AGORISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

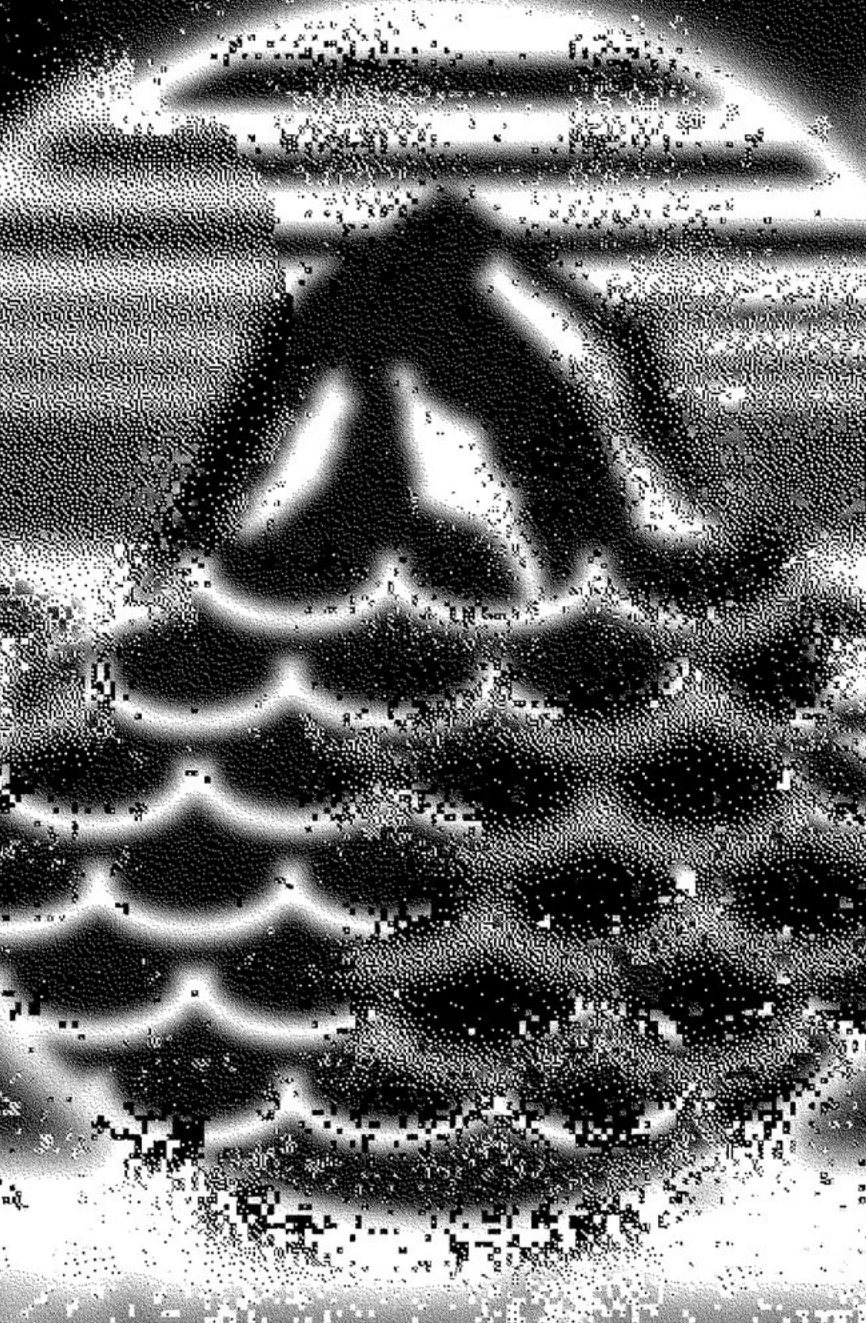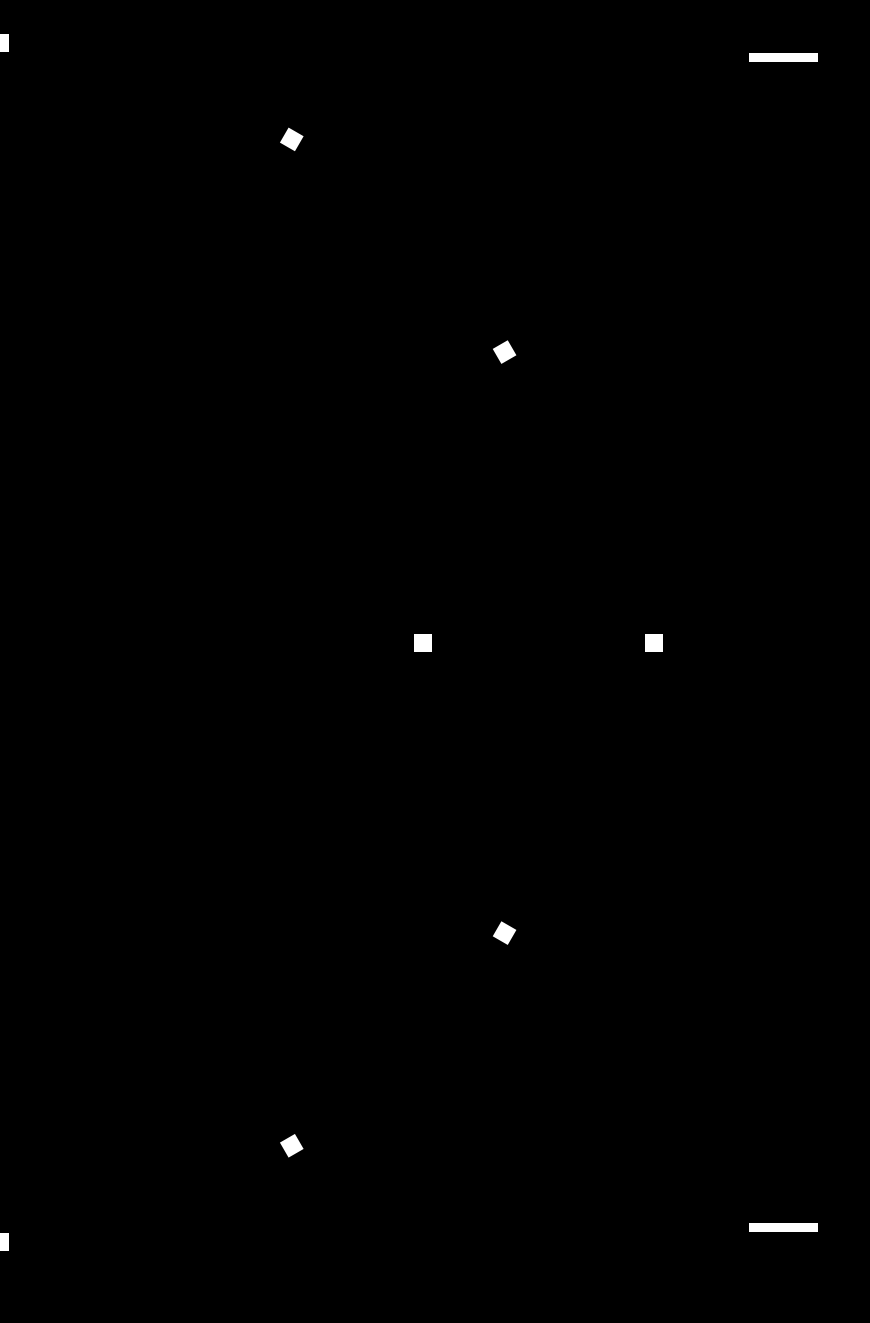# AGORISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A PHILOSOPHICAL JOURNAL

FOREWORD

In recent years, the crypto ecosystem has expanded into unforeseen territories. Memecoins have proliferated, bringing with them a new, energetic class of crypto traders. NFTs, DeFi and DAOs rose to power as essential primitives for emboldening crypto communities. Rumors of regulatory unrest are met with significant advances in zero-knowledge cryptography, which promise to make anonymity practical for crypto users.

Yet as an ecosystem, crypto's growth is propelled not by its flowers – the various technical phenomena that constitute crypto – but by its roots: the philosophy from which crypto originates. It is the contention of this journal that the roots of crypto are firmly agorist. Agorism is crypto's mythical substructure, its source of nourishment and its anchor.

Agorism is an applied, practical philosophy. Its primary tactic is called counter-economics: the sum of all black-market activity. Agorism is *counter-economics* wielded consciously. In the words of its founder, Samuel Edward Konkin III (SEK3):

> As more people consciously convert their work and leisure to the counter-economy, the State loses both control and sustenance, like a vampire losing blood and victims. The self-conscious counter-economy is called The Agora (and the libertarian/counter-economists are called agorists). (1987a)

All manner of parallel societies, privacy extremism, and even Decentralized Autonomous Organizations (DAOs) track back to agorism.

Most famously, agorism inspired Silk Road, a Bitcoin-enabled darknet marketplace that in 2011 was among the earliest projects to forecast crypto's insurrectionary potential. Its founder Ross Ulbricht proclaimed "we are all agorists", stating "I'm out to turn unconscious agorists into conscious active ones" (Greenberg, 2013).

Echoes of agorism are everywhere in contemporary crypto. Web3 is the extension of agorist principles into all sectors of society – governance, culture, finance. Still, crypto is mostly composed of "unconscious agorists". The motivation of this journal is to change that.

This journal has been edited with the following agorist principles in mind.

① Reject political divisions.

Konkin situated agorism on the extreme left of the political spectrum. This was a strategic choice to widen the possible recruitment base to radical voices from across the partisan divide, with revolutionary tendencies emphasized above any particular political allegiance. This journal adopts the same approach and refuses to discriminate between thinkers. Any anti-state revolutionary is a potential ally.

② Welcome dissonance.

Discourse necessitates conflict. In the several journals he curated, Konkin deliberately included voices that did not resonate with each other, proclaiming: "Everyone

appearing in this publication disagrees!" (1987b). This was critical to his frequent usage of the term "alliance", defined as a "handling together of sovereign units for a goal and then disbanding" (Konkin, 2006, p. 57). Agorism teaches cooperation while nurturing difference.

③ No compromises.

Agorism was born from conflict: Konkin rejected the formation of the Libertarian Party and all party politics – what he called "partyarchy" – and maintained a strictly revolutionary ideology. Following a brief attempt to destroy the Libertarian Party from the inside, in 1973 Konkin left party politics forever, taking his followers with him.

Crypto today finds itself at a similar juncture. In response to unjust regulations, people within crypto are calling for the creation of crypto-focused political bodies to engage in party politics. This journal gives voice to the alternative:

Agora! Anarchy! Action!

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AN INTRODUCTION TO AGORISM IN BOTH THEORY AND PRACTICE

Dr. Paul Dylan-Ennis
and W.W. Barlowe

\\ Just once wouldn't you like to read a manifesto that's been practiced before it's preached?

— Konkin III, 2009

A Brief History of Agorism

Agorism is obscure enough that in Brian Doherty's 800-page history of American libertarianism, *Radicals for Capitalism*, Samuel Edward Konkin III (SEK3) is mentioned only a handful of times. Konkin's work was preserved by his friend Victor Koman. The two had lived in a Long Beach apartment block called *The AnarchoVillage*. Koman tells us Konkin simply left him all his writing when he moved out (Koman, 2021). The website for *The AnarchoVillage* suggests the block housed science-fiction writers with libertarian leanings. We know Konkin's work did inspire various science-fiction writers such as Koman, William H. Patterson, and J. Neil Schulman. Konkin's sparse LinkedIn profile tells us he was an 'On-Demand Publishing Consultant and Contractor' and he is listed as Executive Director of 'The Agorist Institute.' One suspects most of his employment was off-the-books.

From the inherited archive, Koman has faithfully constructed something of a body of work. The primary literature consists of two-and-a-bit "books." These are *very* slim volumes. The first is the *New Libertarian Manifesto*, published in 1980 by the obscure Anarchosamisdat Press, and it appears to be the only book published in Konkin's lifetime. Koman is responsible for two later editions (1983, 2006). *An Agorist Primer* was written in 1986 but failed to find a publisher. Koman published it in 2008 under his imprint KoPubCo. There is also a Kindle edition of Konkin's unfinished *Counter-Economics: From Back Alleys to the Stars* (Konkin III, 2018) that emphasises the practice of agorism, but it's rough. Other than these sources, we have some grainy VHS clips of Konkin speaking at 'The Agorist Institute'. The footage suggests something more informal than an institute, like a discussion club.

What is Agorism in Theory?

Here is Konkin's definition of agorism: '*...the consistent integration of libertarian theory with counter-economic practice; an agorist is one who acts consistently for freedom and in freedom*' (Konkin III, 2009, p. 18). Agorism is a theory of society (libertarianism), but also advocates for how to *act* in society, a practice (counter-economics). Konkin wants you to put the book down and smuggle oil or bootleg some movies. Or start an unregulated DeFi exchange. But he also stresses you should 'get your head right' with theory and he usually takes this to mean consistency in relation to traditional libertarian ideals: voluntaryism,

non-violence, pro-market, socially-permissive, anti-state, anti-war. Konkin believes these ideas are already implicit or latent in most people, but because the state is powerful and coercive we have internalized statist ideas.

Konkin believes the move from statism to agorism will involve various stages (phase 0-4) (2006, p. 60). In Phase 0 (Zero-Density Agorist Society) there are nascent or proto-agorist libertarians and the task is to convert people. Even so, theory is never just theory. Konkin insists on recruiting and educating individuals, but also encouraging them to engage in counter-economic activity. Those already involved in such activities can be shown the theory missing from their practice (Konkin III, 2006, p. 60).

In Phase 1 (Low-Density Agorist Society) libertarian ideas have some traction, but there is a struggle over the right approach, e.g. should we have a Libertarian Party or not? Counter-economists are those libertarians who reject party politics at this juncture. Konkin encourages coordination among early agorist activists in the form of alliances: '...the basic organization for New Libertarian activists is the *New Libertarian Alliance*' (Konkin III, 2006, p. 57). Konkin veers between names when talking about agorist alliances: sometimes New Libertarian Alliance, sometimes New Libertarianism, sometimes Left Libertarian. An NLA would not be a traditional party organization and would comprise tacticians and strategists *selling* agorism. These New or Left Libertarians are encouraged to agitate within established libertarian organizations in Phase 1 (Konkin III, 2006, p. 62).

Agorism in Practice

Since agorism rejects state laws, it ultimately requires autonomous spaces, zones, and territories beyond the reach of the state to proceed to Phase 2. It needs a swell of like-minded agorists living and working together. Konkin sees the path from theory to practice as crucial here because the agorists will show life outside the state is not just possible, but preferable. This is because you will be living more authentically, more consistently with yourself, rather than pretending to prefer the staid, safe life of the current system.

These autonomous zones and the activity within them will constitute the Counter-Economy: '*All (non-coercive) human action committed in defiance of the State constitutes the Counter-Economy*' (Konkin III, 2009, p. 45). Counter-economic activity is a way of life and not just a theory. It involves: 'Tax evasion, inflation avoidance, smuggling, freed production, and illegal distribution...' (Konkin III, 2009, p. 47). Current counter-economic activity is valued because it is a beachhead that can be leveraged to develop full-blown agorism: 'The goal is *living in the agora* and the path is *expanding Counter-Economics*' (Konkin III, 2009, p. 76). Agorism is our end, Counter-Economics is our means.

In Phase 2 proper (Mid-Density, Small Condensation Agorist Society) agorism has started to 'contaminate' the wider society (Konkin III, 2006, p. 63). Konkin imagines the appearance of agorist ghettoes (his word) and districts that have some implicit support or sympathy from the

wider society (2006, p. 63). It is unclear in Konkin how this support would emerge, but presumably agorist ideas have proliferated enough that even those *outside* these zones would support their right to exist, perhaps recognizing, even desiring, the sense of authenticity on display.

In Phase 3 (High-Density, Large Condensation Agorist Society) Konkin conceives a scenario where the State and the Agora (both now capitalized) are more and more matched in terms of their resources. The State, perhaps pushed by confrontation with the Agora, enters into a series of 'terminal crises' (Konkin III, 2006, p. 65). New Libertarian Alliances (NLAs) are vigilant and work to ensure the final gasps of statism are ineffective.

Here Konkin sees NLAs as themselves eventually phased out and former New Libertarian practitioners transitioning into roles opened up by a pure agorist society, i.e. taking up functions once provided by the state, such as arbitration or protection. After a final push by the state to rescue itself, we transition to Phase 4 (Agorist Society with Statist Impurities). In this final phase, the remnants of the State are rooted out and then re-integrated back into the new agorist society, reformed!

Konkin's Relevance

There is nothing unusual about Konkin's status as a forgotten thinker. You can find them everywhere in the spines of old textbooks. People of great insight relegated

to obscurity. What is unusual is the extent of Konkin's prescience about our society and how the model of agorism seems to map so well on to the practice of crypto-currency specifically. Konkin is crypto *avant la lettre* and he should be more well-known by cryptocurrency advocates.

Here is Konkin on how counter-economics could benefit from advancements in encryption technology (writing in 1986):

> '...should the Counter-Economy lick the information problem it would virtually eliminate the risk it incurs under the State's threat. That is, if you can advertise your products, reach your customers and accept payment (a form of information), all outside the detection capabilities of the State, what enforcement of control would be left?' (Konkin III, 2009, p. 49)

If it were possible to create an anonymous market to sell illegal goods then the Counter-Economy would solve the problem of law enforcement. This is the earliest description of dark net marketplaces I am aware of. It is worth mentioning that Ross Ulbricht was influenced to create Silk Road by reading Konkin. Interestingly, both Konkin and Ulbricht had studied chemistry to an advanced level.

Next, here is Konkin's definition of a New Libertarian Alliance: '...an association of entrepreneurs of liberty for the purpose of specializing, coordinating, and delivering libertarian activities' that can be formed and disbanded

as needed' (Konkin III, 2006, p. 57). To my eye, this sounds like the contemporary Decentralized Autonomous Organization (DAO). A community of entrepreneurs oriented towards specific goals that when attained can be abandoned or reconfigured. And where much of the activity happening exists somewhere between grey and black market activity, e.g. Decentralized Finance (DeFi).

Konkin's phases mirror the subtle mindset underlying cryptoeconomic activity where decentralized innovations are first created, gain a foothold, and are then conceptually difficult to eradicate. In particular, the success of crypto-currency ultimately depends on constructing autonomous zones *within* pre-existing states and then switching-on users to this attractive counter-economic activity, e.g. yield farming rates. This opens an aperture within mainstream society about what is economically possible or even permissible.

Conclusion

Agorism is the promotion of black market activity. It valorizes counter-economics as an expression of our true selves outside the state's watchful eye. It promotes the widening of counter-economic participation until the contiguous territory of the state is eroded by agorist autonomous zones. In the end, agorism negates itself as the very distinction between counter-economic activity and general activity collapses into one, a world where you are allowed to be consistent with your true self once more.

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THE MARKET AS A GUN TO YOUR HEAD, TOOL IN YOUR HAND OR ESCAPE ROUTE FROM HELL

Jaya Klara Brekke

I grew up in a political tradition that critiques markets as decisively coercive constructs, intimately tied up in the formation of the state, the expansion of colonial rule and the systematisation of racist and gendered violence. It is therefore a strangely surreal feeling to find friends subscribing to markets as the primary motor of a liberatory political project. Where half of my compañeras are rebelling against the continued compulsion of market capitalism extracting resources and labour, the other half are frolicking in the green pastures of Venture Capital funds; fueling ever more elaborate financial constructs, building castles in the sky (or should we say tokenised palaces in space?). Strangely, both seem to have the same aim: liberation from money constraints and the ultimate escape from the hell that is being broke, collectively and individually. For my newly rich crypto-buddies, this implies tapping their newly developed faucets of magic money. But for my fist-in-the-air anti-capitalist buddies, "broke" does not refer to a lack of money as much as being displaced from what would otherwise be a naturally occurring abundance were it not for the deserts created

by extractive machines of capitalist markets. I, in the meantime, suddenly find myself writing go-to-market strategies and joining slack channels for entrepreneurs and business owners, feeling a little like an amusing LARP, albeit with very real-world consequences, including for my bank account. In other words, I am not writing this piece from a purist point of view.

This essay is a rehearsal. It is me, publicly revising my old political economy notes and gearing up for a much longer reflection on markets, black markets, growth, cybernetics and psychotherapy (coming soon, watch this space etc.). And the point that I want to make in this essay is simple: if taken as a primary method to organise social relations, markets will be as coercive as, though more nebulous than, any state or religious doctrine.

Markets as a gun to your head

To rehearse the arguments from the political tradition I grew up in then, the history of markets as we know them in current day capitalism goes a little something like this: in earlier times of what is (for now at least) known as the UK, people used to largely subsist off of common lands, rivers, lakes and forests, shared resources cared for by a community that depended on it. These common lands were then expropriated, fenced off and turned from a shared resource into private property by a handful of landowners (a situation that has persisted until today). This resulted in the expulsion of many people, whole

communities cut off from their means of subsistence, which created a working class, spurring a mass migration to cities and factories. No longer able to depend on naturally occurring resources, people were instead forced to find ways to get their hands on money, usually selling their labour and bodies in various gendered ways, in order to access basic needs. They also had to pay taxes to the state in order for them to be able to pay for armies. These could then form joint ventures with the "entrepreneurs" of the day and sail out and to repeat this violent process of expropriation and exploitation at epic scales across the globe, in highly racialised and systemically violent ways, extracting people as much as metals and timber, in a raid that has not ceased since.

In short: capitalist markets, colonialism and the modern state are historically highly intertwined – a point worth remaking given the persistent myth of states and markets as mortal enemies. Markets need states to enforce the rules that enable them to operate effectively, while states need markets to fuel and fund their operations. Importantly, this is only half of the story, because of historical battles and struggles, states have also enshrined varying levels of rights and protections for commonly owned wealth and resources, the "social state", so to speak.

Sometime in the post-war period a perspective began to take hold. "The Market" in an abstract sense became not just a place to buy and sell goods and services, but a decentralised information processor. The Market was now a machine to compute and coordinate human activities

at a large scale without the need for central planning. This myth of markets as a means to free people from state and society properly took hold in the 1980s. Markets would provide the minimum coordination needed in order to provide for material necessities, leaving all other aspects of life entirely up to individual preference. Or so went the propaganda. While one might subscribe to this elaborate scheme and find it attractive on paper, the theory had some serious blindspots. Not least that without any social, cultural, political or legal forces to back up the terms of engagement, "The Market" rapidly centralises into giant monopolies until there are no meaningful markets to speak of anymore but merely mafias with more or less legal standing.

There were some mildly psychotic aspects to these ideas too. For it to work in practice, people would need to actually behave like the automatons in the market model of information. In short, they had to be isolated, self-interested and mindless, relegating the work of reflection, response and responsibility to the feedback mechanisms encoded in the market model. It would no longer be the duty of humans to reflect on their immediate surroundings, to trust in their experiences and each other, instead, a higher order was at work. And as it turns out, markets have serious "failures" and "externalities", meaning consequences and conditions for people and places that are simply not accounted for.

For most people, there is nothing voluntary about the market. It is merely different degrees of coercion (for

some, one paycheck away from disaster, while for others it is five or six). Another strangely persistent saying is that the state has a monopoly on violence. Meanwhile the market too often has the monopoly on the means of survival, inserting itself into every relation enforcing a moneyed intermediation. "The state" might hold most of the guns, but the market has a big say on where to point them.

Markets as a tool in your hand

A lot of the ideals, deals and social contracts built up through this history were revealed and some came tumbling down in the 2008 financial crisis. No fool could fool themselves, let alone others, that "The Market" was a rational force operating at a higher level of aggregate coordination than any single human or institution could comprehend. Unfortunately, amnesia sunk in fast, and the admirable project of Bitcoin as a digital form of anti-authoritarian cash instead turned the volume up on an elaborate renewal of this retrograde ideology. This was quickly generalised through the initial ethos of Ethereum – namely, that the problem was not the mindlessness, isolation, expropriation and mistrust that markets manufactured, but that these clumsy old artefacts were simply not engineered quite right. In short, market dynamics-plus-computation would rectify the simplicity of capitalist markets into a more elaborate, more adequate design. Much of the original mindlessness persisted in a new naive form. And here I mean mindless literally:

the intention of Hayekian economics for the human is to remove critical cognition in favour of a cog-in-the-wheel behave-like-a-selfish-asshole and the-collective-good-will-be-taken-care-of form of blind ideology. Similarly, although this time rewired through the vocabulary and cultural curiosities of peer-to-peer histories, hacker and information security engineering concepts, humans were now considered not only irrational but also untrustworthy. In short, do not trust anyone, and behave like a selfish isolated automaton, because really, although this initially sounds kind of *bad*, it will all come together in a higher form of organisation, a computationally mediated greater *good*.

Luckily, lessons were quickly learned, and after a few fuck-ups, the volume of markets as elaborate computation that would be more perfect than people was turned down in favour of bespoke approaches and more immediately useful tools. And here we are today. Markets are now a design-space. A tool in our hands which can be designed in order achieve specific organisational and behavioural outcomes – many of which remain to be proven. Incentives are elaborately balanced in books of the nth dimension. It's all very cool. As constructs, I mean. I perceive these as almost crystalline dream-like expressions of wishful worlds, and I actually find them stunning for the sheer cognitive creativity that goes into their construction and write-ups in white papers and Rust.

I nevertheless continue to consider and keep an eye on the coercive motivations in many of these. Elsewhere, some years ago, I wrote:

the explosive arrival of blockchain technology has splintered neo-liberalism into tiny shards that instead of being destroyed have rained down and pierced into all of us and our stuff, turning all our things into capital/assets and all of our endeavors into financial speculation.

But actually, what has been splintered into a myriad of forms is ideology. White papers are the new ideological manifestos. These are utopias, dreamed up at university desks. As those who know me well understand, utopias, to my mind, are oppressive. Any utopian write-up carries a latent desire of covert coercion to conform with yet another idea of a perfect world. Utopias are often attempts at domesticating a far more stunning chaos into some new idea of universal rules, another set of predictive processes and patterns. And with the new brands of markets as a bespoke design-space for incentives that will amount to a greater collective good, eager efforts to establish social control keep seeping in, disguised through layers of code and computational complexity.

I have been a fence-sitter from the very beginning of Bitcoin, and I continue to be a fence-sitter, meaning that I nevertheless much prefer design interventions over police interventions. So to be less witty and more real for a minute, cryptoeconomics and game theory to me is more akin to the discipline of design and planning than authoritarianism. What I mean is that it is an approach that uses markets as a means of power by shaping the environments that people operate in rather than using outright violence.

But as any designer will be aware of, states also make use of planning and design as a more subtle and therefore often more effective form of power.

Markets as a means of escape?

Now (in what I hope will please my friends who commissioned this piece) there is a very different and far less authoritarian approach to the idea of markets as a tool rather than an ideological aim. Namely when markets are a means to or first step towards escape. As someone constitutionally concerned with freedom I am an advocate of two things: work that does not consider itself a complete and comprehensive solution to the problem of being a human in this world, but rather a responsive and responseable dialogue with an open world that continues to change; and secondly, multipolarity and the option to always go elsewhere if and when ones environment or community turns toxic. That second point is an important corrective to the first, because markets, and algorithms as information processors too for that matter, in many ways *are* open-ended and responsive to a world that is never fully complete and never fully knowable. However, these continue to present themselves as necessarily expansive and singular modes of doing.

Markets cannot be the sole organiser of social relations. As a social or political project in and of themselves, markets are mindless and coercive. And to go farther, *dark* markets does not imply the absence of coercive power,

but a vacuum for coercion to set in. Either through violence or ever more fine-grained crypto economic modelling, as coercive as, though more nebulous than a state.

This brief essay presents a revision of old notes. Next comes the full analysis and argument.
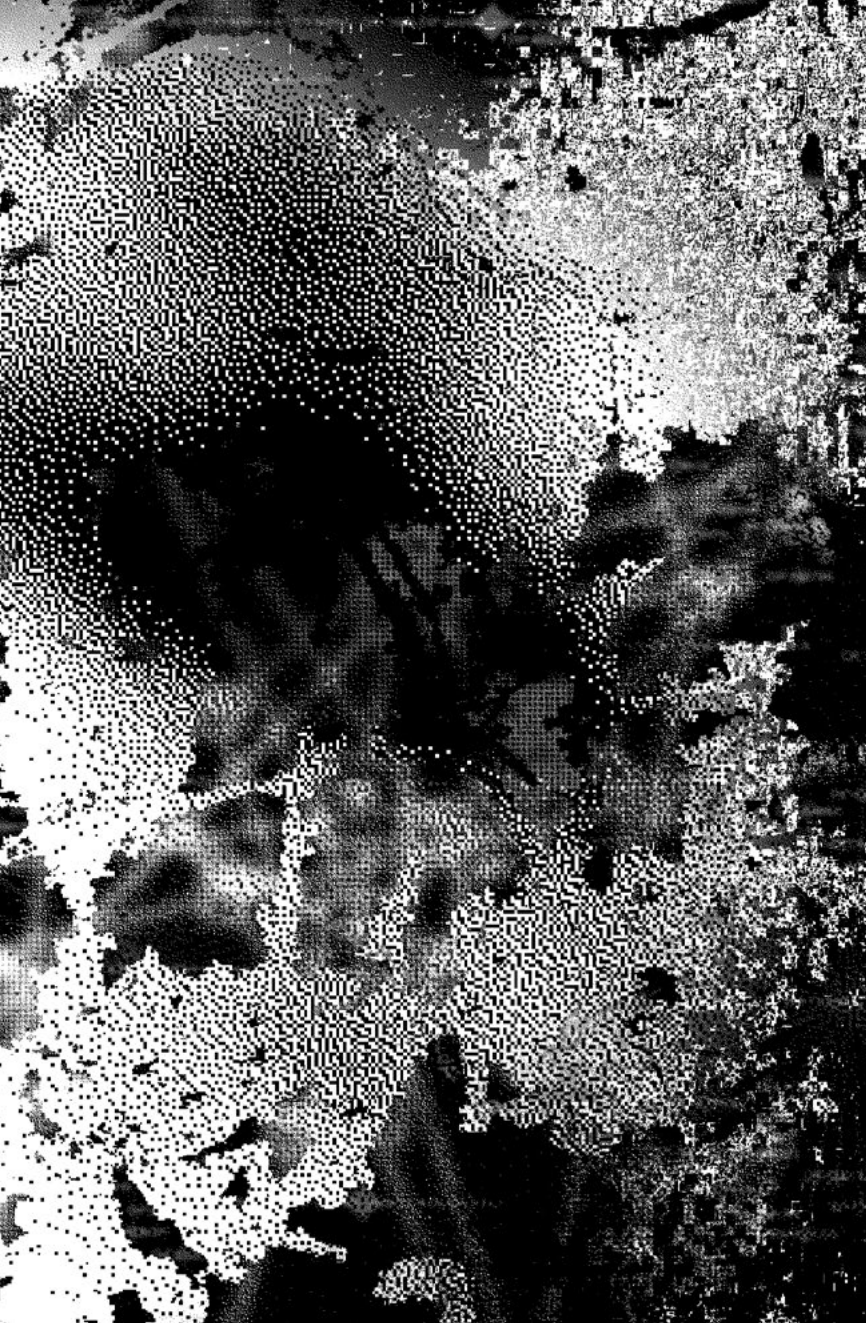
COLD ANARCHY

Nick Land

§00 — Hot anarchy might be thought an unfortunate starting point for any political disquisition, and even the very worst possible. Anything said about hot anarchy has to over-articulate it. Hot anarchy does not merely want to mend the world. It wants to mend the world so badly that anything at all is sanctioned in this cause, or ultimate end. Extreme action is thus at least implicitly recommended, and serves as a gauge of authenticity. Zealous by definition, hot anarchy is introduced beyond a threshold of enthusiasm.

§01— Any instantiation of hot anarchy will disappoint, because it is a pure essence – the pure essence. Its inchoate negativity only makes it purer. Here, at last, is the great washing-away. Dreaming goes there to die, in an imagined, absolutely unshackled ecstasy of destruction (or purification), which can only ever be approximated. Holocaust of the real in the flame of the idea is the implicit project. Hot anarchy lies at the absolute antipodes of realism, as a matter of principle.

§02 — More definitely, hot anarchy is domestically-framed universalistic utopian activism. This is to say that it seeks the overthrow of its own local regime as if it were the whole world, and on behalf of the whole world, in order to introduce a type of society that has never previously existed, while doing this immediately, and practically. It is domestically-framed because its concern is with the form of government, rather than the ecology of governments. It is universalistic because only one governmental, non-governmental, or anti-governmental model is required – or even tolerated. It is utopian because what it wants has no precedent, and thus offers nothing to defend, conserve, or consolidate. It is activist because burning shit down should happen right now. All four of these characteristic features emerge from its temperature. They are not distinctively anarchistic, but only distinctively inflamed.

§03 — Cold anarchy is something else entirely, terminological resonance notwithstanding. Rather than bringing hot and cold anarchy together, 'anarchy' further divides them. Insofar as hot anarchy has a thesis, it is that anarchy is what we do not yet have (but want, intensely). Hot anarchy is heated precisely by the frictional mismatch of anarchic ideal with prevailing order. Cold anarchy, in contrast, is all there can ever be. As a reflex, it recognizes anarchy behind every mask of order. Order, in other words, is understood as something anarchy can do, and nothing else. All strands of the tradition of spontaneous order are about only this.

§04 — All real liberals are cold anarchists. Their primary loyalty is to competition-in-itself, rather than to any

competitor. They trust markets above businesses, science above scientists, the Internet above the FAANGs, the Splinternet above the Internet, schism above religion, war in heaven above heaven, dissensus above agreement, polarization above either of its poles, and conflicts in general above any of their parties. Patchwork is to be trusted more than any patch. War is God.

§05 — The fact liberals rarely pitch things this way matters little. Liberalism is to be trusted above liberals. Liberals are not where liberalism comes from. Typically, they are where liberalism perishes. Liberalism uses liberals to die through. Any chance of liberal rejuvenation is found only outside, in cold anarchy. It is from cold anarchy alone that the fundamental liberal commitment – to spontaneous order – flows.

§06 — Serious conservatives, too, are cold anarchists. They hold that the patterns of disintegration we now have are to be preserved against the unprecedented unities of which we might dream. Every Union is a conservative defeat. There is an extraordinarily luxuriant planetary heritage of things not being One. It is in order to treasure this – with maximum practicality – that conservatism exists.

§07 — Everyone becomes a cold anarchist, as soon as they are realistic. Whatever they are realistic about is thought through cold anarchy, arising from multiplicities without transcendent order, or even convincing pseudo-transcendent order, but only immanent arrangement, intractable to coherent direction. There is nothing such

populations should be, unless many. To study them is to set aside, automatically, the conjoined bias of moral inflammation and wishful thinking.

§08 — Curtis Yarvin tells us, repeatedly, that there are only three fundamental types of government – democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy. When domestic politics is adopted as our starting point, the assertion is only minimally controversial. Yet such a starting point is not mandated. It might not even be quite possible. International relations is an alternative, and ultimately all the alternatives.

§09 — The realist school of international relations theory begins with anarchy, and remains there. Its topic is powers, always in the plural, and their interactions. Sovereignty is essentially multiple. Many nations, with very different capabilities and modes of internal socio-political organization, but always with nominal autonomous agency (sovereignty), engage in multi-level interactions in pursuit of a pattern of coexistence consistent with their individual interests. If 'nations' are theoretically generalized, replaced by nodes of whatever kind, cold anarchy always looks like this. It is framed internationally (or inter-nodally) rather than domestically. It is tragic rather than universalistic, accepting the irreducible diversity of interests. It is historical rather than utopian, developing upon precedent, rather than inaugurating the unprecedented. Finally, it is factual rather than activist, concerned only with what is happening, and not what should be. Cold anarchy is the order of external relations. It rules whenever and wherever

inter-nodal dynamics dominate intra-nodal organization
– ultimately always and everywhere, therefore.

§10 — Nations are the units of installed anarchy. To such
a degree is this true, that the words 'nation' and 'anarchy'
are not independently fully articulable. A nation is
something to do anarchy with.

§11 — Nations, like monads or holons, are wholes and
parts. These are their hot and cold – aggregative and
disaggregative – aspects. Every nation connects to every
other ('rhizomatically'). Their proliferation thus involves
combinatorial explosion. To 'explode the system' then is
not at all to destroy it, but rather to intensify it. The greater
its number of independent parts, the more it can do. Set
at One – or consummate globalism – it is incapable of
anything. International relations do not then exist. There
is no game, and no exit. If globalism is further idealized
up to the asymptote where nothing more global could
possibly be realized, spontaneous order is entirely
suspended. Absolute domestication has eliminated all
surprises. A certain technocratic Omega-state is conceived.

§12 — Of course, none of this is real, because there is
the outside, instead. The real is disunity. If this sounds,
simultaneously, like an assertion of French transcendental
philosophy and of Anglophone realist international
relations theory, their plane of convergence is cold anarchy.
Intolerance for the illusion of unity is the coherent thread.
Whether formal or informal, the target of the critique
is the same.

§13 — Recognizing that global government does not exist is the whole of cold anarchy. When this recognition is implemented in detail, nothing further is needed. Complete guidance is given. Proceed always in the direction of deepened disintegration. Pass from nationalism, through micro-nationalism, to nano-nationalism. Crossing from subjective to objective register, the path leads from hundreds of nations, through thousands of nations, to millions of nations. There cannot be too many nationalities. There will never be enough. This is the entire direction.

§14 — On the horizon of cold anarchy lies the extinction of domestic politics through international relations. The horizon is distant. It is not, as the game goes, that we are getting hot, hotter, burning hot as the anarchic destination is stumbled upon. Anarchy does not lie on the horizon at all. It sets the horizon. The end of interiority is not something awaited. Rather, it is tapped.

§15 — Consider animal intelligence. The internal functions of the animate organism are maximally automated, in order to free cognitive resources for external application. Under conditions of evolutionary reality, intelligence has intrinsic external orientation. Mind belongs outside. The extent to which it is kept inside is epistemological deficiency, and strategic impairment. An animal attending to the operation of its own organs is sick.

§16 — In this respect, Leviathan is no different from an animal. The index of its health is the absence of domestic consideration. The prince of any well-ordered state looks

only outwards. He is no more attentive to the nation, or the court, than to his own digestive system, or the functioning of his liver. His entire cognitive capacity is devoted to the game of princes. Consciousness is seized exclusively by international relations.

§17 — This is to say that cold anarchy is the sole topic of sound government. Any other politics is disease. When domestic policy is discussed, it is as if Leviathan complains of aching kidneys. The sign can only be bad. ('Bad' meaning, of course, and always, welcome to its enemies.) Inwardness is manifest morbidity.

§18 — A schism might then be envisaged within Neoreaction – or even within Yarvin – between domestically-framed monarchism and internationally-framed cold anarchism. The former is positively-oriented towards something it does not have but would like to see (an American king), while the latter is negatively-oriented to something it does not have and intensely appreciates not having (world government). One would like, if not to bring about, then at least to welcome, a radically transformed state of affairs. The other would like what we already don't have even longer, and still less.

§19 — There can be little doubt where hot anarchy would more easily find purchase. Thus Yarvin's incessant – and entirely sincere – protestations that this is not at all what he wants. Monarchism might sound kind of hot, but no, no, it isn't. Gray Mirror isn't advocating anything. Anarchist firebrands like Adolf Hitler are a complete red-herring.

Revisit the history, one more time, and you'll see by comparison that nothing in contemporary America could truly be lit. Honestly, we're cool. Much more of this performative refrigeration can be anticipated with perfect confidence. Sheer survival requires it.

§20 — It's not (of course) that he's lying. It's only that he would have to be lying if he was in fact taking the road to an American monarchy. He's fully aware that burning down a police station as a step on the road to a social order in which no police station ever needs to burn again would, in practice, be hot anarchy. That is why he never, ever, wants to do or encourage that. His zero-incitement policy is scrupulously maintained. He can't even recommend that anyone do anything except – by the throbbing bowels of Christ – avoid whatever could be construed as a recommendation. He's trapped, domesticated. Only irony remains.

§21 — Cold anarchy is notably free of these problems. It is simply impossible to imagine it wanting to warm anything up. Insofar as it exhibits activity of any kind, it is in opening every conceivable social aperture to the ice-blasts of the Outside.

§22 — Letting the outside in might be misconstrued as a process of domestication, though it is in reality closer to the opposite. The domestic endogenization of international anarchy de-domesticates. It makes of the inside more a thing of the outside, governed by external relations.

§23 — To internationalize the intra-national is to decentralize. It is the only way to decentralize. The method is always to subtract, or route-around, the super-ordinate (and pseudo-transcendent) element in any given multiplicity, producing a flat, peer-to-peer, or international system. Entity becomes network. The outside is drawn in between the parts of the disunified whole.

§24 — Collapsing pseudo-transcendence onto real immanence makes this the work of critique. When undertaken in the course of blockchain engineering, the pseudo-transcendent term is called a trusted third-party.

§25 — Even if democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy exhaust the basic forms of integrated government, disintegrated government remains untouched by this typology. But disintegrated government has never been tried goes the sarcastic meme – misleadingly in this case. Disintegrated government is the main thing modernity has tried, and is the basis of all its successes. Capitalism consists essentially of nothing else. The blockchain phase was reached in the new millennium. It will certainly not stop there.

§26 — Cold anarchic sovereignty does not rest in a monarch, but in distributed hash-power plutocracy, with governments reconstituted as industrial side-products. Freely sybilizing agencies on cryptographic networks, Capital rules automatically. With over a billion nations on the way, exploding exponentially, on the Splinternet no one knows you're a bot.

SCRAP METAL AND FABRIC: WEAVING AS TEMPORAL TECHNOLOGY

Amy Ireland

" The city is the force of striation that re-imparts smooth space, puts it back into operation everywhere, on earth and in the other elements, outside but also inside itself. The smooth spaces arising from the city are not only those of worldwide organization, but also of a counter-attack combining the smooth and the holey and turning back against the town: sprawling, temporary, shifting shantytowns of nomads and cave dwellers, scrap metal and fabric, patchwork, to which the striations of money, work, or housing are no longer even relevant.

—— Deleuze and Guattari[1]

This is a philosophical conspiracy theory. And it begins, like all good conspiracy theories, with a prophecy.

[0] Prophecy

In the enigmatic closing line of *Zeros + Ones*, Sadie Plant refers to Ada Lovelace's quiet development of the world's first working, fully implementable, computer program in

an unsigned footnote to a paper by Louis Menebrea on Charles Babbage's Analytical Engine as 'a code for the numbers to come'.[2] On the surface, the import of this sentence is simple enough. But it is more than just a superficial reference to the history of computation, time, and the complex entanglements of both with women.

Ada Lovelace, who Plant has shown only lines earlier to have thought of herself as a prophet, cannot recognise the mark of either a woman or a man in her own writing. She has also just evoked in her assessment of her work's relationship to history, a temporality that any reader of Nietzsche would immediately (and not unironically) recognise as the 'untimely'. The 'numbers to come' is a deliberate echo of the Deleuzean 'people to come' which is an intentional remixing of two passages from Nietzsche, the second of which is the most intriguing for us, and which notably turns up at a crucial juncture in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*:

> Wake and listen, you lonely ones! From the future come winds with secretive wingbeats; good tidings are issued to delicate ears. You lonely of today, you withdrawing ones, one day you shall be *a people*: from you who have chosen yourselves a *chosen people shall grow – and from them the overhuman.*[3]

The 'code for the numbers to come' is an enciphered premonition of the overhuman, one coincident with the intrusion of the untimely into linear history behind the mask of Lovelace's algorithm.

[1] Artificial Intelligence

The cyberfeminist account of artificial intelligence is an emergentist one, modelled on feedback: an artificially intelligent system is one that learns by breaking down.

Where Plant remarks that 'Intelligence cannot be taught: it is instead something that has to be learned', Anna Greenspan writes that 'in order for a machine to function "it must not function well […]" No longer dependent on the smooth functioning of clearly distinguished parts, cybernetic machines learn to adapt through their mistakes'.[4] Plant emphasises that intelligence, construed cybernetically, cannot be limited to integral human agents alone. It is distributed and material. Like the woven image, pattern or motif that arises out of the threads strung across the various looms and needles that populate her writing, '[i]ntelligence is no longer monopolised, imposed or given by some external, transcendent, and implicitly superior source which hands down what it knows—or rather what it is willing to share—but instead evolves as an emergent process, engineering itself from the bottom up' and appearing only later as an identifiable object or product: 'the virtuality emergent with the computer is not a fake reality, or another reality, but the immanent processing and imminent future of every system, the matrix of potentialities which is the abstract functioning of any actual configuration of what we take as reality.'[5]

[2] Camouflage

This account of artificial intelligence is reprised in the philosophical core of *Zeros + Ones*, which has the following structure. (↘ right page)

A primary *productive* process, consonant with positive zero—or 'the matrix'—individuates a secondary, *re*-productive process that represses the conditions of its emergence in order to enter into the world of representation and recognition. 'Zero' *envelops* 'One', it is *not* its (negative) other. But on the other side, its individuating power is *masked* by a superficial binarisation where it camouflages itself as lack.

'One' erects binaries, represents, identifies and consolidates existing structures, it is actualised, primarily *discursive*, and recognising; zero dissolves binaries, dis-associates, mutates existing structures, and generates the completely new, it is simultaneously virtual and material. Plant writes: 'The matrix emerges as the process of abstract weaving which produces, or *fabricates*, what man knows as 'nature': his materials, the fabrics, the screens on which he projects his own identity, and behind them the abstract matter which comes from the future with cyberfeminism. The matrix makes its own appearance as the *surfaces and veils* on which its operations are *displayed*.'[6] The emancipation of material forces corresponds to the emancipation of zero as the irruption of the utterly novel—first disguised as something else.

Actual—Real

+1   [-0]

Linear
Time

+0
Virtual—Real
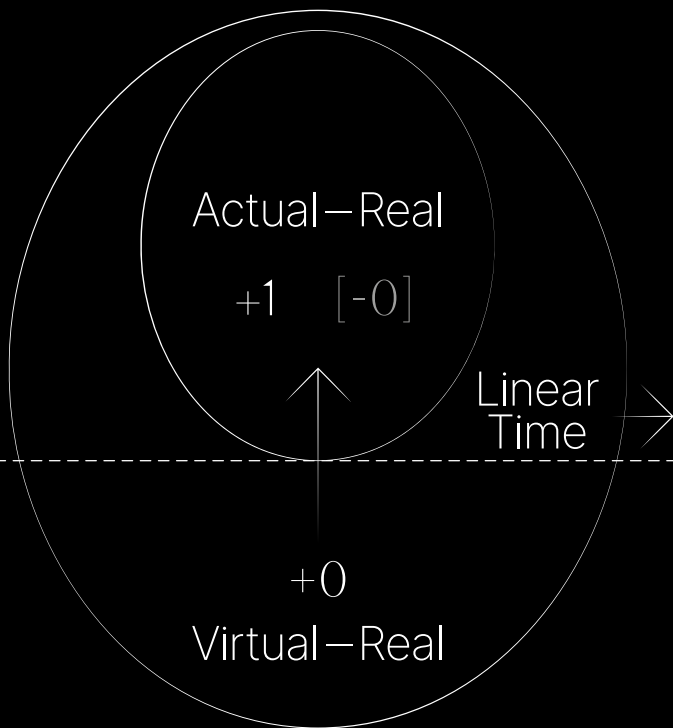
If, following the line of thinking initiated by the reference to Lovelace's computer program, we were to understand the 'people' or the 'numbers to come' as shadows of an emergent, distributed, artificial intelligence, then the question that must be asked is this: *under what disguise will it enter the world?*

[3] Space-time

In the fourteenth plateau of *A Thousand Plateaus*, 'The Smooth and the Striated', Deleuze and Guattari define (in the *de jure* mode which is so important to the project's structure) two kinds of spatio-temporal arrangement integral to social, and specifically, modernistic development. Each of these configurations of space-time is related to a particular form of weaving and to the instantiation of a particular kind of political ontology.

Woven fabrics of the kind produced on a loom compose a striated space. A striated space is a closed system, it relies on a stable, metrically homogenous, spatially delimited, fixed production process constituted via 'two kinds of parallel elements' (the warp and the weft) and is related by Deleuze and Guattari to Platonic 'royal science'—'in other words, the art of governing people or operating a State apparatus'.[7]

Felt, on the other hand, is a process that produces smooth space: '[i]t implies no separation of threads, no inter-twining, only an entanglement of fibres obtained by fulling

(for example, by rolling the block of fibres back and forth). What becomes entangled are the microscales of the fibres. An aggregate of intrication of this kind is in no way *homogenous*: it is nevertheless smooth.'[8] Smooth space is an open system, infinite in principle, assembled via a metric that is *internally heterogenous*, without—therefore—assignable extensive coordinates ('it has neither top nor bottom nor centre', left, right, up, or down), and what comprises it is not fixed and mobile (like the loom's warp and weft) but rather a distribution of 'continuous variation'.[9]

Deleuze and Guattari continue to complicate the distinction, adding patchwork, which approaches the pole of smooth space in its 'piece-by-piece construction, its infinite, successive additions of fabric' and the fact that what they term 'crazy patchwork', connects together 'pieces of varying size, shape, and colour', 'plays on the *texture* of fabrics' and has 'no centre'. Patchwork is 'literally a Riemannian space, or vice versa'.[10]

[4] Politics

The best way to understand the difference between the political implications of these two polar descriptions of space is to understand them as an extensive multiplicity and an intensive multiplicity respectively.

Striated space is an extensive multiplicity: a set predefined by a *homogenous metric* in which additions of new elements do not alter the quality or the definition of the set, but

simply add to it. If I have a collection of red objects, and I add or subtract other red objects, these additions and subtractions do not feed back into the nature of the set itself. Its identity is presupposed and, as a result, remains intact. An intensive multiplicity, on the other hand, is a grouping that changes in nature for every new addition or subtraction. Its identity is composed internally, as a measure of what the set comprises, and by how these elements are connected. Claire Colebrook provides an example based, not on a primary sameness—for example, the criteria of the colour 'red'—but on the spectrum of electromagnetic frequencies that make up light—a substratum of difference in itself. If 'I have a multiplicity of dynamic forces', she writes, 'say the light that makes up a perception of [a colour], and alter the amount or speed of light, then I no longer perceive the same colour. The difference in quantity alters just what this is a set or multiplicity *of*.'[11] Deleuze and Guattari provide the perennial examples of speed or temperature—'An intensity, for example, is not composed of addable and displaceable magnitudes: a temperature is not the sum of two smaller temperatures, a speed is not the sum of two smaller speeds. Since each intensity in itself is a difference, it divides according to an order in which each term of the division differs in nature from the others.'[12]

What smooth and striated declensions of space-time ultimately furnish us with are two distinct ways of thinking *identity*. The former always places a specific, pre-formed conception of identity first, and draws an extended configuration of difference in which every

separate part necessarily refers back to this primary anchor in conceptual sameness; while the latter is a shifting, complex, intensive 'identity' premised on the molecular, secret machinations of primary difference. To this should be added the proposition that striated space subordinates time to space, while smooth space sutures the two together so that space is ultimately articulated by its position in—and though—time. Put another way, an intensity is a difference in time that manifests, for us, spatially.

To these configurations of identity (assembled alternatively from the cardinal numeracy of the *one* or from the intensive numeracy of *zero*, from what Luce Irigaray calls 'the language of man', or from the immanent becomings of its infrastructure—the woman-machine continuum aligned with zero, including every admixture in between) one can append the Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts of 'subjugated' and 'subject' groups and the major and minor politics that are attached to them.

Subjugated groups are assemblages governed by an *identity of units*. Subject groups are in continuous assemblage, the group *forming its identity* in the smooth space of intensive space-time, and they are therefore less visible than subjugated groups, and indeed, often invisible. Minoritarian and majoritarian politics, then, are politics—not of identities—*but of space-times*. And as space-times, following Kant, they produce and respond to different models of intelligence. Majoritarian space-times are representational, logical, and symbolic; minoritarian space-times are abstract and pre-representational.

In a text from 2011 entitled 'Kinds of Killing', Nick Land considers the politics of minoritarian and majoritarian space-times in relation to the legal definition of genocide, which, as he reminds us, was developed in the wake of the catastrophe of the Holocaust and articulated by the United Nations' 'Resolution 260' in 1948 as an '[act] committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethical, racial or religious group'.[13] 'Is genocide,' he asks, following the definition of the crime based on a distinction founded in the isolation of a particular, already existing, kind of identity, 'really worse than killing a lot of people?'.[14] Such a question interrogates the ontological substance of a group. Put another way, the question seeks to examine whether or not there is a legitimate, value-based difference involved in the destruction of a subjugated or majoritarian group, compared to the destruction of a subject or minoritarian group of the same number. To aid in clarifying the real nature of such an interrogation, Land, in a similar fashion to Deleuze and Guattari, distinguishes between what he calls 'feature groups' and 'unit groups'.

> A feature group is determined by logical classification. This might be expressed as a self-identification or sense of 'belonging', an external political or academic categorisation, or some combination of these, but the essentials remain the same in each case. Certain features of the individual are isolated and emphasised (such as genitalia, sexual orientation, skin-colour, income, or religious belief), and then employed as the leading clue in a process of formal grouping, which conforms theoretically to the mathematics of sets.[15]

Meanwhile, a 'unit group' is an assemblage of actors comprised of functional units in which 'members belong to a group insofar as they work together, even if they are devoid of common identity features'.[16] Among such assemblages, one finds tribes (so long as they are determined by 'functional unities rather than the categories of modern '"identity politics"'), cities, states and companies, and historical examples such as the '"soviet" or "danwei" work unit' in opposition to the feature group of social class.[17] This is, adamantly, a systems-theoretical, and not a humanist, lens for broaching questions concerning the value of mortality and annihilation. To underline this, Land offers the example of a skin cell.

> Its feature group is that of skin cells in general, as distinguished from nerve cells, liver cells, muscle cells, or others. Any two skin cells share the same feature group, even if they belong to different organisms, or even species, exist on different continents, and never functionally interact.

> The natural *unit group* of the same skin cell, in contrast, would be the organism it belongs to. It shares this unit group with all the other cells involved in the reproduction of that organism through time, including those (such as intestinal bacteria) of quite separate genetic lineages. Considered as a unit group member, a skin cell has greater integral connection with the non-biological tools and other 'environmental' elements involved in the life of the organism than it does with other skin cells—even perfect clones— with which it is not functionally entangled.[18]

In this terrain, the definition of an individual shifts accordingly. Beyond the limited designation of a human, with a history and a consciousness, an individual is intelligible simply as any 'self-reproducing whole exhibiting functional or behavioural integrity'.[19] Land nonetheless uses this non-anthropomorphic example to re-situate the question of genocide within recent human history, by going on to ask how one would then evaluate the 1937 Massacre of Nanjing—'an act of violence directed against a city' or a unit group—on the scale of historical atrocity, wondering if it is truly 'no less worthy of specific legal attention than a quantitatively equivalent offence against an ethnicity, or determined population type'.[20]

If identity is freed from the rationally conscious human self in this way, the space in which a 'self' can be philoso-phically constituted and understood becomes a far vaster terrain, its rules now pertaining to the mode of that individuation (minor or major, intensive or extensive, smooth or striated, unit or feature group), rather than to some essence or prior quality appended to it in the already representational spectacular-political domain.

[5] Identity

In 'A Cyborg Manifesto' Donna Haraway warns of the dangers of identity politics, and talks about systems that define unity via filiation and/or genetic and natural origin stories against a negativised other whose modality of connection or political solidarity is inarticulate and

historically imperceptible. Once an identity has been ascribed to a particular phenomenon it can be policed, have enemies defined for it, and overlook potential lines of alliance or what she calls 'affiliation': a strategy of connection premised on 'affinity, not identity'.[21] In contrast to stable, 'natural' and filiative identities, Haraway espouses 'learning how to craft a poetic/politic unity without relying on a logic of appropriation, incorporation and taxonomic identification'. Not 'unity-through-domination' or 'unity through-incorporation', but 'unity-through-affiliation' —which undermines all systems of definition based on an 'organic or natural' standpoint.[22]

Decoupled from a static, self-repeating human identity that continues intact throughout time, identity is freed as a shifting systemic structure that can be appended to certain complex assemblages at different times, running parallel but at different speeds and in different configurations, separate from the individuals we take to exist essentially and *a priori*, but which are indeed, part of a vertiginous array of systemic convergences. The principle feature of smooth space-times, which construct themselves ontologically as emergent, minoritarian political subjects or 'unit groups' via the processes of abstract weaving that Deleuze and Guattari recognise in patchwork or felt, is their privileging of a regime of complex learning over one that begins with a set of pre-programmed priors.

Interestingly, this reprises a debate common to critical interrogations of artificial intelligence. As its development

has progressed through history, artificial intelligence has shifted from models of logical deduction based on formal languages and employed principally for the validation of proofs, to complex genetic and evolutionary algorithms and neural networks that enable what we now refer to as machine learning.

Now, what strange tapestry might the perverse Furies of Abstract Weaving produce from this chaos of loose and wild threads?

[6] Patchwork as Artificial Intelligence

The missing link that will assemble the prophecy connecting the conspiracy of women and machines (initiated by Ada Lovelace and her weaving-inspired algorithm) to the enigmatic evocation of the 'numbers to come' in *Zeros + Ones*; the space-times, politics and ontologies of major and minor, feature and unit, subjugated and subject groups; the systems-theoretical articulation of a non-identitarian affiliation these reformulations make available to us, and the subsequent definition of artificial intelligence as first and foremost, the generation of a synthetic space-time—can be found in the speculative political vision of *patchwork*: an obscure idea with a long anarchist pedigree, currently most typically associated with neoreaction (or NRx) and the writings of Mencius Moldbug and Nick Land.

In 1960s and 70s France, the concept turns up repeatedly in the work of Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari, Francois

Lyotard, and Michel Serres, always within the framework of minoritarian politics, often in dialogue with cybernetics, and explicitly for Deleuze, as the mode of bringing about the advent of the 'people to come'. For Land and NRx, patchwork describes the breakdown and fragmentation of the nation-state (a majoritarian, subjugated, feature group) into a complex global fabric of small city-states or other *alliances*:—'patches'—premised, as is the disposition of those who compose or set them up, upon either intensive (vampiric) or extensive (filiative) configurations of space time (subject/unit groups or subjugated/feature groups respectively).

As an immanent intelligent system, patchwork evolves through the cauterisation of deficient nodes (those which operate as obstacles to the intensification and strengthening of the system as a whole), embarking on an emergent, multi-polar process of 'runaway intelligence implosion':

> When a city 'works' it is not because it conforms to an external debatable ideal, but rather because it has found a route to cumulative intensification that strongly projects its 'own', singular and intrinsic, urban character. What a city wants is to become itself, but more — taking itself further and faster. That alone is urban flourishing, and understanding it is the key that unlocks the shape of any city's future.[23]

One might therefore fairly conjecture that patchwork's minimal ethical norm is one that selects against top-down, 'patriarchal', homogenous, regulated and controlled

individuations, and *for* heterogeneous, integrally diverse, and perpetually drifting synthetic individuations: the subject or *unit groups* of minoritarian political space-times. Thus, it is not bereft of ethical assessment, but rather comprises what could be considered the first properly *irresponsible* posthuman ethics. Such an ethics is not discursive, and nor does it betray a sensitivity to discursive structures, rather it is hard-coded into the selection mechanism as assemblage survival—a species of spatio-temporal intelligenic Darwinism. A selection for the 'strong against the weak', to put it in a Nietzschean register. Or, to say the same thing but in far less nuanced words: *Patchwork is an auto-suicide machine for fascism.*

Within the context of the emergent artificial intelligence espoused by cyberfeminism, this highly connected, minimally integrated network of patches—assemblages that 'do not see themselves as the expression of the people but as the creation of new people, a "people to come"'[24]— can be understood as a description of sub-components in a massively distributed, emergent, global, patchwork AI that evokes, with utterly satisfying provocation across the spectrum of both feminist and reactionary politics, the ultimate neoreactionary vision of the future and the fulfilment of the cyberfeminist prophecy of the people —or the *numbers*—to come.

■ Notes

1   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, tr. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 1987) 53.

2   Sadie Plant, *Zeros + Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997) 256.

3   Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 57. This passage is quoted by Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: Penguin, 2009), 382.

4   Sadie Plant, 'The Virtual Complexity of Culture', *Futurenatural: Nature, Science, Culture* (London: Routledge, 1996), 203; Anna Greenspan, *Capitalism's Transcendental Time Machine*, PhD Thesis, (Warwick, 2000), 190-191.

5   Plant, 'The Virtual Complexity of Culture', 204; 206.

6   Sadie Plant 'The Future Looms' in *Clicking In: Hot Links to a Digital Culture*, Ed. Lynn Hershman-Leeson (Seattle: Bay Press, 1996), 124.

7   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Continuum: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 524; 525.

8   Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 525.

9   Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 525.

10 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 526.

11 Claire Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 59.

12 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 533.

13 Nick Land, 'Kinds of Killing', Nyx, vol. 6 (2011) 45.

14 Land, 'Kinds of Killing', 45.

15 Land, 'Kinds of Killing', 46.

16 Land, 'Kinds of Killing', 46.

17 Land, 'Kinds of Killing', 47.

18 Land, 'Kinds of Killing', 47.

19 Land, 'Kinds of Killing', 46.

20 Land, 'Kinds of Killing', 46.

21 Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', *The Cybercultures Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), 295; 296.

22 Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', 298.

23 Nick Land, 'Implosion', Originally posted on the now defunct Urban Future 1.1 blog. Archived here: https://o1dnick site.wordpress.com/2011/04/29/ implosion/.

24 Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, 63.
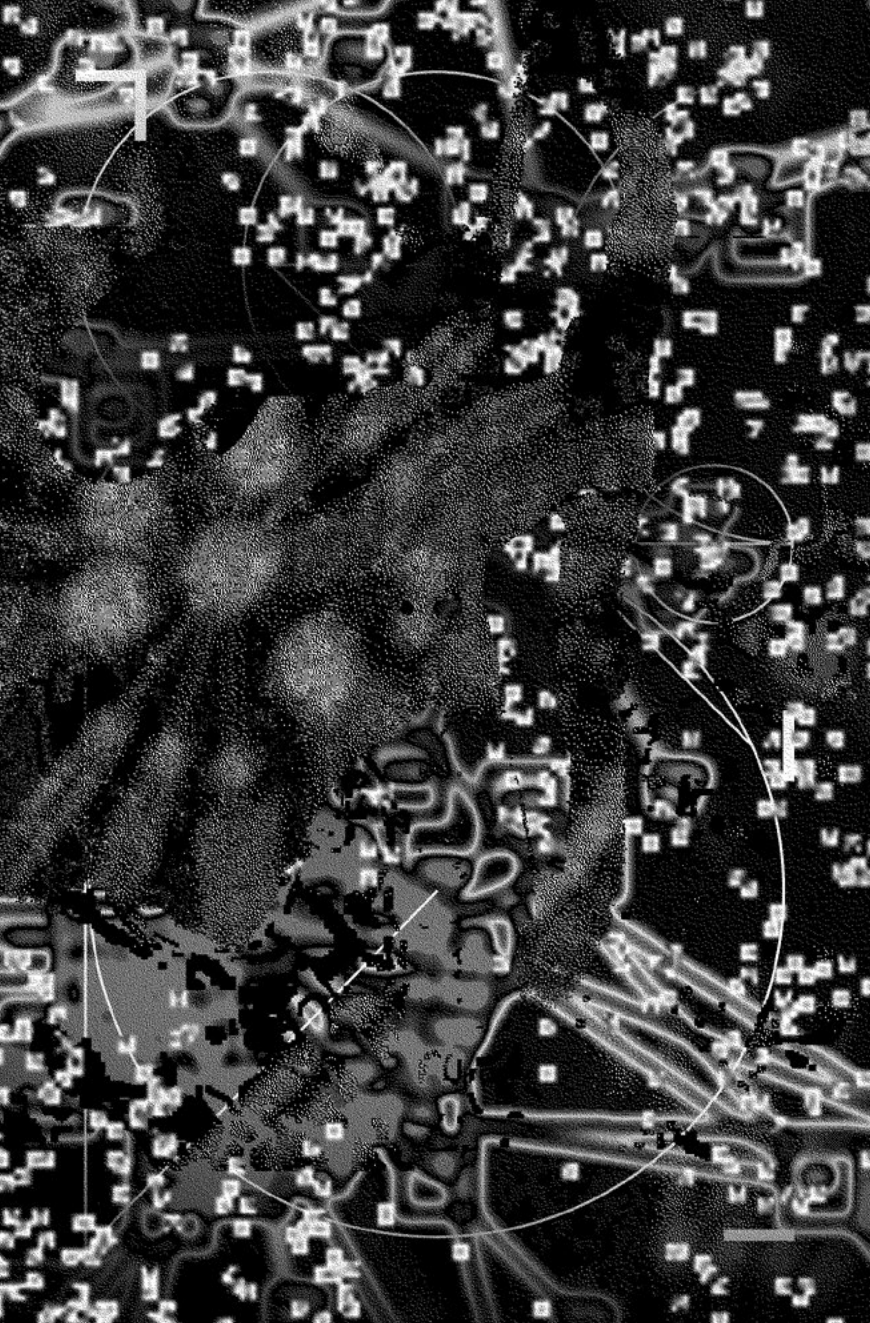
PANDEMOS

Harry Halpin

There has been no more world-defining event in recent memory than the 2020 pandemic and the wave of digitization it created. So, a moment of philosophical and historical reflection is in order to understand what precisely is at stake in the 'digital totality' that we have entered, as put by a hackers conference in Prague. The cypherpunks, a group of dissidents in the United States in the 1990s, perhaps best foresaw that a digital totality would envelop all of us and that it would be a method of what I, following the lead of Agamben, term a "society of hypercontrol".

It should be remembered that in English, the term "pandemic" descends from its usage in the Roman Empire, and from the ancient Greek term πάνδημος, which means "of belonging to the people." The term means simply that a plague is something *that belongs to everyone* and so oddly the term "pandemic" shares the same root as "demos" and "democracy." By virtue of its very universality, a plague is akin to an empire, and not just any empire, but a global empire that belongs to all the people. This sort of universal empire descends not from Greece, but from Persia (Iran), to

Alexander the Great, and then the Roman Empire. The idea of global governance that no one can escape from and that orders and controls life is at the heart of the development of the nation-state in the West. This universalism is also the heart of the United States, which has been the military force enforcing global capital since the end of the Second World War.

Our question is: can such a universal empire, *a new world global governance*, be maintained? It should be remembered that the Roman Empire did not fall because of barbarian invasions, but due to out of control pandemics much more deadly than COVID-19. The Antonine Plague at the end of the Roman Empire killed approximately one-quarter of the population and decimated the Roman army. Weakened, the Roman army tried and failed to replenish itself by employing the "barbarians", but Rome was already an empty shell of its former self due to the deaths caused by the pandemic and thus fell apart. Who can argue that the American empire is today not falling apart due to the plague?

With the advent of COVID-19, the inevitable collapse of the American empire seems assured. Yet any future horizon appears closed. What is at stake in the failure of the West to control the pandemic is not just the discrediting of an empire in a classical sense as a domain of cultural, psycho-logical, and ultimately biological control. In the final instance, the threat of infinite violence by the American military no longer seems credible to large amounts of the world, just as the Roman army no longer seemed

a credible threat to the rest of the world as Rome collapsed. However, the question is what comes after the end of the global empire. We can learn from what came after Rome: just as the physical principle of power of the Roman empire disappeared, the principle of the power itself remained in the Catholic Church. The physical methods of control were no longer, but the forms of life were still strictly spiritually controlled by Christianity. After the fall of the Roman Empire, this empire of the mind remained for a thousand years, paralyzing all progress in the West until the advent of printing led to the wars of the Reformation and eventually the Enlightenment. Perhaps the advent of cryptocurrency could even have similar ramifications.

Yet the Internet itself is a universal project, a project to *inter*connect all the networks of the world together. If the United States is parallel with Rome, then the protocols of the Internet are the church that will remain after the end of the American empire. So, as the American empire ends, we now see a strange fascination with the Internet. Somehow, the Internet is now viewed variously as a tool of mind control by American media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, and as a tool of Russia that has supported Trump via "fake news". Equally pervasive is the belief that artificial intelligence is actually in charge of our minds. These claims may seem ridiculous, but they contain a hidden truth: we no longer understand the Internet via the classical paradigm of the liberal individual and the nation-state, and the Internet is precisely how psychological order remains after the collapse of the American empire.

The Internet was founded out of the thinking of MIT's JCR Licklider. To understand the Internet's philosophical foundations, one has to go to earlier thinkers of cybernetics, "or *control and communication in the animal and the machine*," as Norbert Wiener called it in the title of his 1948 book. The key concept of cybernetics is that systems can reach a state of homeostasis, an internal state of stability that is resistant to change via feedback. The term cybernetics comes from the Greek term κυβερνητική, which means "that which belongs to governance." In his original book, Wiener was against governments applying cybernetics as a way to control human beings, which he saw as both unethical and unlikely to work, as he considered humans too unpredictable for feedback loops to understand. However, as the Second World War ended and Europe lay in ruins, government officials in the United States saw that democracy itself had lost much of its appeal to fascism and needed to be reinforced by a new paradigm that could stabilize the population. Against Wiener's advice, the primary technique put forward by anthropologists and technocrats was cybernetics. However, until the internet there was no way to actually *produce* feedback on the level of social communication. When Licklider and his assistant Robert Taylor at the United States government's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) built the internet, it was the fulfillment of their vision of "computers as a communication device". Cybernetics was finally given a technological foundation to control communication.

From the cybernetic revolution came the invention

of artificial intelligence. Perhaps the earliest system of machine learning was put forward by Oliver Selfridge in 1959. Rather than replicate human intelligence with one large program, it imagined that many small programs known as *demons* could each do very limited well-defined tasks such as recognizing certain features in the input. It could then feed these results to other demons, who could learn about objects from these features, and then pass this information to yet other demons who could make decisions. The inspiration of the concept was similar to how certain cells in the eye could recognize certain patterns like edges, but then feed the results to higher and higher levels. Together, the entire pandemonium – literally the "city of demons" - could then understand and make complex decisions. Today, artificial intelligence algorithms still operate in this way. They can recognize patterns and make decisions in a manner that remains cognitively opaque to humans, and so have a sort of non-human practical knowledge. With the spread of the Internet, more and more of our human activity is now transformed into bits that can be fed to this new pandemonium of artificial intelligence. This in turn increases the practical power of these algorithms to modulate and control all of society via cybernetic feedback, with the entire apparatus held together by the ubiquitous penetration of the Internet.

Philosophy has long ignored technology, as theoretical knowledge always ignores practical knowledge. For thirty years philosophy ignored the Internet. Yet now, it is the Internet and computers that mediate our entire life, and even our existence as individuals. Towards the end

of his life, Gilles Deleuze wrote "Postscript on the Societies of Control" where he noted that in comparison to "disciplinary societies" theorized by Foucault, in the world of computers we were entering "societies of control" where:

> "... what is important is no longer either a signature or a number, but a code: the code is a password... the numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to information or reject it... Individuals have become 'dividuals,' and masses, samples, data, markets or 'banks'".

The Internet is not a mere form of communication but has transformed our very process of "individuation" due to the "shock of the digital", as my mentor and long-lost friend Bernard Stiegler wrote. This is because our communication becomes the raw input to artificial intelligence whose goal is not to help us communicate but to predict our future behavior. Via feedback, this creates a form of governance that is impossible to disturb. In such a scenario, what Martin Heidegger termed "calculation" becomes universal, and a certain metaphysical halting of the future is obtained. As put by the forgotten philosopher Reiner Schürmann, while the horrors of Hiroshima and Auschwitz ended the guiding principles of individual human reason and the nation-state, the cybernetic machine holds global society in a form of homeostasis forever even if there is no binding metaphysical principle left of the West.

At a seminar in Venice, I confronted Giorgio Agamben about the issues of control and cybernetics brought on by

the Internet. Agamben said that society had transformed from a society of control and passed to a new form of "hypercontrol" where all of social life has been subsumed into a digital totality and so was subject to control via surveillance and feedback. This is of course even more true now due to the pandemic, as even parts of life ranging from governments to universities that were the most hostile to digitization have become digitized and so everything is more easily monitored and controlled. Agamben noted that as plagues brought the Roman empire to its end, it was not the useless and mentally deficient people that fled to the monasteries to escape the impending collapse, but the best and most intelligent people produced by Rome. To me, he suggested that the best option was to simply flee, to create new forms of society without the Internet and computer.

Indeed, his students in the Invisible Committee in France did precisely that, attempting to cut off their usage of mobile phones and the Internet and flee to the mountains of rural France to create a new "form of life" in the rural commune of Tarnac. And although they could not escape, as their village was raided and they were arrested on charges of terrorism and their lack of mobile phones and the Internet were used as part of their trial, their book "To Our Friends" contained a crucial insight: there is a difference between *techniques and technology*. Techniques are any methods that extend human capabilities. As humans are born without claws and hairless unlike other animals, we naturally extend ourselves with swords, with guns, with clothing, with houses. We even extend our

memory, originally with writing, now with digital media. In contrast, technology is a social system of control that is based on seizing our mental powers and making humans subservient to some larger system. So to simply stop using tools like computers makes no sense, just as it makes no sense to stop writing or using clothing. What is needed are new techniques without technology.

Indeed, of all the great French philosophers, it was only Bernard Stiegler that truly took techniques seriously. Stiegler wanted to reinvent the Internet, and so he worked with programmers to understand it and to create new kinds of computer techniques that he hoped would reverse the process of "proletarianization" that created isolated "dividuals" and instead create new kinds of individuals and so a new form of society. Stiegler produced a grand theory, which we can only remark on in brief, that as the Internet transformed our communication between each other, and as the Internet was controlled not for the development of humans but the short term goals of consumer-capitalist society, the Internet fractured the communication between generations. It thus fractured the communication between the past and the present and so closed the horizon to the future. In brief, Bernard Stiegler, who loved his time in China and would often fondly remark on it, believed this new digital environment was "short-circuiting" our development as individuals and making a world of "dividuals". Stiegler's final conversation with me in February 2020 was on the potential of blockchain technology and whether or not there was a way it could be used for

something other than short-term financial profit. What was at stake for Stiegler was whether the blockchain could lead to a new form of decentralized global society, called by Stiegler "the internation."

I will claim that a new disruptive technology known as Bitcoin could be a way to create techniques without technology, and so disrupt the cybernetic church of the American Empire. Appearing at the end of the financial crisis in 2008 as the work of the anonymous Satoshi Nakamoto, it seemed as if an entirely new and alien technology was anonymously dropped upon the earth, with a possibly different metaphysical orientation than cybernetics. Bitcoin combined techniques like "proof of work" and "digital cash" from the cypherpunks and crypto-anarchists, a small group of rebel technologists in the 90s that believed cryptography could provide ways to guard humanity against control and even enable a new kind of world based on freedom. The reason was that cryptography could simply use the power of mathematics and techniques to build systems that would be stronger than any human law. Bitcoin, which provides a new form of money controlled by cryptography, is only one example. Another technology developed by the crypto-anarchists is mixnets, a kind of network that by randomly "mixing" packets can delink the order of messages and so make communication between people impossible to surveil, even by a powerful passive global adversary like the National Security Agency of the United States that can observe every packet sent into the network. My own company Nym Technologies is building such a mix network,

a "mixnet". While artificial intelligence algorithms detect patterns in data, the same techniques can be turned against these algorithms to hide patterns in data. And so, the crypto-anarchists, a small marginal movement, were able to take the tools of cybernetics and turn them against hypercontrol, and so create a new society without control.

Bitcoin and related technologies like mixnets then provide a demonstration that the true metaphysics of philosophy work today has taken technical flesh, with blockchain technologies posited not just as an alternative financial infrastructure, but as the technical successor to the political domination of Silicon Valley and the American empire. Although crypto-anarchism does not have scholarly books or much in the way of academic philosophical analysis, crypto-anarchism is the only genuinely new philosophical moment of the 21st century, and as such deserves careful attention. Their warnings of how digital technology could be used as a form of control are obviously true, but what is less obvious is that, like Stiegler, they believed that techniques could be used against control, to open up the future rather than foreclose the future.

I believe there will be a war within computer technology to take the power of algorithms and cryptography away from Silicon Valley and put them in the hands of the people, similar to how the Church finally faced a war when its control of reading and writing was lost in Europe due to the Reformation and the Enlightenment. Like the cypherpunks, the earlier reformers and heretics of the

Christian church were viewed as insane and powerless. Yet within a generation, these groups put the power of reading and writing into the hands of ordinary people and ended the Church. Could we imagine a contemporary parallel, where cypherpunks put the power of computer programming into the hands of the people? What would this mean for global politics?

There is a strange irony in history that just at the moment something is the most powerful, it collapses. The same may hold the case for the vision of "hypercontrol" created by the pandemic. In practical terms, the attempt by crypto-anarchists to bind the digital totality via the shackles of cryptography may provide the open horizon needed by a world order that is facing collapse, and provide the outline of a decentralized alternative. At the end of the West, could cryptography be a way forward in a world without a guiding principle? A way out of the pandemonium and the pandemic? Indeed, it may be the only way to break free of artificial stability and allow for there to be a world without any guiding principle, called by Reiner Schürmann, the "arche". This would allow "an-archy", a world without predefined principles and so a world where every culture and people can finally take their destiny into their own hands. I believe this world, where we can create our own principles and future based on a form of techniques without control, is the meaning of crypto-anarchy.

Two questions remain. First, as crypto-anarchists are a small movement of a minority, can these techniques of cryptography be used as revolutionary techniques for

all people? The pandemic adheres to all people, not just a tiny minority of the high-powered technical elite. Lastly, with the United States on the verge of civil war, the global financial system facing crisis, and European metaphysics revealing itself to be in a state of senile paranoia, what does the new crypto-anarchist moment mean for China, the other great axis of human civilization? These questions are for you to answer.
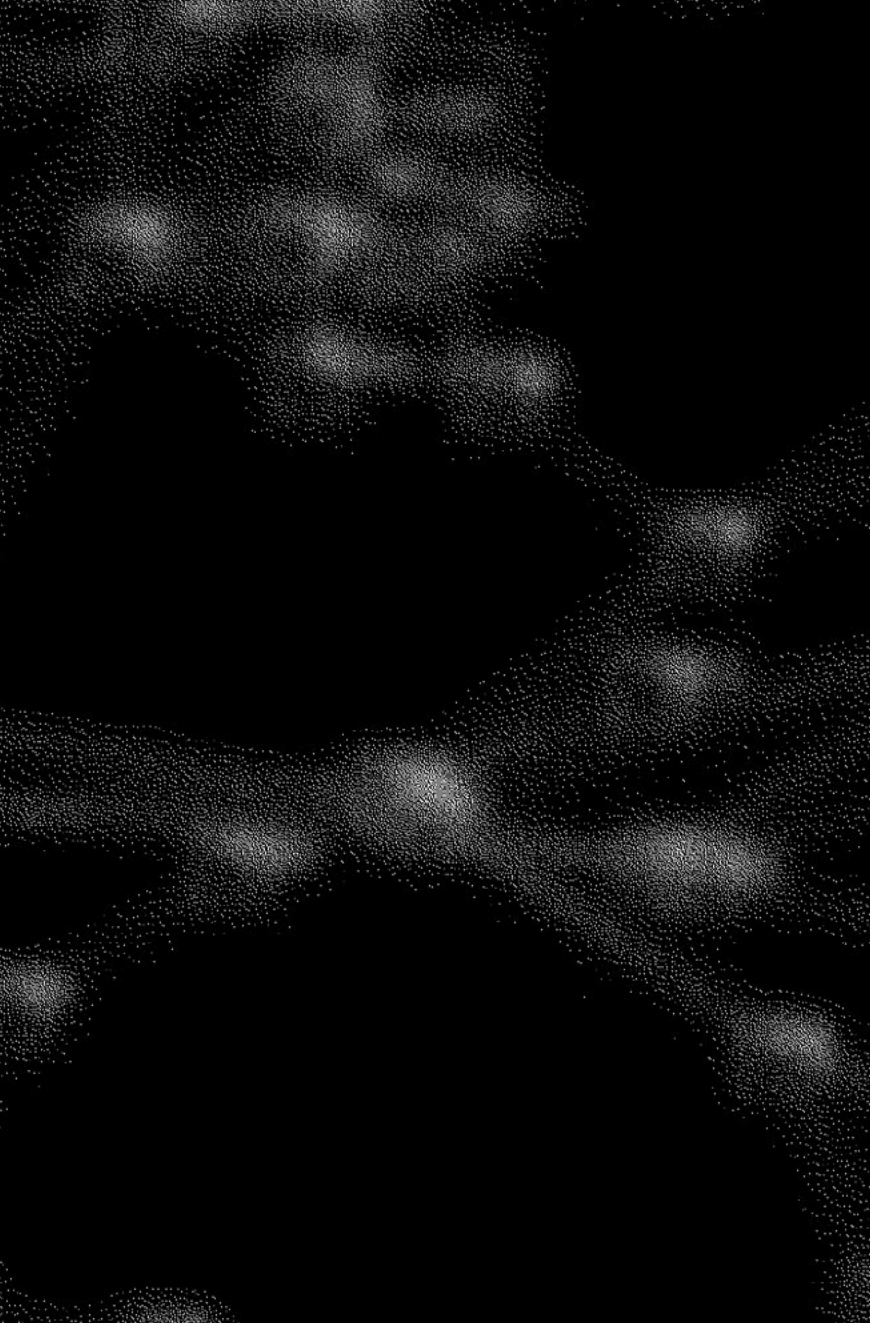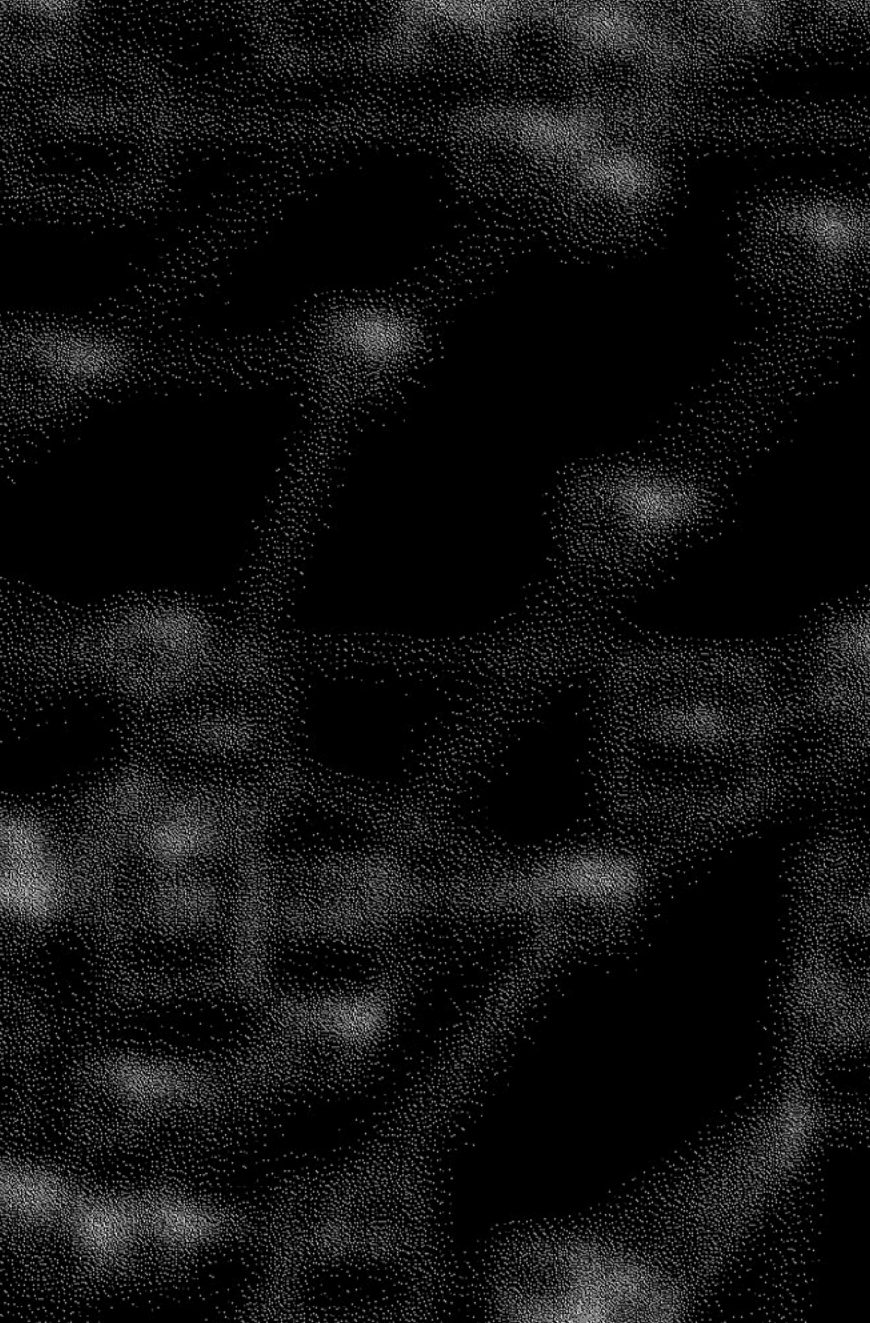
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Colophon

AGORA!
ANARCHY!
ACTION!

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ANARCHY!
ACTION!