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📌 Volume 11 Issue 1 – 2017

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# Precarity, globalism and resistance in emergent collectivism: The case of Enspiral

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## Abstract

Growing isolation and labour precarity in media work has generated novel forms of organised networks. This article presents the example of the 'Enspiral Network', established in 2010 in Wellington, New Zealand, as a harbinger of future responses to precarity. Participants in the network draw on a blend of digital literacies to function sustainably within, whilst working to resist and update current organisational paradigms. They have created relatively fluid, hybridised structures and practices to move beyond the rigid hierarchical interaction that characterises corporate organisations. An example is cloud-based software that permits carefully governed and recorded decentralised decision-making by a spatiotemporally distributed group. Participants also write reflexive commentary and host and participate in public fora via a range of physical and digital platforms, reformulating activism as an interventionist narrative that promotes the global whilst valorising and nurturing the local via both *everyday* and *public* forms of resistance. Lovink and Rossiter's concept of the 'orgnet' (Lovink, 2007; Rossiter, 2006b; Lovink & Rossiter, 2011) is adapted as a means by which to locate these characteristics as part of a larger picture of interacting networks, arguing that the relative stability of the Enspiral Network is generated by social-technical systems that facilitate a novel mix of entrepreneurial market pragmatism and ethically framed social enterprise.

## Introduction

Organised networks of media workers have emerged in association with the rise of co-working over the past decade as a response to growing labour precarity. The 'Enspiral Network' is an organised network based in Wellington, New Zealand. The Enspiral Network is a model for and harbinger of a novel type of media work based, self-sustaining organised network that employs decentralised means of participatory governance permitted by a combination of literacies and digital communication technologies such as cloud based, communal decision making software. It has achieved a sustainable hybrid organisational model via the combined strategies of participatory governance, and public engagement. This engagement is associated of ongoing practices that foster the development of open-source software and engage in social entrepreneurship. Network participants are enabled by the immersive ecology of the 'mediapolis' (Silverstone, 2007) they

inhabit, wherein the affordances of a range of communication technologies are manipulated using media literacies that empower participants to practice both everyday and public forms of collective resistance. This resistance to the isolation and volatility created by their precarious circumstances is realised via a mix of organisational structures and practices, technology creation and strategic media and communication materials. These materials present oppositional narratives that are framed in terms of deviation from the structures and practices of larger, more rigidly institutionalised and hierarchical (predominantly corporate) organisations.

This article begins with a discussion of the rise of co-working, followed by an overview of the history, organisational structure and examples of the public communication materials generated by the Enspirial Network <sup>1</sup>. It then provides a definition of resistance as involving *oppositional activity* that takes the format of both *everyday*, and *public* forms of resistance in order to suggest that organised networks of media workers rely on both forms of resistance for their coherence. The discussion locates this claim in terms of the debates around labour precarity and media work. The central role of collective organisation and networks in media work and the creative industries – particularly during the “digital age” – is examined, where rapidly changing work practices and technology use rely on and generate active, if somewhat unstable, peer networks. These networks permit collegiality and ongoing knowledge exchange, and in the case of individuals or micro businesses, financial benefits such as niche work opportunities. Finally, Lovink and Rossiter’s concept of the ‘orgnet’ is suggested as a means by which to locate these socio-technical network characteristics, before some concluding comments are offered on the relative stability and sustainability of media worker orgnets <sup>2</sup> (Lovink, 2007; Rossiter, 2006b; Lovink & Rossiter, 2011). Their attributes, it is argued, are generated by social-technical systems that facilitate such novel organisational features as the copresence of entrepreneurial market pragmatism and ethically framed social enterprise.

## **Precarity, Coworking and Collectivism as Resistance**

The rise of ‘co-working’ over the past decade has occurred as a mode of resistance to the precarity that has accompanied globalization and technological change. This is particularly true of media work since the global economic crisis of 2007-8, as organisations of all sizes have moved toward the outsourcing of media related tasks to a global workforce of individuals and micro to small sized businesses. Scholarly investigations of this pattern tend to focus on how it is that ‘knowledge workers’ often lack the resources to create independent workplaces outside of the home, and with it, the social context that comes with a group environment. Ahead of strictly financial considerations, this sociality is identified by a growing body of literature (published primarily by scholars in the fields dedicated to the study of organisational phenomena) as behind the strong move toward co-working arrangements (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).

The current article finds its focus in the literature around media work, thus, a categorical distance is assumed between the media worker and other terms commonly employed to describe those who engage in precarious labour in related fields. The broader term commonly employed in Organisation Studies, ‘knowledge worker’, is replaced here by Hesmondhalgh’s (2015) definition of a media worker as one ‘whose work is affected by the fact that it makes a significant contribution to products that are conventionally defined as “media” – communication products such as television programs, films, newspapers, periodicals, books, musical recordings and so on’ (p.7). To this list, we should hasten to make the addition of the suite of digital media deliverable via the internet (and other means) and consumed using a range of device types, including software. The effect of isolation is compounded for the knowledge worker who specialises in media, as they function in a rapidly changing, 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 (Deuze, 2014).

Managed office services, whilst still common in some industry sectors, have given way to

co-working for knowledge workers who are increasingly able to rely on digital technologies (Waters-Lynch & Potts, 2016). For individuals and micro-businesses in particular, the expense required to sustain the various communication infrastructure of a modern office has gradually been reduced to cheap, powerful technology such as laptops and smart phones. Waters-Lynch & Potts (2016) assert that by the mid-2000s, this had led to 'a variety of new work practices structured around individuals choosing temporary workplaces, and engaging in light forms of intentional, work and learning related social cooperation' (p .6). They trace the formal origin of identifiable co-working spaces to 2005, and define them as:

... shared office environments that 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 (pp. 4-5).

Between 2005 and 2015, the numbers have expanded at an impressive rate to an estimated 7800 spaces in over 80 countries, populated by 510,000 co-workers (Waters-Lynch & Potts, 2016, p. 8).

This pattern of growth is likely to continue, 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 efficient 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. Of course, the full range of co-working arrangement types is complexly realised. For instance, many are owned by 'co-working entrepreneurs' who operate these 'places' as businesses and rarely intervene directly in the culture of the 'space' (Waters-Lynch & Potts, 2016). After a thorough review of the complexities of co-working phenomena, Waters-Lynch, Potts, Butcher, Dodson, & Hurley (2016) concluded that a key distinguishing feature of co-working spaces (as against serviced offices) was 'the degree of social collaboration versus the importance of location and facilities of each office environment' (p. 32). Thus, 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 corporate entities with more flexible constructs. These employ relatively 'flat', less rigidly hierarchical structures as part of more dynamic organisations capable of the speed of change required of contemporary media businesses (Lange, 2006; 2011).

These co-workers, (who identify under a range of titles including collectives, cooperatives and clusters), are financially cooperative, and in some instances, engage in a combination of highly entrepreneurial endeavours alongside community building and philanthropic activities. Indeed, from the outset co-working spaces tended toward becoming publicly defined entities, articulated by their participant members as possessing an 'explicit emphasis on social and collaborative activity' (Waters-Lynch & Potts, 2016, p. 7). There was an ethical dimension to this process of articulation for the original group of co-workers, for instance, which was based in San Francisco. Waters-Lynch & Potts relate the process as follows:

After some experiments and iterations, these pioneering coworkers settled upon a set of 'co-working values': 'collaboration, openness, community, accessibility and sustainability' (Waters-Lynch & Potts, 2016, p. 6).

These values set the tone for a pattern of practices that have emerged alongside such worker driven organisation. Among these is the emergent practice of 'social entrepreneurship', where human and capital resources are invested in enterprise that combines capitalistic and humanistic 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.

Researchers in Europe are now attempting to prototype such organisations to become blueprints for expanded application. For instance, practice-led research is being conducted by the European Commission funded Origin of Spaces project (2014-17) that includes cooperative organisations in

London, Pula, Bordeaux, Bilbao and Lisboa as part of a four year study (Weiler, 2015). The goal of the researchers is to use these cooperatives as a base from which to show their emergent organisations can:

... improve and share our knowledge and skills for the benefit of our local and wider communities, so that we can learn, adapt and grow together, ultimately sharing solutions for our current ecological, economical and social challenges (Weiler, 2015, Section 2).

The five primary characteristics identified by the project are: social entrepreneurship, ecological transition, participatory governance, multi-disciplinary co-working, and local partnership building (Weiler, 2015, Section 2). Each of the organisations involved focus on one of these characteristics as a priority, for instance, the originating organization of the project, the Darwin-Ecosystem in Bordeaux France. The Darwin-Ecosystem was created in 2012, and ‘has the objective to practice a new way of working. The tenants’ association “Les Darwiniens”, as initiator, coordinator and partner of ‘The Origin of Spaces’, envisions sharing its collection of experiences on ecological transition, and its potential for creating a cohesive and resilient ecosystem’ (Weiler, 2015, Section 3.3). The narrative presented through this language is one of transition and transformation through business activity and collective intention. The research posits a networked environment can be generative of resilience, which is created by placing otherwise dispersed individual workers and small businesses at close quarters as part of ‘sustainable multidisciplinary clusters’. In this way, it is hoped that their activities can also prototype an organisation capable of a particular politic; one marked by a move away from the predominant, hierarchically organised profit oriented corporate paradigm.

The Enspiral Network emerged around a co-working space in Wellington, New Zealand, and independently of any such formal institutional backing or intervention<sup>3</sup>. It began to take shape in 2010, in part as a response to growing isolation and labour precarity in media work and management (Deuze 2007; 2009; 2011; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2013), but gained momentum when its members were influenced by the ethos of activists from the Occupy movement in 2011 (Enspiral, 2016a). They were inspired to create the open-source cloud-based software ‘Loomio’, launched in 2012, which proved to be highly effective at facilitating genuinely inclusive and egalitarian organisational processes, permitting cohesive, carefully governed and recorded horizontal – ‘democratic’ – decision-making by a spatiotemporally distributed network of participants. The software played a central role in the emergence of a highly fluid, hybridised structure that convenes practices that move beyond the rigid hierarchical interaction that characterises corporate organisations.

Other similar organisations are emerging under less institutionalised conditions, and demonstrating resilience that is worthy of investigation as prototypes for and harbingers of what may prove to be sustainable future organisational structures. A prominent example is the hybrid form of the Enspiral Network, constituted by a layered organisation at the centre of which is the Enspiral Foundation Ltd that is collectively owned by the members. This company ‘stewards the culture’ of the network by inviting ‘ventures’, ‘contributors’ and new members to participate. Contributors form an extended network that is involved in decision-making, and which collaborates toward the execution of ventures (Enspiral, 2016c). These ventures exhibit a strong software making bias, though this is often spliced with and facilitates ongoing events and programs of learning and knowledge exchange. Contributors and ventures direct a percentage of funds generated by their business activities into the Enspiral Foundation (which acts as a kind of ‘meta’ venture) according to collectively agreed upon amounts that are negotiated using cloud based decision making software on a case-by-case basis. The Enspiral Foundation is a limited liability company with a charitable constitution that operates on the basis of a ‘minimal viable board’ (Enspiral, 2017). Other ventures operate as part of the Enspiral Foundation, or as associated but independent legal entities such as limited liability companies, cooperatives or not-for-profit organisations – or as innovative legal hybrids. Loomio, for instance, participates in the Enspiral Network as a ‘worker-owned cooperative social enterprise’ (Enspiral, 2016b). Legally, it operates as Loomio Cooperative Ltd and is a limited liability company that is also a registered worker-owned cooperative, ‘owned by its ten worker-

members' (Enspiral, 2017b).

Enspiral Network ventures are diverse and growing in number, and key examples include: Rabid (web and mobile application development); Dev Academy (developer training); Chalkle (software to assist learning communities); Scoop (independent news source); Metric Engine (application that helps similar organisations compare their performance); Bucky Box (cloud software that assists food distribution); Volunteer Impact (impact reporting software for environmental conservation projects); Lifehack (supports Kiwis to develop and launch inspiring Wellbeing projects and ventures with a tech focus); Action Station (not-for-profit activist organisation); Enspiral Accounting (accounting services to individuals and organisations who 'value social responsibility'); Orientation Aotearoa (supports young people to gain knowledge, find direction and make change); and EXP (runs events, conferences and hosts retreats within the Enspiral network, and offers consulting services in facilitation, programme design and delivery and entrepreneurship coaching) (Enspiral, 2016c).

The network has expanded by virtue of a market oriented, entrepreneurial approach, and now has over 300 members and a sophisticated strategic marketing and media presence that includes a network of websites, blogging activity and audiovisual content (Enspiral, 2016a). Some of this is highly polished public communication that explains their organisation and services, hosted on websites and via social platforms, whilst other material is developed via republishing of materials recorded during conference proceedings, and participation in a range of internal and external fora. The Enspiral Network embraces the public facing dimension of their organisation, and uses this as part of its process of reflexive engagement with their decentralised operations and administration. For instance, each component of the organisation is carefully articulated in a collectively authored 'Enspiral Handbook' that is publicly available as a model for others who may wish to learn from their approach (Enspiral, n.d.). The language and boundaries to their operations and ventures is strongly inclusive and claims to be primarily meaning (not profit) driven, with central goals such as fostering digital literacy and promoting transition to more environmentally friendly practices (Enspiral, n.d., 2016c). Prominent members are active participants in a large-scale discursive engagement around the principles and structure behind such organisations in order to foster networks that are global. They often speak at international events dedicated to the topic of organizational change with the goal of sharing their vision for decentralised, network governed, ethically bounded business practices, and write on the topic on dedicated blogs (for instance Lu, 2016; Robinson, 2016; Zuur, 2016).

Open source software development is key to their engagement with social entrepreneurship, which they provide freely or sell as products in the form of enterprise applications that are also provided freely on request, particularly to not for profits and community oriented start-ups (Enspiral, 2016c). These include the cloud-based decision-making softwares, Cobudget, designed to coordinate business spending, and Loomio, which as discussed above formed an original part of the network, and is central to its identity and success (Enspiral, 2015). Loomio is now used by a large number of organisations to make scalable, networked decisions, which Alanna Krause of Loomio describes as 'the operating system for a new kind of organisation' (Rushkoff, 2014; Enspiral, 2015). Loomio permits any participant in a network the equal opportunity to contribute, support, vote on or block decisions from a smartphone application, and the process is recorded for later review (Loomio, 2014). In effect, the affordances of the technology are leveraged via the literacies of the participants to become generative of a less hierarchical, more stable and transparently mediated format of networked action and interaction where the emphasis is on entrepreneurial ventures.

The surrounding discourse reflects this activity oriented, and oppositional quality. For instance, in "What is Enspiral?" (Enspiral, 2014), a video embedded in their website, the founding members are interviewed and make the following range of observations in their attempts to characterise the organisation (n.b. the Enspiral Venture each participant is connected with is listed along with their name):

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*

It is clear from these series of statements that the participants are reflexively engaged in the ambivalent situation of commercial success in competition with a predominance of highly institutionalised and large-scale hierarchical organisations. Indeed, they use such organisations to highlight the Enspiral Network's strongly inclusive, anti-hierarchy, pro-network and pro-community sentiment.

In sum, and beyond these key features, in the interests of brevity the reader is offered the results of an investigation of their various media, which reveals the following pattern of traits:

- They foster a local sensibility and globalist perspective that includes an emphasis on ecological and environmental concerns.
- They attempt to operate on the basis of a self-organising principle inspired by activist roots, and emphasise the benefit in doing so as part of their public communication practices where the refinement of decentralised organisational strategies based on socio-technical systems are a consistent theme.
- They work to prototype and share with other networks minimal, horizontal organisational strategies and the technology (particularly open source software) that makes these possible.
- They engage in ongoing critique of centrally controlled, hierarchical business institutions, particularly corporate entities.
- They promote both virtual and corporeal/material mediation of network effects associated of the organisation's activities, such as conferences that lead to the creation of published content that employs a range of media.
- They exhibit market pragmatism and are pro-entrepreneurship.
- They demonstrate highly sophisticated, reflexive engagement with media-based practices that are strongly identified with the organisation.

## **Resistance and the 'Collective' in Media Work**

In order to better understand the rise of co-working among media workers and the emergence of associated novel hybrid organisations like the Enspiral Network, it is necessary to examine how these phenomena have emerged as an organised form of active, ongoing resistance to the influence of global capitalism and the precarity it has generated. Within the field of Resistance Studies, definitions of the concept of resistance vary widely in their empirical scope and theoretical genealogy, but tend to agree that it is both an *activity*, and *oppositional* in respect of power (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). Broadly speaking, these *acts* of resistance may be divided into publicly collective resistance such as rebellions or demonstrations, and the relatively private category of everyday resistance. Everyday resistance can be intentional or otherwise, and may be difficult to identify in that it is embedded in quotidian patterns of behaviour such as work practices, and relies on tactics that are context dependent, on individual decisions, and on situations that are dynamic and transient (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 13).

In the context of the networked media worker, we see a very relevant model of such everyday resistance. In the case of an organised network like the Enspiral Network, this is spliced with the collective and public to inspire a relatively stable format of opposition that operates within the

systems that constitute the normative scene of global capitalism. The well documented, and increasingly precarious situation of the media worker is, somewhat paradoxically, defined by a world in which people interact with media more frequently and immersively (Curtin & Sanson, 2016; de Peuter, 2011; Deuze, 2007; 2009; 2011; 2014; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Neilson & Rossiter, 2005; Standing, 2014). Indeed, as Mark Deuze has pointed out, media-based practitioners are now being joined in this precarity as across 'the manufacturing, service, and creative industries, a new world of work is taking shape that seems to be premised on individual rather than industry-level responsibility, requires a high degree of skillset flexibility, and implicitly expects portfolio careerism' (Deuze, 2014).

Media workers, however, have had to function in fragmented networks where responsibility is shifted in this manner toward the individual, and away from the business or organisation over time. As a result, they have tended to develop 'tactics and strategies to counter the precarity embedded in their work styles. For example, they informally self-organize into groups or teams that tend to move from project to project together for a certain period of time (Deuze, 2014). Indeed, Deuze goes on to argue that so prominent a feature of the context of media work is this patterning that it gives rise to far more than innovative organisational solutions. It also gives rise to strategies that greet precarity at the level of peer-based relationships in order to provide social, communal and collaborative dimensions to media worker careers.

For Deuze, the study of this cultural patterning should represent a key component of media work scholarship, which should subsequently inform the university teaching that is dedicated to preparing students for work in related industries. As he forcefully argues, under the volatile circumstances of contemporaneous media work, 'instances of empowerment and agency can most often be found' in 'intentional collectives [that] catalyze the nature of media work' (Deuze, 2014). Given the fluid quality of media work, collectives represent a rare, coherent site of intersection for agency and, Deuze ponders, 'perhaps it is there that what it means to work in the media is articulated most precisely' (Deuze, 2014). The collective then, is understood to be an authentic locus of media worker experience, realised in terms of both the economic power to exert agency as a practitioner, and to participate in a network of peers toward establishing stability of identity and the opportunity for ongoing and meaningful engagement with self and practice.

The conceptual apparatus offered in the term 'collective', or through the phrase 'intentional collective' requires some qualification. As Deuze employs it here, the term has a generalist application and is dedicated to any setting in which peers congregate for mutual support around intentionally defined shared interest. The collectivism studied here is a result of the features of media work touched upon above, alongside other more directly influential economic and cultural outcomes to the globalising of capital and the effects of the accompanying infrastructural change that has so broadly catalysed the 'network effect'. Foremost amongst these has been the outsourcing of work that has led to the phenomenon Deuze outlines, wherein responsibility is shifted to the worker and away from the business or organisation. This will be discussed in greater detail, but for now it is important to note that the combination of the intrinsic features of media work tend toward promoting those vital features of resistance, *activity* and *opposition*, alongside a tendency toward collectivism. Throw into the mix the networking potentials provided by broadly available communication technologies and the literacy in their use that typifies the media worker, and you have a potent context for the creation of practice driven patterns of resistance that are underpinned by emergent organisational structures.

However, the organised networks of practitioners required to realise such potentials are exceptions to the largely non-instrumental quality of Internet-based networked interaction and the tactical forms of resistance this context of mediation tends to generate. Over a decade ago, in his 2005 lecture, *The Principle of Notworking*, Geert Lovink provides an apt description of virtual networks as 'hedonistic machines of promiscuous contacts' (p21). The theme of 'notworking' in his lecture is just so: an appreciation of the paradoxical situation of large-scale networks mediated via the Internet, wherein it is the disjunctive lack of instrumental definition that provides 'a shared sense of a potentiality that does not have to be realized' (p. 19). Such networks 'thrive on diversity and conflict (the notworking), not on unity' (p. 19). The participants in these virtual networks are willing not because they are interactants, but because they are able to engage in the passive modes of

'[b]rowsing, watching, reading, waiting, thinking, deleting, chatting, skipping and surfing' (p. 19). The 'tactical media' produced in the setting over the ten years to that time (2005), he argues, only serve by their ephemeral quality to reinforce the post-Fordist modality of 'short-termism' (p. 20). Tactical media entails activities located in terms of individual strategic contexts, rather than as part of the activities conducted by a purposive organisation that is increasingly institutionalised over time<sup>4</sup>. The 'tactics' employed to create disruptions in existing systems are tantamount to the efforts of game modders, who only serve to highlight weaknesses in existing systems before disappearing again. The net effect is that '[c]apital is delighted, and thanks the tactical media outfit or nerd-modder for the home improvement' (p. 20). Lovink sets in contradistinction to virtual networks, and the suddenness of tactical media his strategic model of the "organised network"; intended to stabilise the temporary disruption provided by "tactical" media. He forecasts that:

Eventually organized networks will be mirrored against the networked organization. But we're not there yet. There will not be an easy synthesis. Roughly speaking, one can witness a 'convergence' between the informality of virtual networks and the formality of institutions. This process, however, is anything but harmonious. Clashes between networks and organizations are occurring before our very own eyes. Debris spreads in every possible direction, depending on the locality. The networked multitude, one could say, is constituted – and crushed – as a part of this process. It is naive to believe that, under the current circumstances, networks will win this battle (if you want to put it in those terms). This is precisely why networks need their own form of organization. In this process they will have to deal with the following three aspects: accountability, sustainability and scalability (p. 21).

Lovink's rather colourful portrayal of the contest between organisation and network comes to seem rather prescient in the case study examined here. It is certainly true to observe that there is a necessary competition between the horizontally defined qualities of peer-to-peer interaction in the loosely defined, non-instrumental "network", and the highly determined rigidity of historically determined organisations that are hierarchical and purposive.

In the case of the Enspiral Network, the organisational strategies employed adopt hybrid formats to 'jury rig' existing legal entities with the goal of maintaining open-ended, minimally hierarchical structures that permit the generation of funds and their collective administration via technological intervention toward social ends. As mentioned above, at the centre of this construct is the Enspiral Foundation, described in the Enspiral Handbook as follows:

... a 'meta' venture that can be imagined as a hub, a platform, an umbrella, or a garden. The Foundation is governed by its constitution, stewarded by its directors, and is intended to be a lean platform upon which distributed leadership, experimentation, collaboration, and interdependence can thrive, enhancing all the diverse expressions of Enspiral's values through the various purposes of the people and ventures within the network (Enspiral, 2016a).

The language employed and intent expressed here indicate the overarching determination to resist any metastasizing of social goals via the application of rigid, centrally defined organisational structures. These are determinedly 'lean', 'distributed', and geared toward fostering diversity and experimentation. This strategy is resonant with the organised networks in Lovink's projected future, which are capable of demonstrating hybrid vigour that harnesses both the potency of the network and the stability and instrumental purpose of the organisation.

As we have seen, Lovink argues that when a network is subjected to the violence of institutionalising rigidity, they encounter the key dimensions of accountability, sustainability and scalability as defining criteria. Rossiter and Lovink (2014) would write close to a decade later, the primary mode of success in this regard has been corporate platforms for content delivery, where the networking effect is harnessed to promote information that is bought and sold via 'social'



media platforms, the foremost of which being, of course, Facebook. In lamenting this pattern and the dire form and format of its outcomes, they write:

Welcome to the Happy Dark Ages. Many have already identified social networks as a conspiratorial neoliberal invention that, in the end, only benefits the global elite. Think of the vampire data-mining economies made possible with all your searches, status updates, likes, etc. The algorithmic modulation of networks generates patterns of data that hold economic value for social media corporations and finance capital (Lovink & Rossiter, 2014).

In this context accountability has been trumped by scalability, and sustainability has become a performance engaged in by the corporations in question. Indeed, there seems ample evidence to support the author's vision of dystopia. Facebook, for example, presents its massively inefficient server farms as an absurd advertisement for having achieved all three (accountability, scalability, and sustainability) successfully by announcing that they are being built in colder climates, such as Sweden (Harding, 2016).

Regardless, Lovink and Rossiter argue, the combination of reimagined organisational structures and infrastructure inspire the possibility of realising enduring forms of resistance to these extensions of the influence of capitalistic inventions, where:

[T]he (legitimized) desire to build lasting collective forms should grow out of 21st century materialities and not be based on nostalgic notions of mass organization. Instead of dismissing the network as such, we propose to rewire, recode, redefine its core values and develop new protocols for the social, which, in today's society, is technical in nature (Lovink & Rossiter, 2014).

This recoding procedure, with its enduring investment in the network, is to be achieved via the combination of the technology available, and the literacies of the participants. As Lovink and Rossiter argue, the materiality of the network – the internet and the computational devices we employ to mediate organisational structure – creates affordances that are yet to be fully exploited in interests of collective social outcomes.

Such ambivalent tensions between the *oppositional* potentials of informational technologies, and their capacity for co-option into the centrist action and influence of global capital were noted by Neilson and Rossiter in their discussion of labour precarity in 2005, over a decade ago. However, they urge a cautious optimism on behalf of the collective power of the worker. Precarity has become the basis for a rich field of research (that cannot be encompassed within the scope of the current article), which has been generative of:

... a proliferation of terms to describe the commonly experienced yet largely undocumented transformations within working life. Creative labour, network labour, cognitive labour, service labour, affective labour, linguistic labour, immaterial labour; these categories often substitute for each other, but in their very multiplication they point to diverse qualities of experience that are not simply reducible to each other. On the one hand these labour practices are the oppressive face of post-Fordist capitalism, yet they also contain potentialities that spring from workers' own refusal of labour and subjective demands for flexibility (Neilson & Rossiter, 2005).

An attempt is made here to give emphasis to the resistance implicit labour, one that must certainly have played a strong role in the larger shifts in play. The authors note that the influence of labour precarity has been the prime source of contemporary media worker, who is both liberated and constrained by:

... interminable lack of certainty, the condition of being unable to predict one's fate or having some degree of stability on which to construct a life. On the other hand, precarity supplies the precondition for new forms of creative organisation that seek to accept and exploit the flexibility inherent in networked modes of sociality and production. That the figure of the creative, cognitive, or new media worker has emerged as the figure of the precarious worker par excellence is symptomatic of this ambivalent political positioning (Neilson & Rossiter, 2005).

That this tension could produce the figure of the 'new media worker' and new forms of creative organisation is part of the inspiration for the author's to point toward the powerful potentials to be discovered in ambivalence. The last, if shaped appropriately, can be (in this way) a mechanism of opposition. The authors fear that discussions of this relationship between labour-power and capital can itself become politicised to the extent that we focus upon it at the expense of the fundamental challenge to 'to alter the circumstances in which capital meets life'. In their laudable conclusion – one that raises a challenge taken up in the present research – they observe that in writings dedicated to precarity are told:

... the story of social-political networks seeking to institute creative projects responsive to situations of living labour .... [W]e find here a common resource from which lessons, models, and ideas may be exchanged and repurposed as transformative techniques (Neilson & Rossiter, 2005).

Conceived of as narratives of resistance, then, such contexts of precarity, with their implicit contingency and instability, can be engaged as the basis for a less institutionalised but more liberated program of action that seeks to apply an ethical response to the organisational modalities of global capital.

The collective will that is organised around media labour under these circumstances in its various manifestations of form can be thought of as a reflex to the ambivalent patterns identified by the research dedicated to precarity. These tensions Deuze explores, discussing the danger of the co-creative and collaborative potentials of the 'new digital and networked media ecology' to become 'an exclusive playground for political and commercial institutions rather than a platform for individual cultural entrepreneurs' (2008, p. 25). He points toward examples of corporate culture inhabiting the participatory (Jenkins, 2006) and 'produsage' (Bruns, 2005) dimensions of digitally mediated communication in order to exhibit this potential. Importantly, we cannot escape these patterns. Thus, Deuze draws on Silverstone's (2007) notion that our lives are 'currently lived in the mediapolis: a mediated public space where media underpin and overarch the experiences of everyday life' (2008, p. 26) in order to highlight how it is that new forms of literacy are emerging such that:

... media should not be seen as some-how located outside of lived experience.... Our life should perhaps be seen as lived *in*, rather than *with*, media – *a media life*.' (2009, p. 469) [author's italics].

A life that is both vulnerable to, and empowered by, new literacies by the convergence of production and consumption, and by the various points at which our immersion in media available to appropriation.

It is here that everyday and public resistance might occur, and this is resistance to a list of phenomena that includes labour precarity, instability in networks, in working relationships, the dominance of larger institutions, and the speed of change in the *mediapolis*. This is a necessarily public phenomenon, and in the context of media work, of central concern. Along these lines, Kraidy (2016) argues for the concept of 'creative resistance' as an outcome to the Arab uprisings of 2011 and 2012. There, a range of media creation including graffiti, memes, mash-ups, banners and rap were among the key activities engaged in to achieve performances of resistance (p.231). The

precarity of the working lives of the participants in the uprisings were frequently generative of the themes of this creative media, which he situates by distancing creative resistance from *creativity* as a 'strategic and discriminatory trope' that is selectively deployed, perpetuating 'relations of politico-economic power' (p. 233). He argues along these lines that 'creative labour' requires reframing in order to permit some meaningful division of creative labour into an 'industrial versus revolutionary' typology. The revolutionary is confrontational, radical, and beyond existing systems of capital – whilst the industrial is rewarded by capital, and participates in existing paradigmatic constructs.

Under the conditions of Kraidy's taxonomy, the creative labour carried out by the Enspiral Network exhibits a liminal set of characteristics: neither revolutionary nor industrial. The network is generated by, and generative of, reflexive engagement with precarity and is constituted by socio-technical systems that are maintained within the 'creative' industries. These systems deploy part of the capital rewards for this activity to update existing paradigms. If this is a format of creative resistance, it is only so from within an industrial setting, making it a study in ambivalence from the perspective of the revolutionary. The descriptive phrase for this industry that has gained such great currency in Australia and Britain, "creative economy", de Peuter (2011) damningly describes as:

... a neoliberal idiom aggregating phenomena that Hardt and Negri (2000; 2004; 2009) critically anatomize in their accounts of the composition of contemporary capital, including the centrality of immaterial labor, the extraction of value through the mechanism of rent, and the parasitical relation of the market to the common (p. 418).

The Enspiral Network has responded to these precarious conditions via organisational strategies that leverage media literacies to exploit the affordances of digital technologies. In effect, these are attempts to create sustainable configurations of socio-technical systems that regard the network as a petri dish where models can be tested. That is, as a model the collective hopes of the network can be understood as a publicly shared format of wealth to be distributed ad nauseum, as this is an infinitely available resource – an organisational construct.

Rather than generate public spectacles, this format of resistance to the influence of global capital seeks to stabilise networks of interacting agents – human and otherwise – as part of their everyday activity. Of course, these organised networks can become the basis to such spectacles, though in this setting appear to be generative of more sustainable formats of activism. The not-for-profit organisation Action Station that is part of the Enspiral Network operates along similar lines to Australia's Get Up, generating capital and organising large scale activism on a longitudinal basis, representing:

... over 140,000 Kiwis... providing them with opportunities to take collective action on issues that matter to them, ensuring their collective voice has more impact, holding political and corporate interests to account (Enspiral, n.d.).

In July of 2016, this activist network launched a:

... distributed campaigning platform (OurActionStation) to put digital campaign tools into the hands of our members, and ran our first full member voting session on Loomio, allowing members all over New Zealand and around the world to have their say in the direction and governance of ActionStation (Enspiral, n.d.).

This format of resistance is sustained, and designed to participate in mainstream media and politics via the sophisticated use of digital networking tools derived from the stabilising power base of the Enspiral Network.

A useful means by which to locate the key finding of this discussion, and the organisational type of

the Enspiral Network is the contraction 'orgnet' (Lovink, 2007; Rossiter, 2006b; Lovink & Rossiter, 2011; Lovink & Rossiter, 2016). Lovink and Rossiter developed the concept from 2005 to the present as an engagement with the ambivalent interplay of phenomena that have been generative of 'new institutional forms whose social-technical dynamics are immanent to the culture of networks' (2011, p. 282). Orgnets, they assert, are generated from 'within the technics of digital communication media', and are 'proliferating across the planet' in the form of non-profit organisations, activist networks, research groups and the like have a political dimension 'galvanised by political passions that are leftist in orientation' (2016, p. 336-7). The orgnet is proposed by the authors as more than a thought tool: it is suggested as a means by which to harness the potency of the technologically determinist relation between the social and technical that resides in the culture of networks. However, the dynamic 'flexibility, spontaneity and scalability' of orgnets is undermined by their lack of longevity and continuity, a lack of funding, a reliance on free and voluntary labour and a lack of well designed, stable software (2016, p336). This list is uncanny in its applicability to the Enspiral Network, which might be considered a modified orgnet: a media work based orgnet that sets out to address the issues of sustainability, funding, labour and software reliability.

Orgnets are 'conditioned by crisis' and the failure of the primary institutions of modernity, and:

... emphasise horizontal, mobile, distributed, and decentralized modes of relation. A culture of openness, sharing, and project-based forms of activity is a key characteristic of organised networks. In this respect, organised networks are informed by the rise of open-source software movements (p. 282).

The Enspiral Network is just so: the complex outcome to the GFC, to Occupy, and to shifting boundaries to media work and activism enabled by the freedoms created by emergent forms of mobility (Urry, 2007). The participants inhabit the network as a collective that is able to transact the energy created during Occupy as an ongoing, multivalent format of resistance that employs digital literacies to engage in the creation of relatively horizontal organisational formats.

The stability of the novel Enspiral Network orgnet is achieved via acknowledgement of the importance of a collective public engagement with its construction and maintenance. The participants in this peer-to-peer network inhabit the mediapolis reflexively, employing a range of literacies – digital and otherwise – that permit the participants to celebrate this immersive media ecology. They create sophisticated, adaptive approaches to public communication that underpins and promotes narrative performances of the stability of the orgnet that are, intentionally or otherwise, *oppositional acts*. These are conducted in various modes, both everyday and public, that demonstrate consensus around ethical boundaries that are humanistic and sustainable, adopting an activist stance that promotes and attempts to distribute such technologies as open source software. The determining presence of collectively created and deployed software is vital as arbiter of the media work orgnet, providing a bulwark against volatility by mediating conflict and generating capital simultaneously.

Lovink and Rossiter posit the concept of the orgnet as a 'basic unit' rather than as a model, contrasting their function to the exploitative, growth oriented corporate model of the social network. Instead, orgnets express a willingness to participate in a network effect; to work to build '(real-time) collaborative platforms', and 'provide coordinates for practices that structure data flows and sociality in ways that do not submit to the techniques of extraction special to social media' (2016, p. 340). This is the most vital feature of the orgnet, its capacity to actualise a willingness to be a *part* of scalable infrastructures that exceed existing paradigms, and according to a particular politic. Importantly, the network participants reflexively describe their activity as participating in a program that sets out to generate technologies that will facilitate a sustainable construct to underpin organisational practices, both within the domain of media work and beyond. Central to this project is solidarity around resistance to hierarchy, and the narrative presentation of market success via entrepreneurship that is constrained by a set of network defined guiding principles. These practices reformulate activism as an interventionist narrative that promotes the

global and intercultural, whilst valorising and nurturing the local.

It is evident that the Enspiral Network is challenged by struggles to mediate processes rendered implicitly complex by residual effects of hierarchy and power. In 2016 they conducted a major organisational review entitled 'Refactor 2016' which Alanna Krauss described in an article on Medium.com as the 'story of how we upgraded core systems and processes in a distributed network without bosses' to address 'a number of interconnected issues' (Krauss, 2016). A key trigger for the process was the centralising of power in the hands of the Enspiral Foundation Ltd, Directors, around whose function there was a lack of transparency that 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 (Krauss, 2016).

The board of directors, a necessary part of the limited liability company, is a function of the hierarchical legal constructs that the orgnet had employed in its hybridising procedures. The resolution to the matter was to introduce a 'minimum viable board' of three directors in April 2016, whose responsibilities are very narrow of scope and focused on matters of compliance. The title and rationale for the process were derived from software development:

It's 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 (Krauss, 2016).

The technologically deterministic tone of the analogy employed to describe this review points toward the socio-technical centre of the orgnet, but also toward the complex challenges that will continue to be implicit to establishing a 'horizontal', 'self-organising' organisational model, regardless of intent.

## Conclusion

The Enspiral Network and other such autonomous media work based orgnets emerged in association with the rise of co-working over the past decade as a response to growing labour precarity, and a range of broader deleterious effects of global capitalism. The Enspiral Network may be seen as a harbinger of a novel type of self-sustaining orgnet that employs decentralised means of participatory governance permitted by a combination of literacies and digital communication technologies such as cloud based, communal decision-making software. These attempts to move beyond the model of the corporate organisational paradigm are subject to the complexity implicit to any socio-technical system, where the residual effects of hierarchy and power continue to play a role. Nevertheless, the willingness to *act* – to *resist* – the impetus of existing paradigms on the basis of a reflexive engagement with the potentials in network culture separate these socio-technical systems and their impacts from other contexts of collective organisation.

The Origin of Spaces project provides a useful contrast, where five collectives have been synthesised via the intervention of large scale funding from Government sources as part of an effort to conduct formal research into the potentials in such unconventional organisations. Relatively emergent, self-sustaining orgnets will not typically be so publicly evident as the synthetic Origin of Spaces project because they are not well funded enough to take up such an institutionalised, large scale public presence. This centrally administered process is defined under the auspices of a research tasking that has as its broader goal a single overarching project definition: the creation of a model, a kind of blueprint, that established institutions can adopt in response to crises. The Enspiral Network is certainly generative of such modeling, but the organisational constructs created here are based on bricolage, and hacked together from components of existing paradigms as part of a jury-rigging procedure. Their goal is a culture that is able to reach beyond the bricks and mortar of infrastructure such as co-working spaces as part of a network where blueprints are epiphenomenal, and created as needed as part of the *everyday* activities of the participants. The true depth in this strategy is to be discovered in how such

orgnets are basic units that form part of a global potential, unfettered by institutional politics and located outside such drivers as the promotion of nations over networks.

The technical dimension of the sociality facilitated in network culture is of central importance to this capacity to exceed the status quo, as is demonstrated by the role of software in mediating the decentralised governance of the Enspiral Network. The relative stability of the Enspiral Network is an exception to the rule of orgnets, and it is no coincidence that their organisation is rigorously narrated in public communication materials that emphasise the importance of cloud based decision making softwares such as Loomio and Cobudget. The media literacies of the participants in this more enduring orgnet permit the leveraging of a decentralised model of governance to compose a publicly framed narrative of identification that is activity based and certainly, in some key ways, oppositional. These activists are able to rely on the resilience of the network, and a shared intuition: that the affordances of the network enable public and open mediation of a novel organisation that is able to function sustainably within, whilst seeking to resist and update current paradigms.

## Notes

1 This is based on 'digital ethnography' (Hine 2015, Horst & Miller, 2012) that forms a part of a broader investigation of orgnets in Australia and New Zealand.

2 Many instances exist of resistance-based 'orgnets' that are not geared toward the completion of media work, and which are not-self sustaining. For example the Tactical Technology Collective (<https://tacticaltech.org/projects/all>).

3 Over time, the co-working dimension of the Enspiral Network has been integrated with the operation of ventures. The Enspiral coworking venture, Enspiral Space, closed during early 2016 and is now managed as part of Rabid (Enspiral Space, 2017).

4 Some examples of related tactical media groups include RTMark, The Yes Men, Electronic Disturbance Theater, Carbon Defense League, Institute for Applied Autonomy, 0100101110101101.ORG, Bureau of Inverse Technology, Ubermorgen, The Illuminator, Irrational, subRosa, and I/O/D.

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