

Online Communities: Experimental Communication in the Virtual Diaspora

José Luis Brea

To these central systems, the authors counter-propose a-centric systems, networks of finite automata in which communication flows from one neighbor to the other, in which all individuals are interchangeable and are defined only by a state in a particular moment, in such a way that local operations can be coordinated and the final result can be synchronized independently of a central body.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Rhizome: Introduction*¹

These pure singularities communicate only in the empty spaces of the example, without being tied by any common property, by any identity. They are expropriated of all identity, so as to appropriate belonging itself, the sign ϵ . Tricksters or fakes, assistants or “toons,” they are the exemplars of the coming community.

Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*²

Identity, Community, and Technology

When discussing identity and its construction in new media, there are at least two main areas or approaches to consider. The first is essentially *biotechnological* in that it concerns the impact of technology on all issues surrounding the construction of the body, genetic engineering, and even the impact of virtual technologies on the production of a certain rearticulated *machine technology* of desire. There are many significant changes taking place within all these fields and, therefore, we should consider them as we analyze the transformative processes of the construction of self due to new technologies.

A second approach focuses more on the way in which new technologies are creating new working conditions within the field of communication, and how through them we can think of a transformation in the way we articulate the *common*, the collective, and *new forms of community*. If we understand (according to the thesis defended by the *communitarians*) that a subject is only so if he/she can enjoy a *position* in the heart of a community, then we must accept that this second approach is especially relevant. Although I do not wish to adopt an exclusionary position, I will analyze how new communicative technologies are affecting the production of sociability and processes of construction of subjectivity that are themselves inscribed within concomitant processes of socialization.

The questioning of the existence of identities within virtual space will therefore pass through an ellipsis that I consider necessary: we will discuss the modes of producing community made possible by new technologies. Only in the response to this question concerning *modes of online community* will a certain emphasis emerge around the issue of transformations of modes of production of the self and the construction of identity, in as much as they are affected by the impact of new technologies.

I will refer above all to those modes of *producing community online* that have been approached explicitly or implicitly as artistic or (post)artistic practices. In other words, although I will consider cases of communal production, I will give special emphasis to those practices that have emerged in the artistic sphere and its characteristic audience.

I should add that if it is viable to limit oneself to a discussion of the modes of *producing community online* that have been proposed from within the artistic sphere, it is undoubtedly because artistic practices have themselves recently undergone a series of transformations, within which the aim of *producing community* has become a major trend. We can say that many contemporary artistic practices have centered precisely on the production of community and relational structures rather than on aesthetic objects or formulations.

From this perspective, one may consider that *net art* descends primarily from the activist forms of *media art* characteristic of a general expansion of public art in the late twentieth century. This is a very suggestive proposal that provides a useful key for identifying the most interesting manifestations within the fuzzy world of online art. It means seeing what *being online* provides in terms of an opportunity for communicative action in the same problematic context within which the above-mentioned artistic practices are renegotiating their contemporary meanings and functions. In other words, the ability to develop mediations, systems of relations, and mechanisms of communicative action that can *produce community*.

Virtual Heterotopias: A Critique of the Mediations and Productions of the Public Sphere

For all these reasons, this use value, this product that is the public sphere, is the most fundamental product that exists. In terms of community, of what I share in common with others, this is the basis of all processes of social change. This means that I can forget about any kind of politics if I reject the *production of a social sphere*.

Alexander Kluge, "On Film and the Public Sphere"³

What action is possible in the public sphere?

Knowbotics Research, *IO_Lavoro_inmateriale*⁴

The latest form in which the immanent self-criticism of the avant-garde has been revisited in the art of the second half of the twentieth century is through a *critique of mediations*. If the historical avant-garde concentrated its deconstructionist efforts on a critique of the "work of art" itself and its languages, in the second half of the twentieth century the critical emphasis was directed primarily at unraveling the web of social mechanisms that produce artistic value. Risking generalization, one may suggest that the most refined way in which this deconstructionist project was realized was as a systematic exercise of *dismantled displaying of mediations*. In other words, through the incorporation of a self-reflexive system that allows cultural practice simultaneously to become an effective social practice inscribed in the effectual events of practice and to exhibit and question the set of conditions that make this possible. In as much as this critical practice also aspires to transform these conditions in a meaningful way, its critical action as a cultural practice has necessarily involved a mid-term strategic objective: to "produce a public sphere," to produce the mechanisms that will allow a critical reorganization of the conditions of dissemination and social inscription of these practices. Jürgen Habermas's famous theory states that the production of a public domain is a *pending task* in contemporary society given its debased or weakened condition.⁵ If we take this a step further, we can develop a proposition. The art of the twentieth century has left a *message*, a heritage or challenge for the twenty-first: to create a practice that can produce the conditions for a reconstructed and recovered *public sphere*. The historical significance of net art and online artistic practices may be defined, on the cusp of the twenty-first century, by their ability to take on this challenge and to produce an *autonomous public sphere*.

In the contemporary historical context, this task brings together the best “urbanizing” aspirations raised by recent critics of public art and media activism (as producers of *citizenship*), which are no longer conceived as the mere production of objects and contents with which to uncritically populate public space or the media sphere as they exist now, but rather, as the active and direct production of communicative and social mediation in themselves. Within this field, the challenge is to produce the systems, the agencies, the abstract machines that will make possible civil encounters and public dialogue on the issues shared by different social agents. Once again, the intention is to *produce a public sphere*. As Kluge has pointed out, only by producing a public sphere is any critical action or communal project possible that could represent a concrete and profound reflection on democratic forms upon the *reconstructed stage* of the political.

My intention is not to attribute to the Internet *per se* salvational or messianic (or demonic) qualities. I propose that we think of its potential within the context of the transformation of contemporary society, cultural practices, and social actions within them, which will require a revision of its mechanisms, structures, and order. The Internet is obviously not an empty field—alien to the rest of social activity—into which we can project absolute promissory fantasies. It is a territory with a complex set of transversal dynamics that allows for cuts and acts. Therefore, it is not so much a utopia as a mechanism whose promise lies in its relationship to social space itself, and thus it is open to an investigation of its potential, its qualities, and its possible uses. What is really at play is the possibility of developing an *antagonistic use* of mediations, an acknowledgment of the enormous tactical potential contained within technological mediation, and the exploitation of this quality from the perspective of a renewed interest in equality and emancipation.

The challenge now is to evaluate the tactical usage of the Internet as a tool that *is here*, changing the character of our world and our possibilities for action in that world. On either side of the contemporary political-cultural arena, *new media* are no more than transmitters and, perhaps, potential producers of *heterotopias*. As such, it is a mistake and a mystification to attribute redemptive, utopian, or demonic and apocalyptic qualities to new media.

The futility of utopian fantasies as applied to the Internet has been explicitly critiqued⁶ by Critical Art Ensemble, the same authors who theorized the concept of *electronic disturbance*. However, it is clear that no defense strategy associated with a specific differential act—be it a local culture or a system of symbolic production associated with any identity—can afford to renounce the use of one of the tools that can best serve the interests of differential communication. Therefore, considering that the Internet has this quality of being a *medium*, and simultaneously recognizing that *no mediation is neutral* (but rather *polyvocal* and *multiple*), the issue now is to *politicize* its use. It is through this use that social politics and cultural politics can come together, no longer just in terms of the ends but also the modes of *practice*.

Pioneering Modes of the Online Community: The Utopia of a “Community of Media Producers”

Through the emergence of digital cities, the spirit of media activism developed by independent and community television stations has been exported to new technology. The solidity of activist groups linked to “old media”⁷ favored the rapid emergence of politics claiming a radical democratization of access to new media. Launched as an experiment in direct electronic democracy, intended initially to last ten weeks, the digital city of Amsterdam, DDS,⁸ tested an unprecedented system of participation in civil society in the municipal decision-making process. This *direct electronic democracy* that allowed for civil participation was quickly abandoned in favor of more traditional—and less worrying for the political establishment—modes of “civic representation”. However, the experiment did produce valuable gains, including the demand for free access and support for broadband and freeware. Two fundamental trends evolved from this experience and would come to characterize the

future development of *online communities*. The first trend is the desire to relate directly to a civic space, to a real social fabric, rejecting the idea of an imaginary virtual “autonomous” limbo. The second trend is to assign an ideal of radical participatory communities to the constitution of *online communities*, considering them as future experimental realizations of the Brechtian ideal of “communities of media producers.” Here we are speaking of communication communities as open systems of users in which all the participants can act at the same level, with similar rights to the transmission and public reception of opinion, discourse, or communicative action. Obviously this suggests heuristic conditions that in reality will be hard to achieve, and we can imagine that the historical development of *online communities* may be read as an optimistic sequence of attempts to constitute real approximations to this ideal model. This is far from Habermas’s idea of the Ideal Community of Communication; instead, it is an eccentric and nonhierarchical map of small interconnected cells that follows, if anything, the model of “islands on the net” characterized by Hakim Bey in his conceptualization of the Internet as a Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ).⁹

Within the Internet, this “community of media producers” is often characterized fundamentally as a model of participation, attempting to replace the traditional unidirectional and vertical scheme of emitter-receptor with that of a disseminated rhizome of users. This is the spirit behind the initial constitution of BBSs (Bulletin Board Systems, the precursor to websites and online forums). Within the artistic community, *The Thing* was a pioneer that developed as an instrument of emitter participation. Its very development made evident the problems and challenges plaguing the construction of these online communities, which try to evolve as authentic communities of emitters/participants. For the original BBSs, such as *The Thing*, the difficulty in becoming true communities of emitters/participants became clear as soon as multimedia browsers appeared and the communicative potential of the medium far exceeded the limitations of a mere notice board.

With the Internet we have the ability to develop communities of participants/emitters, or communities of media producers. However, the BBS structure was too limited to carry this out. The new unit of information is no longer the message or announcement, but the website. The issue is no longer how to create alternative, democratic, and participatory “emitters,” but rather to allow anyone who wants to the ability to create their own autonomous and independent emitter. The challenge for the BBSs is to become open internet-service-providers of website hosting, becoming meta-editors. *The Thing* developed quickly into this new condition, becoming a service not only for Web hosting but also for access. Therefore, the user becomes not merely an active receiver—in the sense that this *pull* technology allows for the active selection of content—but also an independent and autonomous transmitter. The dream of a community of media producers seems to be closer than ever. However, the sudden arrival of major communication industries and mega corporations is trying to undo this development.

The End of Utopia: Drowning in Noise

The mass arrival of industrial corporations on the Internet has not created an immediate negative effect on either the costs of access or those of “emission.” The work carried out by those early hosting services (which were encouraging the creation of “communities of media producers”) becomes futile in the face of the generalized cheapening of access and emission (the possibility of personal Web pages) led by large corporations. In many cases, these corporations fund their “generosity” by charging the customer another way, be it through the use and monopoly of software or through increased use of telephone lines. But above all they do so through a surreptitious *appropriation* of the *mechanisms of mediation*. The results are the dissolution of the dream of the Internet as a community of participants/emitters, the creation of a mass medium and its subsequent *portalization*, the saturation of the communicative space of the new medium, and its *drowning in*

noise. Thus, the emerging communities of *media producers* rapidly became mere communities of *media users*. These communities no longer produce their own instruments of emission, given that hosting and access are freely available through portals fighting for “audience” share, nor do they control their own distribution mechanisms. This is now in the hands of the portals, which from this point on will administer the circulation of information in the new communicational space, or at least its main channels.

Whereas the macroindustry emergent around the Internet generalizes the conditions of emission and reception, it appropriates and monopolizes—abandoning any pretension of independence—those of distribution. The immediate effect has been the neutralization of any political quality that was structurally maintained by the early Internet. The emitter no longer owns the channels of emission, and the general effect is one of drowning “in noise.” We can conclude that we are still dealing with a communicational technology that potentially allows for free and independent emission, but for which the mechanisms that grant visibility have been moved to specific nodes focused on mass circulation. Everything else gradually gets lost, segregated to the peripheries. The great strategy of advanced capitalism with regard to the Internet has not been censorship or control of the medium but rather its *megalization* in order to force it into the implacable logic of mass media. The old attempts to construct a “community of media producers” are now facing the question posed by the title of a work by Heath Bunting: “Own, be owned ... or remain invisible.”¹⁰ The issue now is how to instrumentalize independent mediations that make “visibility” possible for those projects that refuse to succumb to the mass-media demands of portals, the realm of the dot-coms. The idea is to intervene in the generation of relational mechanisms of coalition that can guarantee that “any emitter” can effectively reach “any receiver.” To make it so, one must play with *operators of visibility*. Working on *mechanisms of coalition* therefore becomes the central challenge so that the ruthless progress of portals, search engines, and other operators of the new economy do not sideline the objective of constructing communities of communication.

Operators of Visibility/Mechanisms of Coalition (Revised Modes of the Online Community)

The first of these “mechanisms of coalition” is the collective website, which, as environment and as unit of production/dissemination/presentation, allows a group of emitters with common expressive or ideological aims to come together and share resources and strategies. Most of these collective websites were developed as small mechanisms of resource sharing among directly implicated emitters—usually artists or net artists—and were self-promoted and self-maintained. The structures of function are initially minimal, and function through a strategy of *minority* (as promoted by Deleuze and Guattari), always maintaining the ideals of DIY media. This independent model lives on in the structure of Bey’s TAZ, proposing very light and versatile mechanisms that can displace and transform with ease. Nonetheless, the logic of institutional absorption was finally imposed, as the incorporation of *äda web* into the Walker Art Center showed.¹¹ For others, strategies of survival involve the expansion of coalitions in ever-increasing circles, passing from the *molecular* (to use Deleuze’s term) to the *molar*. Thus we see the emergence of different ways to *construct constellations* between different spaces and websites, creating circular structures, or *rings*. Of these, we should mention PLEXUS as a successful example within the artistic field.¹² Within the Spanish–Latin American realm we have *doble_vínculo: una constelación de comunidades web* (Double_link: a constellation of web communities).¹³ A similar approach can be found in an earlier project developed as an e-show in February 1998, with the title *The Post-Media Age*.¹⁴

This type of ring-constellation collaboration, based above all on “reciprocal links,” soon lost its effectiveness with the rise of link maps and bookmark lists, through which each user can make his or her own weblogs and lists of favorites. Collaborative links then required additional “framing”—in

the sense that Derrida speaks of *parergon*¹⁵—through the addition of interpretive mechanisms and guides to reading the groups of links. To a large extent this appeared through the large e-shows that, like traditional temporary exhibitions, were characteristic of net art during its Golden Age from 1997 to 2000. Of these ephemeral exhibitions and “instant museums,”¹⁶ we should highlight *Digital Studies*, organized by Galloway and Greene for Rhizome; Steve Deitz’s *Beyond Interface*, for the Walker Art Center; and *net.condition*, organized by ZKM in Karlsruhe. If the e-show could once be considered just another collaborative mechanism through which groups of artists could raise “visibility” for their work, then the large exhibition organized by ZKM represents the complete absorption of these mechanisms into conventional structures of art exhibition and legitimation, and therefore the disappearance of any communal principle. The e-show is no longer a collaborative strategy, a producer of community, but rather simply one more device through which art institutions and advanced cultural industries can reproduce the structures and complex problems of the *offline* art world.

However, the most important means for the creation of *online communities* is the e-mail forum: the mailing list. We could say that it marks the true emergence of the *online community*. The mailing list is the main—if not the only—mechanism of dialogic interaction, participation, and communication among the members of an online community. We can even say that it has a generative effect: wherever a mailing list emerges, a community can be born. We can list a number of online communities limited to artistic practices conceived and developed for the Web: *nettime* and *syndicate* in Europe; Rhizome in the United States; and *::eco::* in the Spanish-speaking world.

As direct descendents of the original BBSs, these critical forums are based on the free exchange of news and opinions among members. If in their initial moments these forums emerged as spaces for communal interaction free of any kind of “censorship,” it soon became clear that they required some form of filtering. For technical reasons, and also for practical and objective communications issues, it became impossible to maintain open forums. In some cases, such as Rhizome, there was an attempt to maintain some totally unmoderated lists, but the requirements to block spammers and hackers and the need to deal with error messages, returns, etc., soon took their toll. As a result, two types of activity emerged: first, the establishment of different types of lists; and second, the delimitation of editorial control. In *nettime*, for example, different lists were established essentially according to language use, each of which had a fairly stable team of editors whose function was to filter out messages that did not follow the rules.

The second main issue around which mailing-list forums have developed refers more to the selection of subject matter. To take the example of *nettime* again, the subject matter was determined by the self-reflexive aim that had spawned the group: the creation of a mechanism through which a real time critique of the development of *new media* in contemporary society could take place. Therefore, debates on isolated issues of art and aesthetics were excluded, and the inclusion of the political was a natural demand within a group that from the outset accepted the political and social issues implicit in working with communication media.

With Rhizome, the very diversification of the lists favored an increasing distribution and specialization of content. Messages that focused on art with particular reference to online art went to the *net.art.news* list, while those dealing with theory, debate, and politics went to the *rhizome_rare* list. General or undefined messages went to *rhizome_raw*, which remained unmoderated, while those messages deemed to be more important editorially were distributed through the weekly *digest* list. Within this structure, the limits of the mailing-list model can be clearly seen. On the one hand, we have total free expression, generating an incredible amount of noise, while on the other hand we have an editorial model more akin to a magazine and increasingly removed from the participatory and nonhierarchical forum that we identified above as a community of media producers.

Rhizoid Authorship: Collaborative Communities and Copy-Left

We have written the Anti-Oedipus between the two of us. Given that each of us is multiple, it was already too many people.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Rhizome: Introduction*¹⁷

One of the most interesting cases of forums by mailing list leads us directly into the final issue to be considered here, namely, *communities of authorship*. I am referring to 7-11, a participatory mailing list in which the desire to collaborate overcame in practice any intention to “inform.” This was a list in which circulating messages adopted the form of illegible concrete poetry, in a form of resuscitated neo-Dada that transferred the achievements of *mail art* into the territory of *e-mail*, playing above all with ASCII drawings and experimentation with a universal language drawn from the world of programming.¹⁸ The majority of messages were practically illegible, placing all of their *relational* value in the circulation and the exchange of pure signifiers in which writing recovered its status as pure grapheme and prelinguistic sign. At the same time, a complex system of pseudonyms and continual rotation meant that the list had no fixed moderator, and even the identifiers could be modified by the participants. Therefore the identifiers of the list were effectively limited to “nonformat” message formats and the widespread use of green monospace fonts on black backgrounds on their Web archive. Clearly there was little interest among this group in dialogue or rational debate, so the forum gradually became a kind of collective macrowork of net art. The intention was to participate in a communicative game creating a community that did not exist beyond its constitutive acts of communication. It was not only a community of communication but also, simultaneously, a collective body promoting an expressive, participatory, nonhierarchical, and eccentric *authorship*.

It is quite possible that the second great political potentiality of the Web lies in its ability to create collectivized modes of authorship: in practice, eccentric modes of collective identity diffused through a nondelimited dispersion of enunciative operators. This quality constitutes a new political potential, this time in terms of radical experimentation with contemporary modes of constructing identity, far removed from any pretension to essentialize its figures and basing its articulation only on modes of praxis and action—appealing precisely to the *materializing* conditions of discourse, of performative acts of speaking and communication.¹⁹

One of the territories in which this experimentation has been carried out with great success—aside from the development of open and free software, which perhaps constitutes one of the most interesting examples of collaborative experience in the production of knowledge—is *online* artistic production, a field in which many collectives develop their symbolic work, avoiding traditional notions of the “artist-genius.” There is an obvious technical reason for the formation of groups and the “division of labor” within these groups (the case of *jodi* is paradigmatic: artist-designer + IT technician), but beyond this technical need, there is an ideological and political intent that would explain why so many Internet projects result in collective, communitarian, and open practices. In fact, it is almost always the case that the most interesting work on the Internet arises from this kind of molecular structure, which represents the connection of many individual efforts. These efforts run through many different fields of activity, from theoretical debate to technological experimentation. Beyond this, some projects have dealt intelligently with the communal issue by exploring and questioning its critique of preestablished notions of individual authorship. Perhaps the most important aspect to note is that this process of resistance aims at the effective transformation of the economics of art and practices of symbolic production in contemporary society as well as the transformation of authorship to modes of production and labor in information societies. In this

regard, the foundational manifesto of La Société Anonyme is explicit: “Any notion of authorship has been overtaken by the logic of circulation of ideas in contemporary society.”²⁰

The process of questioning authorship—applied in the best cases to the very “collectives” that propose it—refers equally to the profound transformation currently affecting the economies of art in the information society. The logic of distribution of symbolic goods, affected by the potentialities of new technologies of dissemination and articulation of cultural consumption, determines not only the obsolescence of an art market based on traditional notions of presence and originality but also the displacement of the function of artistic practices away from the mystical-magical surplus attributed to it by an anthropological demand, as though the artist were still a tribal shaman. In *information societies* in which *immaterial production* tends to become one of the main generators of wealth, artistic production—or more generally, all symbolic production—begins to occupy explicit areas with regard to the articulation of new forms of knowledge management. In this sense, Walter Benjamin’s formula of the “artist as producer” can be revised into new and rich interpretations, at a time in which the aim of transforming the conditions of production of one’s own medium implies specific positions with regard to one’s specific economy.

At the point where this practice is no longer connected in a hegemonic manner—or at least not exclusively—to the mercantilism of trade in unique objects (and certain modes of public heritage building that cut through the mechanics of collecting and physical exhibitions through a *spatial acquiescence*), works produced on the Internet by collectives involve an experimental exercise that doubly questions these regimes. These practices test, on the one hand, established modes and conditions of production, each time they attack the principle of authorship, and the legalities of *intellectual property*, of copyright. On the other hand, they question modes of distribution, consumption, and public reception, which are no longer limited to trade in the singular or exhibition of the original, but incorporate new economies of production, multiplication, and postmedia distribution in which what is regulated tends not to be property (increasingly irrelevant with regard to *artistic experience*) but rather access to information.

The Coming Community: On the Production of Identity in a Post-Identity Context

Because if instead of continuing to search for a proper identity in the already improper and senseless form of individuality, humans were to succeed in belonging to this impropriety as such, in making of the proper being—thus not an identity and an individual property but a singularity without identity, a common and already exposed singularity—if humans could, that is, not be—thus in this or that particular biography, but be only *the* thus, their singular exteriority and their face, than they would for the first time enter into a community without presuppositions and without subjects, into a communication without the incommunicable. Selecting in the new planetary humanity those characteristics that allow for its survival, removing the thin diaphragm that separates bad mediatized advertising from the perfect exteriority that communicates only itself—this is the political task of our generation.

Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*²¹

And class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.

Edward Thomson, *Making of the English Working Class*²²

The new economies characteristic of Web societies are affecting not only the modes of production and consumption of the *objects* generated and distributed by cultural practices but also the *subjects* themselves—the ways in which effects of subjectivity or *subjection* are generated in them. A profound crisis is affecting the traditional Great Mechanisms that produce identity, such as family, ethnicity, school, fatherland, or tradition, and making them increasingly irrelevant. Without doubt, the spectacular increase in social mobility—geographical and physical but also affective, cultural, gender- and identity-based, determines the decline of these essentially territorial machines. But the most decisive factor is the general absorption of the institutional function by contemporary industries of collective imagination. We can speak of an expanded *constellation of industries* that brings together the industries of communication, spectacle, leisure, and cultural entertainment, and in more general terms all those related to the experience and representation of life itself, and takes charge of producing the subject in as much as it can recognize itself as *itself* among peers, and can administer its differences and similarities within this relationship.²³

Faced with this incredible potential, acquired in contemporary societies by this *mega-industry of subjectivity*, symbolic production practices are being charged with an irrevocably political dimension. As immaterial production and knowledge occupy such a central role in the new economy, their impact, according to Toni Negri, “deeply affects the very reorganization of production on a global scale.” Negri states that increasingly those elements “that are connected to the circulation of merchandise and immaterial services, to the problems of reproduction of life, are effectively becoming central.”²⁴

This is how the domain of the virtual, the *online interstice* on which the Web is formed, defines a territory of experimentation of singular value to test some of the most interesting challenges of our age. One area of attention is without doubt the new economy of the consumption of objects and cultural production, altered by new systems of distribution created by new communications technologies. More significant, however, is the challenge to the universe of identity, the horizon of processes that constitute the social and the subjective. In a world in which the need for an authentic *life of one's own*²⁵ becomes more and more threatening—and therefore more urgent—the activation of these *self-reflexive mechanisms of criticality* being sought through artistic and cultural practices allow one to develop effective processes of resistance in the face of the homologating and deauthenticating effectiveness of the new powerful industries of the collective imaginary associated with mass media.

In this context, and like other territories and mechanisms of *relational work*, the Web will reinforce our ability to articulate versatile and community-generating forms. Constellations of molar units will themselves express *moments of community*, and the tensions of shared experience. Specific vectors of the community of interests, experiences, beliefs, or desires, stretching momentary and unstable lines of code, will be established in the free flows of difference. We are not vindicating a community that can be essentialized under homological notions of identity, but rather inducing fluctuating communal contingents regulated only by the instant and ephemeral expression of *effects of difference*: transidentical, mixed, multiform, and pluricultural from their origins. Eccentric and nonhierarchical constellations of small units disseminated in a capillary fabric of connected vials.

In this new *relational space*, perforated and constituted not so much through its nodes but through the interstices between them, the Web appears as the perfect (*non*)space for the renewed appearance of what Georges Bataille called “the impossible community”: the ever-returning “community of those who have no community.”²⁶ A *community* in which there will probably be no more “subjects” or individuals but instead a mere circulation of transitive effects of identity inscribed in the shared experience of their own *incompleteness*. On the strength of this, the Web may well become the announcement, if not the actual *habitat*, of the “coming community.” By forcing us to

awaken from the despotic delirium of an ancient system, it can become its greatest nightmare. And therefore, for us, the sweetest dream.

Translated from the Spanish by Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro.

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Rhizome: Introduction* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1976), p. 50.

² Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (1990), trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 10–11.

³ Alexander Kluge, conversation with Klaus Eder, “On Film and the Public Sphere,” in *New German Critique*, no. 24 (fall 1981), pp. 211–14.

⁴ Knowbotics Research, *IO_Lavoro_inmateriale*, <www.krcf.org/krcfhome/11Odencies5d.htm>.

⁵ See Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Darmstadt, Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1990).

⁶ Critical Art Ensemble, “Utopian promises, net.realities,” <www.critical-art.net>.

⁷ I take this ironic allusion to TV from the denomination adopted by the Association for Old and New Media, WAAG, <www.waag.org>.

⁸ On the Digital City of Amsterdam, see <www.dds.nl>.

⁹ Hakim Bey, *Temporary Autonomous Zone* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Autonomedia, 1985).

¹⁰ www.irational.org/heath/_readme.html

¹¹ “äda'web is an online-art site or gallery on the Internet. Following its opening in May 1995, it presented (and in many cases produced) more than two dozen artworks and projects designed for Internet viewing. Founded by curator Benjamin Weil, äda'web was headquartered in New York. By the time it closed in February 1998, äda'web was regarded by many commentators as the premier showcase for online art. see at <http://adaweb.walkerart.org>

¹² www.plexus.org

¹³ “Doble_vínculo, una constelación de comunidades web,” <aleph-arts.org/doble_vinculo/>.

¹⁴ *La era post-media* was originally an e-show I curated and presented on Aleph (aleph-arts.org/epm/). Since then, I have developed these ideas in *La era post-media. Acción comunicativa, prácticas post-artísticas y dispositivos neomediales* (Salamanca, Spain: Centro de Arte de Salamanca, 2002).

¹⁵ See Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

¹⁶ I am using Francis Haskell’s terminology; see *The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Rhizome*, p. 7.

¹⁸ ASCII is the international character set. ASCII drawings are made through alphanumeric characters, and have become a major activity. There are Web sites dedicated to ASCII-art, which have been influential on many pioneering net artists, particularly Vuk Cosic.

¹⁹ In the sense that this materializing characteristic of discourse and discursive practices directly affect the production of identity, as argued by Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge, 1990/99.

²⁰ La Société Anonyme, “A Redefinition of Artistic Practices (LSA47)” in *Parachute* (Canada), no. 109 (February 2003).

²¹ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 65.

²² Edward Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), p. 9.

²³ In this regard, one should consider the interesting statements of Pierre Bourdieu on “cultural capital” in relation to the processes of production of *distinction*. See Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979).

²⁴ Toni Negri, “El G-8 es una caricatura; la globalización exige una participación de todos,” interview by Gabriel Albiac on the publication of *Empire*, in *El Mundo* (Madrid), July 21, 2001.

²⁵ See Ulrich Beck, “Living Your Own Life in a Runaway World: Individualism, Globalization, and Politics,” in *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*, Anthony Giddens and Will Hutton eds. (New York: Jonathan Cape, 2000), pp. 164–74.

²⁶ On Bataille’s notion of “the impossible community,” see Maurice Blanchot’s exceptional essay *La communauté inavouable*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983).