups, colonize the everyday technological landscape and define the ideological/ political maps used to comprehend the significance of these technologies. Along with a great curiosity about how networks currently function, one of our key motivations in putting this event together has been to reflect further on the possible and current relationships between (a few) institutions and networks. Winter Camp was too short, too small to yield results that can simply be generalized across the terrains of net.culture, but it confirmed the need to couple face-to-face meetings with a research agenda that both takes key signals from what's happening at the grassroots and prompts critical reflection on issues across network boundaries.