

Title: Organized Networks: Media Theory, Creative Labour, New Institutions

by Ned Rossiter
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"Transformation is conditioned by a capacity to become organized." (p.215)

Organized Networks asserts that there is an urgent need for new institutional forms that reflect 'relational' processes that challenge existing systems of governance and representational structures. The argument arises from the apparent inadequacy of modern institutions to respond to the impact of socio-technical networks. Emergent forms are radically dissimilar to the ways in which social relations are organized under the 'moribund technics' of modern institutions (from the University to the State). These older forms, referred to as 'networked organizations', are hierarchical and centralizing despite the rhetoric of apparent inclusion. In contrast, emergent 'organized networks' are horizontal, collaborative and distributed in character offering a distinct social dynamic and transformational potential. The difference is how institutions have responded to developments in networked communications technology and the issue of intellectual property rights: on the one hand, networked organizations using this as a regulatory mechanism to enforce or extend existing power structures, and on the other, organized networks advocating open source culture. If all this sounds rather too neat, there is a recognition of contradictions here, and the book expands upon some of these added complexities, indeterminacy and uncertainties associated with sociality, labour and life in general.

The book is split into three main sections, each with two chapters: the first, addressing the limits of democracy and organized networks; the second, tackling the creative industries, precarious labour and intellectual property; and the third, the virtuosity of 'general intellect' and 'processual democracy' to elaborate on the figure of 'organized networks'. Previous versions of many of the chapters have been published but together they make a powerful interlacing argument for criticism demonstrating a depth of research to highlight the key issues for political intervention in organized network culture (indeed, a companion volume might be Tiziana Terranova's *_Network Culture_*, Pluto 2004). Acknowledging the peer intellectual support of *Nettime* and *Fiberculture* mailing lists, it is perhaps not surprising that Rossiter demonstrates an impressive but familiar range of sources to subscribers (including immanent critique and negative dialectics of the Frankfurt School, the concepts of 'general intellect' and 'immaterial labour' in Autonomous Marxism, and the constitutive role of the outside and immanence in Deleuze's philosophy, amongst others) - taking a transdisciplinary approach that he likens to the collective ethos and protocols of the network itself. The sense of project is clear, passionate and hopeful:

"It is about conditions of possibility, the immanent relation between theory and practice... and a resolute belief... in the concrete potential of transdisciplinary institutional forms that enlist the absolute force of labour and life" (p.17).

The potential to transform social relations is somewhat demonstrated in the socio-technical dynamics of mailing lists, blogs, wikis, content management systems, and so on. But it is the institutional nature of this, as a description of the organization of social relations, that makes it thoroughly political. An example of this is the section on the creative industries where the instrumental ways in which creativity has been exploited in the realm of policy (pp. 98-132). For the argument of the book, the creative industries indicate two aspects: antagonism in the form of the exploitation of creative labour power underpinned by the increasing regulation of intellectual property as a consequence of the drive to commodify collective and communicative practices and knowledge (the appropriation of general intellect); and also, the affirmation of creative labour that holds potential for self-organisation through its networked capacity. By focussing on the exploitation of immaterial or what Rossiter refers to as 'disorganised labour-power', the underlying conditions are exposed but so are new forms of agency appropriate to organized networks. Organized networks represent relative institutional autonomy but not in isolation - they also need to operate tactically, engaging horizontal and vertical modes of interaction:

"The tendency to describe networks in terms of horizontality results in the occlusion of the 'political', which consists of antagonisms that underpin sociality. It is technically and socially incorrect to assume that hierarchical and centralizing architectures and practices are absent from network cultures." (p.36)

Networks are clearly not limitless or without borders, but (like the free market) the situation is far more complex:

"... while networks in many ways are regulated indirectly by the sovereign interests of the state, they are also not reducible to institutional apparatuses of the state. And this is what makes possible the creation of new institutional forms as expressions of non-representational democracy." (p.39)

This is one of the interventions of the book: far from arguing against institutions, the limits of democracy and the discourse of neo-liberalism in general is seen to be the available means to rethink politics within network cultures - and this is what is referred to as 'non-representational democracy' to describe democracy decoupled from sovereign power (citing Virno's *_The Grammar of the Multitude_*, New York: Semiotext(e) 2004). For Rossiter, organized networks offer such an opportunity to develop strategies and techniques of better organization.