Anti-Hierarchical Culture in Media-Based Creative Collectives: Sketching Originary Analyses

Benjamin Matthews

Adjunct Fellow
School of Humanities and Communication Arts
University of Western Sydney
Locked Bag 1797
Penrith NSW 2751 Australia
Benjamin.Matthews@westernsydney.edu.au

Introduction

In this paper I employ originary thinking in the analysis of the Enspiral Network, a novel collective organisation, made possible only by virtue of digital communication technology. Its origin was a small group of coworkers in Wellington, New Zealand, in 2010 that grew over time to become an intentionally "horizontally" structured, decentralised organisation governed by its more than 300 participants, working primarily in a variety of social enterprise and creative industries. The organisation is interesting for its capacity to maintain stability in the absence of strong hierarchy by using socio-technical systems that are constructed around digital communication technologies; and in particular, the infrastructure of the internet. The digitally altered scene of culture that has fostered this organisation is a secular one, and as Gans has argued, on the secular scene of culture the sacred centre is implicit:

> In what might be called the "default scenicity" of modern communities, the sacred center is merely implicit. The degree of this implicitness may be said to measure the community's secularity, which even in the most extreme case allows us to distinguish between ritual or simply cultural phenomena and the interactions of daily life. ("The Last Celebrity")

This essay will draw on the proposition that under the conditions of the "default scenicity" of modern communities the sacred centre is not formally designated by artifice or structure, in order to engage with the impacts of digital communication technology on the "degree of implicitness" Gans discusses. It will use the context of the Enspiral Network as a case study in the dynamics of secular, digitally mediated interaction.

Gans argues that when individuals interact informally, as part of everyday life, this implicit

sacrality is realised through normative patterns of behaviour, such as politeness, the reciprocity of which serves to mediate the "symmetry of a normal encounter" ("The Last Celebrity"). A conversation held between individuals in pairs or small groups under such informal conditions will fall back on unspoken rules that permit relatively dynamic, reciprocal interaction to unfold, encouraging the use of metaphors such as "flow" to describe a particularly satisfying experience of such discourse. Of course, the degree to which such interaction is free of hierarchy is dictated to by existing intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutionally defined dimensions of experience; the complex richness of which shows the powerful potential held in informal interaction. The governance of a "normal" encounter is realised in real time via the most ancient of dangers: to occupy the centre by commanding attention is to risk attracting the resentment of the group should that process of appropriation be unwarranted. Here, status conferred by external (institutional) means such as capital accrued in the form of economic wealth or political influence may compel the interlocutors to laugh at a weak attempt at humour, but this is a sinister laugh that defines the act of "humouring" and will not lead to a dynamic conversation.

The undermining of potential under the conditions of such an interaction shows how important the "implicitness" of secularity is to liberating symbolic exchange, and catalysing the kinetic quality of informality on any scene of culture. The case study will demonstrate how innovative organisational strategies are able to maintain a high degree of this implicitness during quite formal (as against quotidian), ritual interaction toward the execution of vital functions, such as executive decision making around the spending and distribution of funds. Specifically, the Enspiral Network has created technologies, such as the "cloud-based" decision making software, Loomio, to permit decentralised governance of their organisation and mediate the requirement for rigidly defined hierarchies. Instead, the informally *realised* implicit sacred—rather than being institutionally defined—is maintained on a supplementary, digitally mediated scene of interaction that operates on the basis of a set of uniquely liberated spatio-temporal constraints, where agents are networked one-to-one and one-to-many simultaneously.

This intentionally paradoxical move, to use institutional means to mediate institutional control, allows the informal dynamics of the group to defer resentment as a part of a scene where appropriate demonstrations of skill or talent trump institutionally conferred authority. There are clear advantages to such reciprocal interaction, such as the encouragement of collective (dialogic) intelligence, and attention toward the well-being of the members of the community in general, rather than according to the dictates of hierarchy. I conclude that the stability of the Enspiral Network is generated by a dedication to creating a uniquely scalable (relatively) implicit sacrality. With growth in scale, the deferral of resentment that would ensure stability usually moves from relying on informally designated, temporary hierarchies to formalised, increasingly institutional structures that are, inevitably, more hierarchical.

The Enspiral Network, however, takes advantage of the affordances of digital communication technologies to achieve an unprecedented scale of mediated, minimally hierarchical interaction via organisational strategies that seek to maintain the implicit sacrality that characterises secular 'default scenicity.' This strategy is intentionally paradoxical to the extent that it may be considered to generate an institutional foundation for ritualistic interaction, but in a manner that intends to capture the egalitarian quality of informal, everyday communal life. This is, I suggest, a harbinger of future applications of digital technology, where an increasingly reflexive and optimistic relationship with technological determinism is a commonplace.

"Implicit" Sacrality in Anti-Hierarchical Culture/s

I have previously applied originary thinking to the analysis of the effects of digital communication technology on scenes of culture, commenting on emergent forms of subjectivity and modes of attention[1]. I explored agency associated with the networking of individuals in the unprecedented format of one-to-one, and one-to-many (in simultaneity) afforded by digital communication technology. These individuals participate in a scene of culture that is generative of a similarly novel sensibility; one whose characteristics are identifiable with the production of intentionally, and thereby reflexive, paradoxical expressions using modes of representation that reach far beyond digitally mediated interaction and exchange. This essay considers collective activity made possible by digitally mediated communication, rather than the intentionally paradoxical portrayal of these conditions. However, there is strong continuity to be discovered across these scenes of culture, which can be mapped to the fact that these scenes are primarily secular, where interaction occurs beyond formal institutions and under circumstances in which the sacred centre is implicit, rather than designated.

As individuals gather in groups, attention is garnered by force of purpose or virtue, and as mentioned above, individuals are subject to resentment should they monopolise attention beyond culturally bounded (normative) measures of justification. When celebrity intersects with everyday life, we see the evidence of this secular configuration, as the celebrity is enwrapped in an imaginary aura of sacrality—or what Eric Gans has called an 'implicit public, "institutional" scene' that separates them from ordinary people via 'a supplement of sacred presence' understood as a supplementary scene of interaction rather than an integrated phenomenon ("The Last Celebrity"). When we encounter a celebrity in the flesh, we experience this separation directly as an auratic removal. The celebrity exists as a virtual presence until met: and this collision brings about the absurd copresence of virtual and direct experience of reality.

However, the celebrity cannot transcend the dynamics of reciprocal interaction, and remains subject to the danger associated of the sacred centre, sharing "many benefits with the big-man, notably wealth and visible influence, and consequently shares as well the

Schadenfreude that attends his every misfortune" ("The Last Celebrity"). The celebrity does not typically play an instrumental role in the resolution of social crises, and this peripheral function permits them to evade violent reprisal; instead they experience the humiliation of having their foibles and misadventure popularly witnessed, and frequently celebrated. This secular phenomenon, the supplement of sacred presence, is a product of a virtualizing procedure that is resonant with what can be achieved by digital communication and, as such, it is becoming increasingly quotidian. Similarly, exposure to the affordances of digital communication must displace the virtualizing potential of that medium over time from absurdity to normality.

Coworking, Media Work and Globalization

As digital communication technology has achieved greater penetration, and literacy in the use of associated "platforms" has expanded, groups of people living in secular society have innovated to shape scenes of activity in which the centre is established and maintained as a stable, yet not rigidly institutionalised presence. A salient example has emerged with the rise of coworking over the past two decades, which has occurred as a feature of globalization and technological change. This is particularly true of creative and cultural industries since the global economic crisis of 2007-8. Organisations of all sizes are moving toward the outsourcing of tasks to a global workforce of individuals and micro to small sized businesses, generating growing isolation and labour precarity in media work and management (Deuze 2007, 2009, 2010; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2013). This workforce lacks the resources to create independent workplaces outside of the home and consequently lacks the community that comes with a group environment. The effect of such isolation is compounded by the work of "creatives," who function in a fast moving, highly dynamic and peer defined context. Maintaining a contemporaneous skillset, and gaining access to prospective clients, demands that the individual practitioner build and maintain strong networks that facilitate knowledge exchange and generate business opportunities. This, combined with more broadly human considerations such as community, is identified by both observers and participants as behind the strong move toward co-working arrangements[2].

A growing body of literature is dedicated to the study of coworking[3], which is not surprising given the speed with which the practice is expanding. Waters-Lynch and Potts (2016) have compiled annual data that shows a doubling pattern from 2005 to the present that is likely to continue. They define coworking spaces as offices a 'heterogeneous group of workers (rather than employees of a single organization or industry) pay to use as their place of work, to engage in social interaction and sometimes collaborate on shared endeavours' (4-5). They argue the origin of coworking spaces can be traced to a humble few in the USA in 2005, a number that by 2015 was estimated to be 7800 in more than 80 countries frequented by more than 510,000 coworkers (8).

This is in part because such environments permit individuals and small businesses to offset

the precarity of their work by pooling resources to create infrastructure that is both cost effective and generative of a context in which networking can be conducted, and knowledge and skills exchanged formally and informally as work is completed. It also creates the opportunity for shared social experience and the organisation of collaborative commercial endeavours. The context often sees groups organise events based on shared interests, and the creation of sophisticated community driven business structures and practices that replace the experience of individuals as part of entities with less hierarchical, more humanistic characteristics.

Such coworkers (who identify under a range of titles including collectives, cooperatives and clusters) are economically cooperative and engage in a combination of highly entrepreneurial endeavours alongside community building and philanthropic activities. Ownership of these organisational types is distributed, as is their management, and they commonly employ relatively "flat," adaptive hierarchical structures that produce more dynamic organisations capable of rapid change. Among these is the emergent practice of "social entrepreneurship," where human and capital resources are invested in enterprise that combines capitalistic and socially defined goals, such as the creation of software that sets out to address a social issue in a format that can be marketed for scalable distribution.

These organisations are typically small of scale, and a key issue in considering the efficacy of such an entity is scalability; it is generally accepted that smaller organisations are able to conduct their operations with flatter hierarchies, and as scale increases so does complexity and with it the requirement for hierarchical structures and interaction. This essay considers the example of the Enspiral Network, an organisation based in Wellington, New Zealand, which seeks to achieve decentralised management of its affairs by dovetailing the function of social entrepreneurship with the creation of software that facilitates participatory governance. The software is combined with an ongoing, public dialogue mediated via digital platforms that is dedicated to defining strategies as they are crafted and reflexively updated with the goal of achieving the ideal set down in a published register of shared values.

The last is also crowd authored, and demonstrates the central thesis of this essay: that digital technology is being employed by groups of people living in secular society as the innovative means by which to shape scenes of activity that are able to rely on an established centre, maintained as stable without relying on rigid institutional structures. As I will demonstrate in the case study laid out below, this stability relies instead on a publicly shared discourse; a process of representation that employs the novel availability of one-to-one and one-to-many agency digital communication technology permits. Here, the implicit sacrality of the secular scene of culture is shifted to a liminal state, balanced against the explicit sacrality of rigidly hierarchical institutions to defer resentment by creating structures that leverage technology to attain broad transparency during collective decision making that is carefully recorded as a generative history for later inspection.

Case Study: the Enspiral Network

The Enspiral Network originated in 2010, with a group of coworkers in Wellington, New Zealand[4], and was catalysed by interaction with activists from the Occupy movement in 2011 (Enspiral, *Network Overview*). The activist's requirement for a means by which to make collective decisions led to the development of the open-source cloud-based software "Loomio." It was released in 2012, and is a defining feature of the organisation, permitting the emergence of a fluid, hybrid organisational structure that relies on decentralised, participatory governance. Loomio mediates inclusive, egalitarian processes and practices by distributing the decision-making process across a spatiotemporally diffuse network of individual participants.

The Enspiral Network is made up of number of "ventures," constellated about a central venture known as the Enspiral Foundation, a company that is owned by the network members. The Foundation 'stewards the culture' by fostering ventures, and inviting "contributors" and new members to participate. These contributors make up the extended network of decision makers who collaborate to carry out ventures (Enspiral "Our Ventures"). Much of the venture based activity is dedicated to entrepreneurship based on the creation of software capable of addressing a particular social issue, and frequently the strategy this software underpins calls for the convening of events such as public fora, learning programs and other similar opportunities for knowledge exchange. In effect, the structuration of the organisation fosters communal activities and an ongoing dialogue about the conduct of the various social enterprise it engages in.

On a case-by-case basis, contributors agree on a percentage of earnings to be funneled back into the Enspiral Foundation Ltd, (that we might think of as a "meta" venture) via cloud-based decision-making software. Rather than operate as a not-for-profit organisation, the Foundation attains greater financial freedoms by adopting the legal format of a limited liability company that is administered on the basis of a charitable constitution and a "minimal viable board" (Enspiral, "Enspiral Foundation—About"). The surrounding contributors and ventures form part of the Enspiral Foundation's direct business or operate as separate legal entities in a variety of formats, including companies but also as not-for-profits and cooperatives, and other novel hybrids. Loomio is both a registered cooperative and a limited liability company, formally the Loomio Cooperative Ltd, that is 'owned by its ten worker-members' (Enspiral, "Loomio—About").

Ventures are focused on a variety of social issues, and their titles and focus evidence the humanistic quality of the network. They include (without being limited to): Lifehack, which supports 'wellbeing projects and ventures with a tech focus'; Scoop, an independent source of news resources; Dev Academy, which provides programmer training; Bucky Box, a cloud software based food distribution assistance project; Metric Engine, an application designed to assist organisations to assess and compare performance; Rabid, which provides web and

mobile application development services; Chalkle, which is software designed to assist 'learning communities'; Volunteer Impact, 'impact reporting software' dedicated to understanding the effects of environmental conservation projects; Action Station, a not-for-profit activist organisation; EXP, which runs 'events, conferences and hosts retreats within the Enspiral network, and offers consulting services in facilitation, programme design & delivery and entrepreneurship coaching'; and Orientation Aotearoa, a program to support young people to 'gain knowledge, find direction and make change' (Enspiral, "Our Ventures").

A compelling feature of this networked organisation is its scope. By adopting an entrepreneurial approach it has expanded to include in excess of 300 members, a growing number of ventures and a sophisticated market presence made up of highly polished marketing and media including a large number of websites and social media where extensive audiovisual material and written content such as blog articles regularly appear. This includes external dialogue on emergent media and a range of publication points including regular articles by participants on a popular Medium.com site entitled [Enspiral Tales](#) (for instance: Lu, 2016; Robinson, 2016; and Zuur, 2016). Members who occupy central roles in Enspiral ventures are active participants in public events and speak about the principles and details of their approach at conferences and other similar fora about these themes and strategies; frequently with an international audience, and with the explicit goal of attaining a global network of relationships and interaction. By taking advantage of a range of literacies, the network leans into the public nature of their organisation and renders the public sphere a site for reflexive engagement with their strategic approach to such goals as decentralised operations.

Network governance is thus dealt with as both a means of local decentralising, and of modelling and sharing ethical business structures and practices in a scalable—arguably "viral"—fashion. A good example of this tactic is the "[Enspiral Handbook](#)," a publicly hosted document that defines the operational parameters for Enspiral ventures presented in the style of a "wiki" or white paper. It is collectively authored, and invites contributions and updates, and is published on the Enspiral Website (Enspiral, "Enspiral Handbook"). This process and transparency forms both the basic underpinning to an agreed upon approach to organisational procedures, and provides a reflexive model for other organisations to adopt. The language, structures and practices outlined are inclusive, and focus on meaning rather than profit generation, whilst tending toward fostering literacies in the use of digital communication technologies and a process of transition based on the creation of more sustainable ecologies; both in human and environmental terms (Enspiral, "Our Ventures").

This attitude toward intellectual property and the network effect translates into active participation in the creation of open source software, and make very active use of the [Github](#) open source community as a platform to host and distribute project resources and works in progress (Github). Enspiral Network ventures sell open source software as

enterprise applications and provide these freely when organisations such as not for profits and social enterprise based startups request them (Enspiral, "Our Ventures"). An example of a freely distributed software is the collaborative tool [Cobudget](#), which permits collective coordination of business expenditure. Loomio (discussed previously) on the other hand, is purchased on a subscription basis but available without cost on application, and has now achieved a global scale of distribution—indeed, the positioning statement on the Loomio website states: "[w]e believe that more groups practicing effective, inclusive decision-making can change organisational dynamics at a global scale" (Loomio, "About"). This change making orientation is also reflected in the language employed by its representatives as part of public fora, for instance, Co-founder Alanna Krause [describes Loomio](#) as "the operating system for a new form of organisation" (Rushkoff; Enspiral, "Alanna Krause: Inventing a New Organizational Operating System"). The analogy drawn between the software that controls computational devices and which can provide the underpinnings to an intensively networked socio-technical organisation is revealing. The discourse demonstrates how a soft technological determinism marks the network both in material terms, and in relation to the affective experience of the participants.

There is also a clear genealogy for techno-utopian discourse of this kind, and we return to an analysis of the role of the figure of utopia in the concluding phase of this essay. For now, it suffices to note the strong consonance between the perspective expressed here and that which marked the early period of reflection upon the likely influence of the internet; where an associated optimism buoyed up the market and fuelled the "dot-com bubble." As Ian Buchanan argues, the legacy of this period is a continued utopian rhetoric in the face of the broad commodification of the internet:

> [I]n the early years of [the internet's] existence the utopian image of it as an affirmative agent of cultural change was able to flourish, giving the Internet a powerful rhetorical legacy it continues to draw on even as it is moulded more and more firmly into a purely commercial enterprise. ("Deleuze and the Internet" 156)

This enterprise is controlled by few players—Google and Facebook—that dominate the market and contrive to shape the logic of a search-based economy that funnels capital to central points, drawing the representations of the real into the gravity well of its function. Algorithms that supply users with news operate to constrain world views to a "filter bubble," and to distribute with viral efficiency spurious accounts of events with a suddenness that approaches real-time.

Paradoxically, the utopian discourse that participants in the Enspiral Network engage in can be viewed as a reflex to this suddenness, and to the precarious circumstances created by the mechanisms large corporations have devised and imposed via the internet to control global flows of capital. Here is a relationship that is at once discursive and embedded in a scalable material reality; at once globally realised and locally grounded. For instance, [Scoop](#)

[Independent News](#) is a venture facilitated by the network and a not-for-profit organisation that funds and supports "the vital independent sources of information that contribute to a more democratic society" in New Zealand ("Donations"). Loomio is also an acute demonstration of the desire to create a utopian island of democratic interaction that escapes the conditions of global control, by appropriating the same technical systems these conditions employ. The software is "free and open source… public infrastructure, held in the commons," that can be hosted by the user under secure circumstances ("Loomio in 1 Minute"). It is also designed to be as inclusive as possible; it is device agnostic, and is able, for example, to be deployed as a smartphone application, and allows the participants in a network equivalent rights to contribute to decision making by proposing, supporting, opposing or blocking decisions as part of an aspatial process that is encoded as an archive and record (Loomio "[Loomio in 1 Minute](#)"). Loomio, along with the broader suite of technologies discussed here, rely on a dovetailing of digital literacies with communication technology that is generative of reflexively mediated sociality. What emerges is organisational function that permits networked activity that is both entrepreneurial (governed by the market) and humanistic (governed by a communally defined ethos).

The language employed by members of Enspiral ventures reflects this interrelationship between market pragmatism and an oppositional attitude toward corporate culture that is perceived to operate beyond ethical governance. Inflected here is a mix of a utopian ideal, and reflexive response to the failure of digital communication technology—the ultimate example of which being the internet—to live up to the "hype" created through the techno-utopian promises made during the 90s. A useful demonstration of this language can be found in the "[What is Enspiral](#)?" video, embedded in their website and featuring a number of the founding members of the network attempting to describe their organisation—examples follow:

> 'Changing the world through livelihood'
> Craig Ambrose _Enspiral Craftworks
>
> 'We create network effects…. It's a fertile ground for entrepreneurship and almost nothing else.'
> Alanna Krause _Loomio, Enspiral Foundation
>
> 'You are working for something you care about, rather than a nebulous external thing… people automatically care about what they do, and they don't have to be tricked into it by any managerial bullshit or incentives'
> Rose Lu _Rabid
>
> '… in a large institution they have lots of programs and incentives to make you feel like you're engaged in the process, but that's not really the reality and people realise that, whereas with Enspiral you can be engaged as you want to be.'

Malcolm Shearer, Loomio (Enspiral, "What is Enspiral?")

Each of these statements show a reflexive, ambivalent response to the twin imperatives of success in the market, and the maintenance of a transparent, humanistic organisational construct. They also show how the collision of these imperatives shape the intent and drive of the network; for whom the network itself is the only feasible response—and the gravity of the project is, to them, nothing less than world changing.

In order to foreshorten further exposition, I offer a precis of the network's traits based on a broader inspection of published media:

1. Sophisticated, reflexive media-based practices.
2. Entrepreneurship and market pragmatism, based primarily around open source software.
3. Prototyping (modelling) of strategic network effects via organisational strategies.
4. Parsimonious, decentralised organisational structures that rely on socio-technical systems to amplify a self-organising principle derived from activist origins.
5. Local integration and footing, alongside a global sensibility guided by the potentials in the network effect and the need to respond to a range of (unfolding) ecological crises.
6. Public communication dedicated to reflexive engagement with the network goals that is frequently marked by technologically deterministic themes and a critical attitude toward orthodox corporate structures and practices.

Originary Thinking and Anti-Hierarchical Culture

Originary thinking offers unique insights into this case study, where unprecedented access to globally mediated cultural exchange is generative of anti-hierarchical scenes of culture. The stability of the Enspiral Network relies on the use of digital communication technology to permit scalable participation in decision making, decentralising the governance of the network and its business operations, and working to achieve an inclusive culture and egalitarian processes. Reciprocal interaction between individual participants in the network is held up as the ideal means by which to focus merit based assessments of proposed decisions. These scenes of culture are facilitated by the network through digital interventions that seek to maintain a degree of the implicitly sacred quality of secularity. In effect, this an intentional use of structure to achieve openness, and therefore an exercise in ambivalence, or if you will, an intentionally paradoxical experiment in the relation of structure and agency. In this way, the network seeks to tap the volatile potency in emergent—self-organising—patterns of human behaviour during which scalable, publicly mediated dialogues are harnessed, and rendered capable of a focussed, instrumental social function.

This can be understood as a kind of experiment—where the laboratory is the network—built up around a reflexive attempt to achieve a public, supplementary scene on which network-

based interaction is conducted. This scene relies on the unique facility of digital communication technology, but should be understood to employ virtualizing procedures that are common to all language. The use of Loomio, for example, to conduct collective decision-making relies for its stability on the immediacy of direct material experience of a community or issue that is located within the physical scope of the network. However, to use Gans's terms, the process is mediated on an 'implicit public, "institutional" scene' that remains distinct, remains virtual, and in this way is concretised as a supplement to the communal, material scene it springs from. This communal scene tends to have local roots, and a global sensibility because without the direct, corporeal and material circumstances of lived agency the virtual scene has no impendency, and boasts no immediacy: no causal relationship with the scene from which it (must) spring in order to be *supplementary*.

Because the collective conducts such discourse on scenes of culture that are digitally mediated, the liminal quality of the public conversation can be negotiated, and the dialogue sustained as it is simultaneously recorded as an indelible digital record. Thus, the usual limitations of scale (in terms of the number of participants) and volatility that marks dialogic interaction conducted in the public sphere are disrupted, with the paradoxical effect of destabilising the structures that reinforce hierarchy. Of course, hierarchy cannot disappear for it is required, and is vital to, structure. For instance, if a group of individuals are attempting to complete a collective task such as the building of a website, decisions must be made in an ongoing way as a function of its creation that require the expertise of an experienced project manager who would be hamstrung by a disabling lag should each decision be collectively realised. One might say the community originates and is sustained through processes that are framed as a kind of performance, staged and recorded to create and stabilise temporary hierarchies toward the completion of projects such as the creation of software or the running of events. In keeping with the scene-supplement dualism outlined above, another more stable, minimally constructed hierarchy (the collectively organised network) provides a longer lasting foundation to venture-based activity that executes a growing number of projects over time.

The originary thinker adopts the hypothesis that language emerged as a means by which to constrain growing entropy among a group of proto-humans, and to thereby mediate the failures of an existing animal hierarchy in differentiating between the members of the group. The deferral of violence previously achieved by animal hierarchization is now mediated by language; but as we know, hierarchy remains the structure that brings ongoing stability to human communities, and with it the resentment and threat of violence such hierarchy represents. The phrase "anti-hierarchical" culture is apt only if understood to describe a reflex to hierarchy, just as the postmodern is a reflex to the modern, rather than a move beyond it. In this sense, the Enspiral Network is underpinned by a more reflexive and (paradoxically) a more institutionalised process of mediating hierarchy. This mutualism, framed as resistance to hierarchy, is therefore intended to facilitate a certain freedom, but it should be noted, is in danger of devolving into a form of "groupthink," and thereby, a source

of tyranny. This paradoxical outcome would not be unprecedented in human history, particularly when it comes to the influence of formal religion, and reminds us that consensus of any kind implies the normativity that typifies human culture. A formal organisational response to hierarchy can be understood in terms that are teetering on the edge of such a return.

We might understand this danger, and the ambivalence it inspires, in victimary terms. The process of mediating hierarchy via the structures and practices outlined above is a reflex to the precarity of the circumstances of the (increasingly isolated) creative industries practitioner under the conditions of global capitalism in the post-Global Financial Crisis (GFC) epoch, where outsourcing is the norm and ongoing employment with a large, relatively stable corporate institution has become increasingly unlikely. These isolated workers express their resentment toward large corporate institutions through their language, and the inchoate organisational forms they seek to create and participate in. In other words, the worker is framed as the victim of global capitalism and its formal organs, and the network attends to this victimary status by rallying about the cause of providing an alternate paradigm. It is not surprising that the social enterprise the network is defined through and of is attendant to processes that would create victims, and provide platforms that act in support of victims. This is certainly a utopian project, and as such in danger of the kind of collapse outlined above, but it is also a dystopian one, in that it requires the larger context of capitalism beyond its borders for its definition. As Gans argued in March of 2001—in a moment of both interpretive incision and preternatural anticipation of the events of the decade to come—the victimary circumstances of much of the discourse circulated by the structures convened by the formal institutions through the post-WWII period had created a world that is:

> [N]either utopia nor dystopia, and depends for its survival on the deferral of both . . . because no one is secure in his position; all of us are real or potential subjects and objects of victimary resentment and vulnerable therefore to the inevitable expressions of this resentment. ("Victimary Thinking Forever")

In both utopia and dystopia, Gans argues (his italics, "Victimary Thinking Forever"), all have and are secure in a position: '*people have a place and know their place*.' Under the conditions of utopia they wish to inhabit this place; in dystopia, they are likely to resent this place, but more than this, their 'masters accept and defend *theirs.*' The course of action taken by the participants in the Enspiral Network is inspired by the victimary; this reflex is not constrained to a group of like-minded peers, it is the decision of the group to engage in a systemic response in a manner that is inspired by the victimary *elsewhere*.

We could think of this as an example of what Gans (optimistically) labelled "post-victimary"[5] discourse. It is "post-victimary," in the sense that it is an attempt to step outside the circuits of influence of victimary thinking, and is characterised by mediation of

hierarchy with the goal of preventing resentment by stepping outside the feedback loop created by the perpetrator-victim relation that is implicit to rigid, enduring hierarchy. Collective organisation of this digitally networked kind tacitly acknowledges that whilst hierarchy cannot be removed from human interaction, it can be more effectively mediated; temporary hierarchies, for instance, can be permitted for the purposes of achieving a collective goal based on voluntary participation, and guided by principles that are mutually agreed upon and designed to foster community. It follows that organisations can operate on the basis of hierarchy but take advantage of digital mediation to offset the (potentially) victimary circumstances of such structure.

Under such post-victimary conditions, organised networks of workers may be an incubator for a mode of interaction that has in some modest ways begun to build on the affordances of digital technology to create a scene on which hierarchy can be mediated—indeed disrupted—to make the best of the emergent qualities in relatively unconstrained human interaction. Let us indulge a techno-utopian urge for a moment, and view the Enspiral Network from a distance through an originary lens: as a microcosmic presentation of a scalable phenomenon, one that is able to be transplanted, or to spread virally, to other organisations that form part of a global milieu: the victimary elsewhere. There, it will replace structures that currently operate according to formal, hierarchical interaction, defined by tradition established during the presently unfolding, possibly waning and primarily analog highly localised and destructible discursive epoch. Such organised networks of individuals will execute tasks and carry out projects that are decentrally governed by the participant workers, whose collective intelligence will be brought to bear in a manner that pays careful attention to the well-being of each individual equally.

Now let us return to *terra firma*: any careful ethnographic investigation of the lived situation of the Enspiral Network will, there is no doubt, reveal an ongoing struggle to maintain the stability one observes from afar. The micro-politics of human interaction, and the power struggles that must mark any human community cannot be wholly mediated and resolved. Similarly, any and all organisational strategies are certain to be imperfect, and subject to the shifting context of their application. Indeed, during 2016 the residual effects of hierarchy were exhibited as they engaged in a longitudinal, intensive review of their organisation they publicised as "Refactor 2016" through their various media. Alanna Krauss, quoted above as describing Loomio in terms of the technologically deterministic analogy of an "operating system," wrote an article about the review that described the 'story of how we upgraded core systems and processes in a distributed network without bosses' to address 'a number of interconnected issues' ("Breath in Leadership"). The review, she argues, was triggered by the centralising of power in the hands of the Directors of the meta-venture, the Enspiral Foundation Ltd. This was 'inconsistent with a core value of Enspiral: to distribute leadership, information, and power…. [W]ithout a corresponding executive function in the network, the very nature and purpose of governance was unclear' ("Breath in Leadership"). It is interesting to note that the term "refactor" is idiomatic of software development, and as

Krauss notes, is 'something programmers do after they've been working on a piece of software for a while and they've developed a better understanding of how it should be working' ("Breath in Leadership"). Clearly, an array of complex human challenges beset the process of decentralising power, distributing governance and attaining the transparency that underpin effective mediation of hierarchical interaction. The utopian internal scene is clearly not distinct from the dystopian without, and must absorb features of the organs of capitalism the network seeks to exclude. Furthermore, the greater the network's success in generating a model of entrepreneurial endeavour that fosters a mode of capitalist endeavour wherein resentment is successfully deferred, the more it adds (however modestly) to the extension of "business as usual" by participating in the *status quo*.

Conclusion

The technologically deterministic motif, with its 'core systems and processes,' suggests that attempts to stabilise this scene of culture via a platform that is able to supplement everyday interaction and permit such things as collective decision making, is subject to the ever-present danger of metastasizing into the very rigidity it sets out to transcend. Systems are, with ritual, the basis to repeated or routine exposure, and become the source of normativity that is, in turn, the basis to institutionalised interaction. But are we able to have our institutional cake and eat it too? Can we create systems, using technical means, that govern human interaction without subjecting it to a determining hierarchization? In this instance, digital technology permits a level of reflexivity that is otherwise unavailable, and digital literacies have allowed the creation of bespoke (tailor made utopian) scenes for instrumental, organisational purposes that leverage this literacy to generate both transparency and fluidity. However, repeated use of such platforms does not remove the uncanny distance that separates the social and the technical, indeed, they rely on this difference for their function. If the technology were to be conjoined with the human a dystopian situation in which agency has been shifted to an ambiguous machine-human entity, or worse still, to the technology itself, will have occurred. This removal, or displacement, is always in danger of stripping agency of context, as is demonstrated by our growing familiarity with platforms such as Facebook, where the simultaneous access to an increasingly ubiquitous network of one-to-one and one-to-many communication partners, has also stripped individuals of context—and led scholars to adopt the phrase "context collapse" to describe the disorientation this creates (Marwick and Boyd).

Another format of context collapse occurs when supplementary and primary scenes collapse, one with the other; rather than unfolding beyond context, in this instance we have uncanny experiences such as stumbling upon a celebrity whilst purchasing groceries. Now imagine for a moment you have been propelled forward in time 35 years from 1981 to 2016, where the uncanny has become the norm. Here the possibility of scene colliding with scene has been catalysed through a precession Baudrillard[6] predicted, and which no innovation of technology and social system can organise a response to. In this reality, the American

President "Tweets" off the cuff comments that destabilise geopolitics, and using the same platform, you can send a direct personal message to your favourite celebrity (though you can't expect a response) using a device you are expected by social norm to carry with you at all times. This experience no doubt overshadows the uncanny moment of bumping into a celebrity in person at the corner store (as does time travel). However, the same socio-technical systems can be shaped toward the opposite ends, and utilised to combat the loss of context. This is precisely what the Enspiral Network sets out to do (an intentionally paradoxical response), by institutionalising a carefully located strategy that positions the technical at the boundaries to the social in order to engage as a community with the constraints that hierarchies impose.

There is consonance between the paradoxical situation of this organised disorder and the relationship between institutions and normativity. The collision of institutional structure with open-endedness liberates the network to engage in other states usually thought of as unsustainably ambivalent, for instance, market pragmatism and humanism. The originary scene for this paradoxical strategic response is the precarity created as media work was increasingly outsourced, or de-institutionalised, during the period after the GFC. It was also generated through the (apparently non-instrumental) activism conducted as part of the Occupy Movement the GFC—at least in part—inspired. Occupy refused to be institutionalised as other activism had been, and to give itself over to hierarchical organisation, and this moment is refracted through the appearance of the Enspiral Network. Its novel combination of structures and paradoxical features is the harbinger of a future in which communities innovate to take action with what is at hand, rather than wait for or protest against inaction from agents that could, and should, act now. The Governments of our nation states, and intractable institutions such as global corporations have proven themselves too path dependant to achieve genuine change; these are entities so heavily invested in the *status quo* that should we wait for them to deliver, let alone participate in an alternative paradigm, we can be certain it will never arrive.

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Notes

[1]In two essays published in *Anthropoetics* during 2015 I paid particular attention to novel formats of celebrity, especially those with an associated aesthetic dimension, including the celebrity architect, or "starchitect", Rem Koolhaas and the celebrity artist-dissident, Ai Weiwei. These are: "Ai Wei Wei's Leg-Gun Meme, Virality and the New Ostensive" and "Victimary Thinking, Celebrity and the CCTV Building".

[2] A note of disclosure: some bias may be created by my familiarity with the subject matter of this essay. I work as a consultant in the creative industries, through which I have had extensive experience of coworking environments.

[3]For example Bouncken & Reuschl, 2016; Capdevila, 2013; Gandini, 2016; Garrett, Spreitzer, & Bacevice, 2014; Kojo & Nenonen, 2014; Parrino, 2013; Spinuzzi, 2012; Waters-Lynch & Potts, 2016; Waters-Lynch, Potts, Butcher, Dodson, & Hurley, 2016.

[4] The Enspiral coworking venture, Enspiral Space, closed during early 2016 and is now managed as part of Rabid (Enspiral Space, 2017).

[5] See Gans' *Chronicles of Love and Resentment* 218, "Post-Victimary Thinking in the Holy

Land", and 230, "Victimary Thinking Forever" for a discussion of the post-victimary.

[6] Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacres et simulation*. Paris, Editions Galilee, 31 Dec. 1981.