

NETWORKED:

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Networks as Sites of Transformation

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Informal street market in Istanbul, photo by Peter Mörtenböck & Helge Mooshammer

When discussing the current shift to networked operations with cultural organisations, ever so often there comes a point where our dialogue partners express the wish to 'secure' their networks, to learn about how to make network affiliations more sustainable. On the one hand, these concerns point to the struggle of institutions to cope with these changes in social organisation and the frustration with the investment of time and energy required to stay in touch with them. On the other, they hint at a crucial misapprehension of the scope of these changes, as networked operations are not just an updated variation of existing power structures, but a radical different way of making connections, coming to decisions and creating possibilities. Moreover, through their indeterminate flow of exchange, decentred flights of participants and unsolicited contributions, networks become transformational spaces, and precisely that is their strength. Networks cultivate a morphological structure for creativity, wherein the productive power consists in a morphological openness, which makes it possible constantly to forge new connections from each of its nodes without necessarily being linked to a legitimising and controlling origin.

In light of this quality, networks can be seen as fluid peripheries organised around a central void. The best way for such a structure to grow and change is if it refuses a

clearly outlined central project. In a deliberate, active process of dispersing attention and obfuscating a middle figure, networks open up paths that circumnavigate a central emptiness. These paths crystallise around something that exists, not as a clearly drawn object, but as an indeterminate region, as a gap that cannot be filled. They repudiate not only their past, but also the clearly defined form of their future as a joint project. Entirely committed to the terrain of the present, structural control and collaboration must be created anew at every moment. Networks are an expression of an ongoing beginning.

This geometry of transformation makes possible an upsurge in spontaneously designed, flexible, temporary spaces, especially in emerging and less stabilised regions in which labour migration, economic deregulation, social separation and religious movement have created a spatial patchwork of migratory infrastructures. Such infrastructures can consist of kiosks and minibuses, prayer rooms and pickup points for day labourers, transit camps and street kitchens, social clubs and local radio stations. New social spaces are not being created in place of or atop existing ones, but in the middle of existing socio-cultural orders. Their modus operandi of networked liaisons creates an expansionary space of transformation – one in which new cultures seize ground. Thus, for cultural organisations to engage in network collaborations may entail the potential threat, and promise, that, through their participation, the very foundation of culture itself, on which they operate, may change irretrievably.