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CREATIVE NETWORK COMMUNITIES IN THE TRANSLOCAL SPACE OF DIGITAL NETWORKS

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Abstract: *What should sociological research be in the age of Web 2.0? Considering that the task of "network sociology" is not only empirical research but also the interpretation of tendencies of the network culture, this research explores the rise of network communities within Eastern and Western Europe in the early Internet era. I coined the term* creative networks *to distinguish these early creative and social activities from today's popular social networking. Thus I aimed to interpret the meaning of social action; the motivation of creative community actors, their main fields of activities and social organization forms; and the potential that these early developments contain for the future sustainability of networks. Data comprise interviews with networking experts and founders and members of various networks. Investigating respondents' motivations for creating online networks and communities, and interpreting those terms, allows for comparing the creative networks of the 1990s with today's social networks and for drawing conclusions.*

Keywords: *network, communities, creative networks, social networks, social dynamic, socio-technical formations.*

INTRODUCTION

It has been nearly 20 years since the Internet became publicly accessible and the first early virtual communities of specific interest groups engaged in online communication. Today, online social networking sites have turned the Internet into an integral communication medium for the masses.

However, new social communication and organization forms, and new social dynamics, in particular, have emerged within the environments of digital networks, yet remain challenging for sociological studies because of their virtuality and invisibility, as well as noninstitutionalized contexts and translocal (see p. 10, below) qualities. Today, many sociologists regard technology as the impetus for the most fundamental social transformations (Wajcman, 2002, p. 347). Additionally, these technologies tend to be understood in terms of technical properties and their relation to the sociological world to be constructed as one of applications and impacts (Sassen,

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2002, p. 365). Examining the position of the Internet in modern sociology and looking at the reasons why a programmatic response to the Internet has proved so hard to generate, Allison Cavanagh argued that "interdisciplinarity, whilst a rich vein for innovation in research, has not allowed a clear agenda to develop" (Cavanagh, 2007, p. 3). Thus, the question remains relevant today: How and what should be studied, or what is the subject of social inquiry within digital networks in the age of Web 2.0 social networking, when an ever-growing number of people around the world are using the Internet and online activities are more integrated into daily life than two decades ago? Saskia Sassen (2002, p. 365) argued that, "the challenge for sociology is not so much to deny the weight of technology, but rather to develop analytic categories that allow us to capture the complex imbrications of technology and society." Other important sociologists agree. "We must treat technologies seriously" (Castells, 2000, p. 4) in order to better understand the new social dynamics created by virtual communities within the translocal space of digital networks. Moreover, Barry Wellman and his associates consider that "understanding the dynamic interaction between new technology and sociability should be a central concern of community research" (Wellman, Boase, & Chen, 2002, p. 152). I agree. Additionally, sociology in the case of network culture studies should not be based on empirical research only, but it must provide as well, referring to Weber's (1922/2002) sociology, interpretation of certain tendencies through understanding the meanings of social action carried out by the actors who are avidly involved in social networking, as well as the processes and impact of certain social actions. Hence, for the point of departure and as the object of my sociological study on network culture, I focus on the early *network communities* that emerged as a process of self-organization within the electronic media space in the early stage of the Internet, that is, in the 1990s.

RESEARCH TERMINOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY

"A community without a network does not exist." (Kluitenberg, 2008, p. 306)

The general term *network* refers precisely enough to sociotechnical formations that have developed as a result of complex interactions between social action and technical properties of digital networks. However, in my research on early network culture, I prefer to use the term *network communities,* despite the fact that the word *community* has different associations in Western and Eastern (post-Soviet) European societies and, based on my experience, may seem controversial or contested today. "In Western societies, community has traditionally been anchored in local, neighborhood interactions and enshrined as a code word for social cohesion" (Wellman et al., 2002, p. 153). In these societies, people (e.g., both, producers and listeners of a community radio) typically share a common history and have developed rather positive experiences in group-like relationships and collective organizations. However, in societies of post-Soviet countries, in which "collectiveness" was not free will but a forced form of social organization, people obtained a mainly negative experience of group-like formations (e.g., collective farming, such as *kolhozs*, which were built by taking away people's property). Thereby, the word *community,* which in Eastern Europe has been used mainly since the advent of the Internet, still has a slightly negative connotation to many.

Yet, the meaning of *community* in Western societies also has changed over time. Wellman and his associates argued that it is not useful today to think about communities as group-like neighborhoods and that the network understanding of communities in modern times has become much more relevant (Wellman et al., 2002). I also do not use the commonly used term *online communities* (Hampton & Wellman, 2002, 2003) in the cases of these early sociotechnical formations of the ’90s. Although the members of these groups used online platforms (e.g., mailing lists), they also felt it important to organize activities in offline spaces. Both formal network gatherings (e.g., conferences) and the informal meetings (e.g., joint dinners and personal conversations) that were hosted during the festivals of the emerging new media culture in various cities in Europe were key elements for strengthening the communities of these networks. Additionally, various collaborative projects and joint activities were organized by these networks, combining both online and offline spaces (e.g., on-site events—performances and conference discussions—that also involved online participants via the Internet).

These early formations also differ from today’s social networks due to various other reasons. During its early period in the mid-’90s, the Internet was used primarily by specific groups of people because a certain amount of effort had to be put into acquiring access to the Internet and in learning how to create and publish one’s own Web site. Moreover, most of these users felt motivated to explore the possibilities of the new communication technology as a means to exchange information, to meet and to communicate with other like-minded people on a global scale, and to establish a translocal collaborative network. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the 1990s allowed the opportunity to establish more active connections between Eastern and Western Europe. Internet access was relatively inexpensive in Eastern Europe; without a doubt, Eastern European artists and social activists were as eager to explore the new cyberspace as their Western European counterparts. Finally, because many of the active network founders and members were primarily artists, theorists, and other creatively thinking people (e.g., open-minded youth and subculture activists, organizers of new media culture events, programmers, hackers, etc.), I have termed these early formations of the ’90s *creative networks.* This also helps to distinguish them from contemporary social networks that emerged within the so-called Web 2.0 social media platforms. Because creative networks are associated mainly with the early stage of the Internet, I also use the term Web 1.0, in opposition to Web 2.0, when referring to the early Internet period of the 1990s.

With regard to methodology, I used case studies as the primary research strategy among several methods. The theoretical overview of network context interpretations and issues regarding the terminology are discussed in this paper as groundwork for the empirical research. To discover the meaning of the social action and the aims and motivation of network participants, I used mainly qualitative methods, that is, interviews with the creative network founders, the most active participants, and experts. In total I interviewed 15 people. With most of these informants, I conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews, whereas the rest were administered either via e-mail or Skype (see Table 1). This was combined with quantitative data analysis, for example, analyzing the dynamics of the respective network mailing lists (Table 2). Another method complementing my research was the analyses of a wide variety of documents, primarily publicly available data from Internet Web sites and mailing list archives, as well as translocal and local network community publications issued in the 1990s. Finally, to better highlight the structure of the network cases studied, I used social network analysis and performed creative network mapping.

Table 1. Individual Interviews with Network Founders, Active Participants, and Experts.

Name	Network/Community /Initiative	Role	Nature of interview	Interview Date	Interview Language
Geert Lovink	Nettime	Founder	E-mail interview	02.Feb.10	English
Pit Schultz	Nettime	Founder	In-depth interview (transcript from audio recording)	30.Jan.09	English
Andreas Broeckmann	Syndicate / SPECTRE	Founder	In-depth interview (transcript from notes taken by this researcher)	05.Sept.09	English
Kathy Rae Huffman	Faces	Founder	E-mail interview	17.Feb.10	English
John Thackara	Doors of Perception	Founder and director	Skype interview	04.Dec.09	English
Armin Medosch	Art Servers Unlimited	Symposium organizer	Skype interview	05.Dec.09	English
Normunds Kozlovs	Baltic Center for Peace		In-depth interview (transcript from audio recording)	10.Feb.10	Latvian
Kaspars Vanags	Open	Founder	In-depth interview (transcript from audio recording)	22.Feb.10	Latvian
Sergejs Timofejevs	Orbita	Founder	Skype interview	11.Feb.10	Latvian
Pauls Bankovskis	Collaborated with E-Lab	Expert	In-depth interview (transcript from audio recording)	23.Feb.10	Latvian
Martins Kibers	Casablanca 2000	Founder	In-depth interview (transcript from audio recording)	15.Feb.10	Latvian
Kristine Briede	Locomotive / K@2	Founder	In-depth interview (transcript from audio recording)	15.Feb.10	Latvian
Janis Garancs	E-Lab	Co-Founder	In-depth interview (transcript from audio recording)	09.Feb.10	Latvian
Alise Tifentale	E-Lab	Founding member	In-depth interview (transcript from audio recording)	11.Feb.10	Latvian

Note. Interviews in languages other than English were translated to English by this researcher.

For this research, I examined and analyzed five creative network cases: three translocal network studies (Nettime, Syndicate, and Faces), one local network case (E-Lab, in Riga, Latvia), and one mixed type (the translocal network Xchange founded by E-Lab but extended globally), although material from other data gathered also informed my analysis. I carried out my research from the perspective of Eastern Europe and post-Soviet Latvia. However, my intent was not to focus on the differences between Eastern and Western societies, which were significant in the ’90s, but rather to develop common ground for contextualizing and examining the important developments of early network communities. Therefore, this research addresses a broad set of questions:

- Which network theories are applicable when studying digital network communities?

Table 2. Messages from Various Email Lists for Analysis.

Mailing List	Date range	Number of Messages	Status of archive	Language
Nettime	October 1995 - December 2009	19,454	Archive is available online (http://www.nettime.org/archives.php)	English
Syndicate	January 1996 - August 2001	11,067	Archive is not available online (data from author's personal, partial archive)	English
Faces	1997 - 2001	±1,200	Archive is not available online (data from author's personal, partial archive)	English
Xchange	December 2007-September 2007	4,478	Archive is available online (http://xchange.re-lab.net/2009/mailinglist/)	English
Rezone (E-Lab network mailing list)	1997 - 2001	±900	Archive is not available online (data from author's personal incomplete archive)	Latvian
7-11	1997 - 1997	400-500	Archive is not available online (data from author's personal, partial archive)	English

Note. Messages in languages other than English were translated into English by this researcher.

- What were the motivations and meanings of social action that lay behind early creative networks?
- What were and are their main fields of activity as well as forms of social organization in creative networks?
- How do the members themselves interpret the ambiguous terms *network* and *community*?
- What are the most important differences between early creative networks and social networks nowadays, namely, between the communities of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 platforms?
- What potential do these early developments by creative networks have for the future development of network culture?

THE NETWORKED PERSPECTIVE: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The networking form of social organization has existed in various times and spaces. Every society consists of multilayered networks that intersect, overlap, and interact in countless ways: on a physical and technical level (e.g., transportation and telecommunication networks), on a social level (e.g., families and community networks), on political and economic levels (e.g., financial and commercial networks), as well as on cultural, organizational, and many other levels. Networks as social relation systems have been implicitly sketched out in the works of such late 19th century authors as Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Ferdinand Tönnies, who described the ways in which social groups formed.

German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1887/2001) counterstated two distinguished social relations—*Gemeinschaft* (mainly characterized by emotional ties, such as family) and *Gesellschaft* (communities based on a more rational and goal-oriented foundation for particular social interests, as in urban culture, for instance). *Gemeinschaft*, in Tönnies' opinion, dominated mainly in traditional societies, whereas *Gesellschaft* dominated in modern societies. Emile Durkheim (1893/1997) also introduced two types of social groups: the mechanical solidarity of traditional societies and the organic solidarity of modern societies. In turn, Max Weber (1922/2002, pp. 271–272), in describing the two main modes of social relationships, called them communal (based on a subjectively felt unity) and rational (based on relations of rationally motivated interests).

Therefore, I suggest that, in terms of social relations, a similar distinction can be applied to network communities: Creative network communities may feature *rational* relationships (i.e., their common goal typically is rationally motivated, e.g., to foster collaboration between Eastern and Western European media artists, as was the case of the Syndicate network), whereas today's social network communities can be associated more often with *communal* relationships (i.e., they are based on subjectively motivated social ties, such as, e.g., among classmates, friends, or relatives).

In the beginning of the 20th century, Georg Simmel (1971) was one of the first sociologists to start viewing social relations as networks instead of just groups. His work thus demonstrated the emergence of individuality within society, and how that societies simultaneous allow and impede individuality development.

Jacob L. Moreno (1934/1977) started studying social networks by using quantitative methods, thus becoming the pioneer of social network analysis and sociometry. Moreno is also author of the earliest graphical representations of social ties that analyzed the role and relationships of individuals in the group or community.

The concept of the network became even more popular with postmodernism, when sociology researchers began analyzing society not as a whole but as a constellation of various structural elements from different perspectives. A few important and more general network concepts were developed in the 1960s and '70s, before the computer communication networks emerged. Nowadays the contributions of such authors as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari are still applied and adapted. For instance, their rhizomatic network concept (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) strongly impacted the development of early network communities. Nevertheless, it was the end of the 20th century, when new information and communication network technologies (i.e., the Internet) were developed, before the term *network* gained not only a new meaning (i.e., no longer just a synonym for the Internet), but also a twofold image. On the one hand, the network is manifest in the form of a digital computer network on a physical/technical level; on the other hand, it has become a virtual social space. In 1996, when Manuel Castells introduced the term *network society*, he basically referred to a new mode of modern society where all the main social structures and activities are organized around electronically processed information networks. Castells argued that, "the new information technology paradigm provides the material basis for its pervasive expansion throughout the entire social structure" (Castells, 2000, p. 500). More than that, he also foresaw that this would be the dominating factor.

In the mid-'90s, the global distribution and public accessibility of the Internet created a new niche for social activities that were self-organizing in various virtual communities whose

members communicated via the Internet. The way in which global digital network technologies opened up new possibilities for community development was analyzed by Howard Rheingold in his book *The Virtual Community* (1993), in which he introduced and conceptualized the term *virtual communities*. Rheingold (cited in Kluitenberg, 2008, p. 307) distinguished two types of virtual communities in regard to their geographical placement. *Translocal communities* form themselves around a shared interest, subject, or theme; they are completely decentralized and spread out around the world. Given that these communities most often are "debating societies" and use the simplest electronic communication options (e.g., mailing lists), their members may be located almost anywhere in the world, given an available Internet connection. Digital network technologies also may be used in the context of geographically localized communities, for which Rheingold used the term *community networking.*

Meanwhile, digital networks also can be used "for strengthening local communications and transactions inside the city" (Sassen, 2002, p. 380). The Internet has also facilitated discussion and mobilization around local issues (Hampton & Wellman, 2002, 2003). Thus globalization and digital networks do not imply losing the aspect of the local; rather, they can be seen as a possibility for the local communities to extend and develop their social action and communication field on different scales: globally (i.e., the worldwide transnational flow of capital and information) and translocally (i.e., local issues embedded within a global context; Wojtowicz, 2002), as well as locally.

TRANSLOCAL NETWORK CASE STUDIES: NETTIME, FACES, SYNDICATE

Mailing lists were one of the first network community forms of social organization during the very early stages of the Internet in the 1970s and '80s. A mailing list is a simple electronic mail (e-mail) program where subscribers (members of the respective network) receive messages within their personal e-mail inboxes, but also are authorized to freely publish their own e-mail messages by sending them to a specific address, which automatically delivers it to other subscribers. In the mid-'90s, when the Internet became publicly accessible, other Internet communication possibilities were limited, for instance, due to low bandwidth; the mailing list was the main platform for online communication and social organization. At that time, mailing lists were used not only for communication, information exchange, and discussion, but also for organizing the field, meetings, and other collaborative activities of respective translocal communities.

This paper is based on research into three early network communities: Nettime, Faces, and Syndicate. For direct quotes from interviews conducted in English, the wording is edited only for clarity; direct quotes from the data are presented in italics. I begin by examining one of the very first creative network cases, the Nettime mailing list.

> Nettime has been widely recognized as one of the leading forums for the discussion and practice of innovative Internet culture and Internet-based art. Its aim has been to bring together different disciplines and practices such as electronic arts, computer science, IT journalism, and media activism. (Lovink, 2002, p. 68)

The launch meeting of Nettime, called <net.time> at the beginning, took place in 1995 in Italy, during the Venice Biennale that was organized by network activists, media theorists,

and the founders of Nettime, Geert Lovink and Pit Schultz. It gathered an international group of activists, artists, organizers, theoreticians, writers, and others with an interest in the new Internet network, net art, culture, and politics. Later the same year, the Nettime mailing list was founded. When asked if Nettime was a network, a community, or just a mailing list, Geert Lovink replied,

> *It has changed over time. It was very much a movement in its early days. Then it became a scene and very briefly, around May 1997, even a group-like thing, but that didn't last long and then it fell apart, step by step. Slowly it turned into a loose collection of mailing lists.* (Lovink, 2010)

In May 1997, the first Nettime conference[1] gathered 120 Nettime participants (of its 400 subscribers) from countries in Eastern and Western Europe in an old school building that housed Ljudmila,[2] the Soros-supported media laboratory (Lovink, 2002, p. 68). Although Nettime organized a few additional significant events over the years,[3] I agree with Lovink's 2010 interview comment that none succeeded in creating anything similar to the Ljubljana conference regarding the sense of community.

Opinions of what a network is and what a community means for Nettime founders differ. From Lovink's perspective,

> *I personally do not like the term community because of its religious connotation, it suggests unity and harmony, which, back then, wasn't the aim. ... I doubt if Nettime ever was a network in the way we use the term right now. For sure it's a loose connection of people that share a common history*. (Lovink, 2010)

Meanwhile, Schultz tells that, to speak of community, the communication should take place in real time and space. According to Schultz, community starts when people can personally meet each other:

> *I totally believe, out of all what can be community, it is ...when [what is] involved is human interaction, which can't be mediated.... What is happening between people in terms of exchange is body and language, which is so rich [that] it can't be replaced with [the] computer and Internet.... Community, I would say, is substantially to do with what we call* meet–space *these days. It deals with time and space and necessity to interact—in real space. I don't want to become too esoteric, but there is [a] difference [in] what people feel when they are together in real space. Maybe there will be technologies in future [that] can replace that, but definitely not now*. (Schultz, 2009)

One can conclude that Nettime never set the goal of establishing a community, which in principle is characteristic to all creative networks. The primary motivation of Nettime was organizing the field through developing critical discourse and a network culture via the Internet.

After the turn of the 21st century, Nettime became only a mailing list, or, rather, a set of mailing lists: Nettime started to operate in versions for Dutch, French, Romanian, and other language communities. Still, the primary mailing list, nettime-l, was (and is) dedicated to discussions in English. The number of subscribers grew rapidly until 2002. The Nettime mailing list consisted of only few people in the beginning (1995). By 1997 its membership had reached 500 people, and grew until 2000, when it reached 2,500 members. Since then the number of subscribers has not changed significantly: In 2011, 2,534 subscribers receive regular postings and 1,345 are subscribed for digest posts.[4]

Regardless of the fact that other social communication forms have emerged along with Web 2.0, mailing lists today, including Nettime, continue to work just as actively as before. Geert Lovink argued that, "*social networking sites are not ideal community tools and do not constitute counter public spheres*" (2010). He explained that social networking tools are good for expanding one's social horizon but not for organizing a field; they are good for promotion and campaigns, but "*they are less suitable as mediators between the real and the virtual. That's what lists do best*" (Lovink, 2010).

Nettime most definitely was, and to a certain extent still is, the heart of the early network culture. During the second half of the '90s, other mailing lists, Nettime's "neighbors," continued to grow and to form around it, including the Faces list, which is a platform for cyberfeminism. Although the open structure of Nettime aimed to involve a variety of participants, even women who had "full online access, good education, and excellent English writing skills could find *Nettime* a difficult forum to crack" (Nettime, 1999, p. 21). Regardless of the fact that a growing number of women use the Internet, there remains a remarkable lack of female representation (Sassen, 2002, p. 379).

Curators, artists, and activists Kathy Rae Huffman and Eva Wohlgemuth came up with the idea of the Faces list in the beginning of 1997, during a conversation at a dinner party in Vienna. Moreover, as Huffman related, "*We were hosting dinners and discussing Internet and technology in general with women curators, artists, et cetera, in several cities*" (2010). Later that year, Huffman, together with new media activists and organizers Valie Djordjevic and Diana McCarty, founded the international cyberfeminist mailing list Faces, which still works actively today. The aim of the Faces mailing list was to create an environment in which it was possible to speak in a more liberated and private way but with more topic flexibility than on Nettime. It was decided that male subscribers would not be allowed in this mailing list. Eventually Faces became a translocal network for women who worked with new media: It includes artists, programmers, disc jockeys (DJs), curators, activists, theoreticians, researchers, academics, and others. In 1997, 30 women subscribed to Faces, and during the following years the number of mailing list subscribers grew to its peak of more than 400 women. Currently, the Faces mailing list includes approximately 300 women, primarily from many European countries, the USA, Canada, and Australia.[5]

Internet communication has become easier, and the cyberpresence of women has slightly increased, particularly with the ubiquitous social networking opportunities. Yet Facebook has not replaced Faces. For sustaining a network—or yet more, a community—it is important, as Huffman suggested, to know the audience of the network, meaning who the people are and what they need. "*I think Faces is much more personal* [than Facebook], *and even if one doesn't post, one feels a loyalty to the idea of it, the tradition of it, and the potential for it to bring new information and ideas between women"* (Huffman, 2010). As both a member and a researcher, I can only agree with Huffman. This mailing list began operation with an emphasis on providing a responsive and friendly atmosphere, and they have been able to maintain that throughout their duration.[6] In my professional assessment, it seems that the merits of the founders of the mailing list are a significant reason why this particular mailing list remains sustainable. Their ability to take care of their community can be compared with the skills of a hostess caring for her guests. During any of the offline cyberfeminist events (e.g., symposiums, conferences, workshops, and exhibitions), meal preparation, and partaking were just as important as discussing the development of the Internet or video- and sound-editing activities. In other words, as Dutch

media theorist Eric Kluitenberg put it, "community results as an emerging property of these networks, but not without a decided effort" (Kluitenberg, 2008, p. 306).

After analyzing the practices, topics, and commitment of the Faces mailing list, it is possible to conclude several things. First, Faces may be considered in terms of the totality of four notions. First, Faces is a mailing list, but it is also a network and a community. Second, in regard to the community aspect, that is, what creates the feeling of community in Faces, most respondents mirrored Pit Schultz's (2009) feelings that community results from human interaction (although they did not concur that community can only exist in real space). Specifically, these informants emphasized that meetings in real space are necessary for an online community to exist. Third, the respondents thought that the responsive and supportive environment that exists in the Faces mailing list also plays a great part in creating a sense of solidarity, thus decreasing the self-representation and competition frequently characteristic of other mailing lists. And lastly, the Faces mailing list has managed to balance its content, which is "*a mix of media art, theory discussion and domestic announcements*" (Faces respondent Melinda Rackham, March 2, 2010). Namely, no duality exists between discussions and announcements, which is a crucial problem in other lists; for example, Nettime list founders decided that the discussions are more important (for developing theoretical discourse), whereas for Syndicate list members announcements (about participation possibilities, forthcoming events, e.g., festivals, exhibitions, etc.) seemed more useful then theoretical discussions.

Another important Nettime neighbor was the Syndicate network and mailing list, which was launched in 1996 and existed until 2001. It was one of the first attempts to foster the cooperation between the Eastern and Western European media art and digital culture scenes after the fall of the Berlin Wall. On an institutional level, the practice of networking in Eastern Europe in the beginning of the 1990s was initiated by the Soros Open Society institutions, such as the Soros Contemporary Arts Center network. Although this latter network developed under the influence of the Soros policy, the Syndicate network was self-organized. Furthermore, the Syndicate network connected, on equal terms, both Eastern and Western European artists, groups, and organizations, all of whom were interested in translocal cooperation with the aim of developing the emerging field of electronic networked media art. But such networking was only possible among people who were online, as explained by Syndicate founder Andreas Broeckmann:

> *In the mid-1990s, it was a very particular group of people who could be involved. And this grew of course, but it meant that people like you and us, we could say, "Ok, we go online," but it means that we deal with technological determinacy and social anti-technologic. So these were people who wanted to discover how these technologies could allow communication.* (Broeckmann, 2009)

The number of Syndicate mailing list subscribers in 2001 reached 500. The main fields of activities of the Syndicate network and mailing list involved information exchange, organization of the network and mailing list, and initiating collaborative projects. Syndicate operated successfully until the summer of 2001, which was a turning point for this network due to three important events, as revealed in my 2009 interview with Syndicate founder Andreas Broeckmann. First, few members attended the Syndicate meeting in Bulgaria and, because of this, members began to believe that the network was created by the mailing list and not the meetings. Second, the list owners could not suppress an aggressive spam campaign on

the e-mail list by a recalcitrant artist-member. And a highly professionally organized exhibition of young Albanian artists marked the third event, which demonstrated a lack of relevant differences between Eastern and Western Europe artistic expression. All three reasons made the Syndicate founders come to the decision to discontinue Syndicate's work in summer 2001. To fill the gap, the new mailing list Spectre was created in August 2001. However, Spectre was solely a mailing list. Broeckmann explained the difference:

> *In the Syndicate days, in people's minds, it was clear who is on the list: Fifty, 60 people, of who at least five knew each other personally, some of them knew even more than 30 others personally. For newcomers [of the Syndicate list], they had a feeling that there is a spirit. Also they realized that there are these meetings during which people talk, and, after meetings, exchange information.* (Broeckmann, 2009)

Such personal communication was important also for those who did not attend the offline meetings, yet it was different from Nettime, which had organized just a few initial meetings. The case of Syndicate's closing demonstrates how fragile networks can be: They are not immune to inner disagreements and attacks, and personal difficulties among the members may tear apart the structure of a network. In 2001, the core participants of the Syndicate mailing list remained the core within the newly created mailing list Spectre. The topics of focus—media art and culture—also remained the same. What did change, however, was that "deep Europe"[7] was the scope of the context, acknowledging that Eastern European as the prime focus was no longer as important as it was in 1996.

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY NETWORKING CASE OF E-LAB AND ITS GLOBAL EXTENSION, *XCHANGE*

Xchange provides an example of the creative network initiatives that emerged in Eastern Europe. This global Internet radio network community was launched at the end of 1997 by E-Lab,[8] a new media artists and network activist group from Riga, Latvia. This community developed in collaboration with other small-scale initiatives, such as sound and new media artists, electronic musicians and DJ groups, community radio activists, and independent journalists, from Eastern and Western Europe, Australia, Canada, and other locations around the world.

Xchange participants were motivated by a particular shared interest: creative experimentation with novel streaming audio technologies. Unlike other creative networks that were discussion and debate societies (i.e., text-based communication), the Xchange community aimed to explore the Internet's social communication through exchanging sound material. With the guiding idea of exploring the "acoustic cyberspace,"[9] Xchange participants organized collaborative Internet streaming sessions throughout the year 1998, which was the most active period of this network. They created a streaming audio loop that consisted of several sound inputs from a different location in the world. The online streams were picked up and remixed by another streaming unit in another location, and then returned to cyberspace. The initiator of these collaborative streaming sessions most often was someone within Riga's E-Lab or its local Internet radio project Ozone. Other significantly active Xchange streaming session contributors were from MZX (Ljubljana, Slovenia), XLR (Berlin, Germany), Backspace (London, UK), Radio 90 (Banff, Canada), and L'audible (Sydney, Australia). The call for joining the

collaborative sessions was announced via the Xchange mailing list, and the live streaming loops were coordinated using Internet relay chat (IRC). What was streamed, in terms of the sound content, could be noise from the microphone, a sound art piece, ambient recordings of the surrounding environment, sirens in the street, a DJ mix, or spoken words, in other words, just about anything. But the content was not as important as the participation. However, the ultimate purpose was the meaning found within the creative communication process itself. Diversity of creative Internet radio initiatives and the sound artist groups involved in Xchange events is represented in the Xchange network map (see Figure 1). The map also depicts which type of initiatives (in terms of form and content) were involved, meaning an online radio project or an FM radio streaming online, a live 24h stream or an online archive of recorded sessions, a live stream from club music or a sound project, and so on.

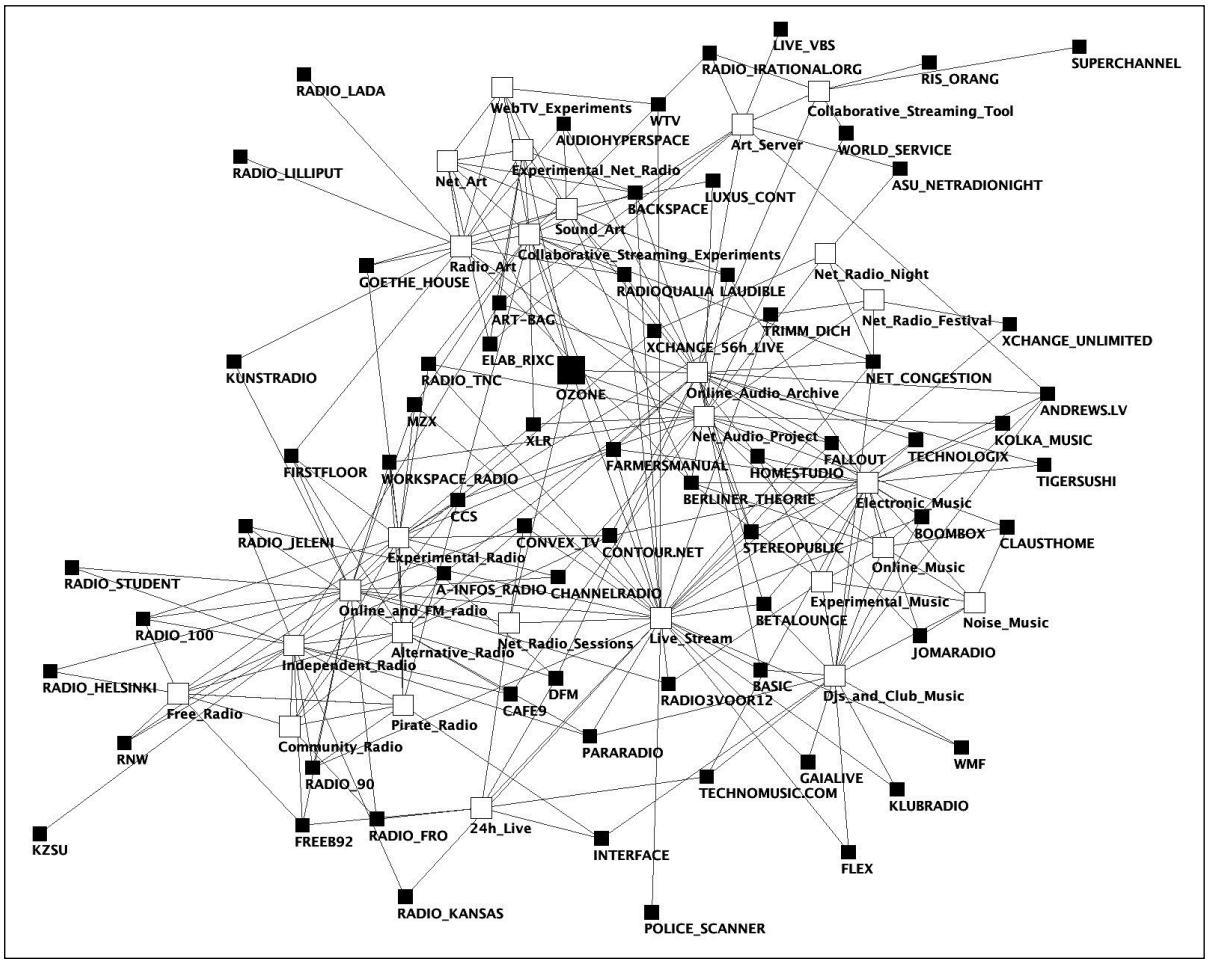

Figure 1. A map of the creative Internet radio network *Xchange*, showing the Internet radio projects, their key participants, and the diversity in their fields of activity during 1996–2000. Data were obtained from *Xchange* Web site in 2012.[10] The black boxes show creative Internet radio and sound artist initiatives who were involved in Xchange network activities, and the white boxes show to which categories (in terms of form and/or content, indicated by its label) each of these groups belong. The map was created with a social network analysis tool developed by Valdis Krebs in conjunction with researchers at the Institute for Informatics and Mathematics at the University of Latvia.

With regard to the community aspect, the Xchange network organized real-time meetings online via IRC that took place in conjunction with the live streaming sessions, thus undoubtedly strengthening its community. However, in line with Pit Schultz's perspective on community, I concur that these events could not replace the offline programs, called net.radio nights, that the Xchange organizers held during various festivals and other international media art events in 1998 and 1999.

However, in 2000, the founders of Xchange and E-Lab turned their interests toward other directions (e.g., experimenting with signals from the Irbene radio telescope, working with satellite technologies, and initiating locative media projects) and stopped organizing online and real space meetings. As a result, the Xchange community slowly dissolved. It remains in network form, although with very weak links that appear through rare mailing list postings.

Nevertheless, during its most active period, Xchange succeeded in creating novel hybrid forms of communication. Although Xchange is considered a creative effort, it lacked any real content because its underlying motivation was pure experimentation in order to become "a global network of *audionauts* festively exploring virtual frontiers" (Lovink, 2004, p. 230; italics added). But when regarded as a social activity, the network became a medium for participation, because participation became a goal (Hyde, 2007), although in a rather autonomous communication space. By exploring such unique features as simultaneity and (remote) presence that exist only in online networked environments, Xchange became an example of new social dynamics.

Obviously the case of Xchange can be studied as a translocal community (similar to Nettime, Syndicate, and Faces). However, because it involved a strong local aspect by being founded by the E-Lab artists group from Riga, it is also interesting to study it as an extension of the local community networking that was developing in Riga and Latvia, in parallel to E-Lab's activities in translocal networks.

New contemporary art tendencies and forms of subculture emerged in Latvia during the mid-1990s. Although influenced by globalization, the artistic outputs were transmitted within various local contexts. The "live" formations of young artists, that is, musicians, DJs, club event organizers, fashion designers, poets, and other young creative people, manifested themselves as a hybrid of techno music culture and experimental contemporary art. One of the "connectors" that not only introduced the techno culture to Latvia but also established new connections between the more active creative people of that time was the Open initiative.[11] "*I think I was looking for my own crowd or environment to fit in and to be in my element. While searching for this, I somehow stirred it all up, maybe even unintentionally*" (Vanags, 2010). The events organized by Open could not be described just as subcultures or techno parties. Indeed, they were large scale and involved a large number of participants and visitors, but they did not amount to being commercial raves. "Altogether these expressions manifested an alternative reality which pointed towards new perceptions, towards fundamental changes in the society" (Kluitenberg, 1999, p. 52). Within such an energy-saturated grassroots cultural environment, the E-Lab initiative emerged and developed in 1996.

From the point of view of organizational structure, E-Lab was an example of an Eastern European artist organization, with its content an electronic art laboratory open and freely accessible to everyone interested. Physically (and locally), E-lab was situated in a tiny room in the Artists' Union building, the laboratory that was equipped in 1997 with its own Internet connection and its first set of computers purchased through a Soros Foundation Internet Programme competition grant. When its first server was installed in 1997 and in conjunction

with the translocal Xchange mailing list, E-Lab established a Latvian-language mailing list, titled Rezone, for the local community to discuss and exchange information on local and international contemporary culture, new media, and urban and club culture events. Thus, Rezone established a bridge between the local and translocal media cultures. The Rezone mailing list still exists with about 400 subscribers and an average of 15 messages per month. The activity of the mailing list during these past 14 years has remained relatively steady, perhaps even growing slightly. Thus Rezone today has proved itself to be one of the most active local mailing lists for electronic art and contemporary culture in Latvia.

However, E-Lab artists viewed the Internet as more than just an information exchange platform or a new media and material for creating artworks. The Internet was associated with a new and unexplored space, where it was possible to implement many ideas that would not have been possible offline or in the mid-1990s, with its post-Soviet society and cultural system. Being overwhelmed with the idea of freedom, openness, and autonomous zones, E-Lab members primarily focused their activities on audial communication, using the early audio live broadcasting technologies that appeared in the Internet (e.g., Real Audio). In 1997 E-Lab established its local Internet radio node Ozone, which, through communicating with other similar small-scale Internet radio initiatives from all over the globe, grew into the global *Xchange* network project. With broadcasting and archiving possibilities, the E-Lab (now RIXC.lv) server today hosts a sound art collection from more than a decade. A collection that includes Internet radio Ozone recordings of live sessions and archived files of early live streams that were provided from different local and international events (festivals, conferences, etc.), as well as collaborative experiments by the Xchange community. In 2009 the Xchange Web site was redesigned into an archive, making its previous works available for future research. The Xchange online archive includes a mailing list archive (with all messages from 1997–2009), sound files (a selection of previously recorded Xchange collaborative broadcasting sessions), and information about the most important Xchange community members.

During the rise of the Internet broadcasting age, Riga and E-Lab, with its experimental Internet radio projects Ozone and Xchange, was described as the epicenter of global network radio, or "something of the World Capital of net radio" (Kluitenberg, 1999, p. 52). By being actively and creatively engaged in the network, the small E-Lab organization with practically no budget somehow managed to find its way into the very heart of an international cooperation network created by artists, theoreticians, and organizers, who were eager to explore the boundaries of the new digital media (Kluitenberg, 1999, p. 52). Thus the local networking case of E-Lab, together with its translocal extension, the *Xchange* network, demonstrates the way in which the potential of digital networks may be used in strengthening social action fields locally, as well as in broadening it to translocal and global scales.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of my research, I draw several conclusions. Additionally, I wish to clarify the main differences between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 communities.

Regarding the meaning and motivation of social action that undergirded the rise of early creative network communities, I have three points. First, such growth requires a well-prepared ground. In this case, the collapse of the Soviet system in Eastern Europe and the

opening of boundaries towards Western Europe facilitated the motivation to communicate and to cooperate on a translocal level, and the new communication technologies (e.g., the Internet) made this possible. Second, an initiator is needed, one who has the ability to assume the role of a connector and who possesses his or her own subjective motivation to establish such networks and sustain its communities. And third, there must exist a shared goal and a common idea that corresponds with the network members' own subjective motivations.

As for the interpretations of the terms *network* and *community* from the network participants' points of view, I suggest that my research supports specific ways by which these concepts can be distinguished. *Networks* refer more to the structure of social ties. In case of creative networks, this means a group of like-minded people with shared interests and loose connections that can be activated, if needed. Meanwhile, *community* refers to a much closer level of personal relationships between and among network participants. Thus, it is possible to talk about a community only in those online network cases or stages of a particular network when meetings of members take place in the physical realm in addition to the virtual communications.

With regard to the activities and forms of social organization of creative networks, the field has always defined these very clearly, with its particular aim recognized and shared by the community members. For instance, during the early stage of the Internet (i.e., the Web 1.0 period), the aims were related to the development of the Web in general and its critical discourse in particular; the social networks were organized around different interests or topics and related primarily to social relationships. However, the main difference between creative networks and social networks—between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 communities, respectively—lies in technological platforms. This is particularly true in the case of Web 1.0, when creative communities were involved in building their own tools and network infrastructure, as compared to Web 2.0, where communities typically use already created, privately owned social media platforms, such as Facebook or Draugiem.lv.

But more than either of these, however, I argue that the important difference lies in the structure of ties and social organization: what and who are linked and in which way. I completely agree with Tiziana Terranova and other contemporary authors who consider that Web 2.0 refers to the transformation phase from the (hyper)linking of documents and individuals to the linking of social relationships (e.g., friends on Facebook or followers on Twitter).[12] Thus it is possible to conclude that Web 1.0 platforms are more about linking individuals (whose shared personal interest is to promote collective ideas) and about creating and linking new media objects (e.g., collective artworks on the Web, collaborative streaming experiments, development of artistic software), whereas Web 2.0 communities are about linking social and/or business relationships between countless people-to-people exchanges, consisting of individually managed profiles on social network sites, numerous posts and comments on blog sites, and the intense activity of uploading and downloading enormous amount of new media objects, such as photos and videos.

In other words, the linking of individuals who collectively discuss the ideas for the advancement of the field (in the case of Web 1.0) has been supplanted today by linking social relationships with invisible input for the common field of interests of a community. For example, Lovink (in his 2010 interview) suggested that "*maybe it is good that there is no* Xchange *on Facebook.*" Perhaps it would not even be possible, for two reasons. First, it was equally important for members of Xchange to be able to create and hyperlink new media

objects (e.g., collaborative streaming sessions resulting in sound loops traveling throughout cyberspace) while, at the same time, to link individuals, that is, community members who were physically located on different continents but who all shared the common goal: to explore the acoustic dimension of cyberspace. Second, because Xchange was a mailing list and not a profile in Facebook, it allowed the establishment of connections and links among people who have different backgrounds, different ideas, and different voices, yet who all promote primarily *collective ideas* and contribute for advancement of the field (i.e., streaming media). Even if Xchange were possible on the Facebook, it would most likely achieve different results: Instead of joint experiments, members would then primarily promote their individual projects because today's popular social media format is built for facilitating self-promotions. Thus, in a way, creative networks can be considered mailing list-based communities in terms of both daily communication and organization of the specific fields of activity; this form of communication may be regarded as a product of the early Internet, or Web 1.0. Yet Web 2.0 platforms can be and are used today by creative networks, but mostly for promotion purposes, that is, for providing information about the community, its members, current and past projects, forthcoming events, and so on. For example, in the case of Faces, their blog is used as a "public face" for this community, whereas the "everyday life" of this community still exists within the mailing list, and not for public consumption.

In short, Web 2.0 platforms are good options for making public the information about the community, its members, and activities, but are not as suitable for developing and promoting collective ideas and organizing the field. This role is much better fulfilled by mailing lists, the key driver of Web 1.0. Therefore creative network communities continue using mailing lists today because, as Geert Lovink noted in his 2010 interview, *"They are bridges between events and the Net,*" just as they bridged the East and West European artist communities in the 1990s.

ENDNOTES

1. The Nettime "Beauty and the East" conference in Ljubljana took place in May 1997 (http://www.ljudmila.org/nettime/) and was co-organized and hosted by Ljudmila Digital Media.

2. In 1994, the Ljudmila (short for Ljubljana Digital Media Lab; http://www.ljudmila.org) was founded by Mitja Domo and a group of Slovenian new artists and activists (Luka Frelih, Marko Peljhan, Vuk Cosić, and others). Throughout the '90s, Ljudmila was an important contributor to East-West European new media art and culture networks (e.g., Nettime, Syndicate). Until 2000, Ljudmila was a key contributor to the media program (later, the Internet program) at the Open Society Institute (OSI) in Slovenia. The network of OSIs throughout the former Soviet Union bloc countries in Eastern Europe was founded and supported by investor George Soros. The aim of the OSIs was to support the development and shaping of democratic governance, social reform, education, independent media, and civil society organizations in these countries so as to encourage participation in democracy and society.

3. For instance, the "Hybrid Workspace" event that was a temporary media lab that operated for 100 days during Documenta X in Kassel, Germany, June–September 1997. It gathered more than 200 participants (http://www.medialounge.net/lounge/workspace/)

4. Data received via e-mail by the author on March 31, 2011from current Nettime moderator Felix Stalder.

5. The Faces community blog on the Internet (http://faces-l.net/) provides additional public information.

6. I became involved with Faces as a result of my interest in cyberfeminist issues in the late 1990s and attended "The First Cyberfeminist International" symposium that took place within the framework of

the "Hybrid Workspace" event series at Documenta X in September 1997 in Kassel, Germany (http://www.obn.org/kassel/).

7. "Deep Europe" was a term used by Syndicate list members to embody the concept of improved connections between Eastern and Western European members.

8. E-Lab—the Electronic Arts Laboratory—was founded by Raitis Smits, Jaanis Garancs, and Rasa Smite in 1996, in Riga, Latvia. On the basis of E-Lab, the Center for New Media Culture (RIXC) was founded in 2000, in Riga (http://rixc.lv).

9. "Acoustic Cyberspace" was a concept used by Xchange. It was developed by Erik Davis, based on a talk he delivered at the 1997 Riga Art+Communication festival.

10. The information source can be viewed from http://xchange.re-lab.net (and was retrieved July 16, 2012).

11. Project "Open" was founded in 1995 by art curators Kaspars Vanags and Ilze Strazdina in Riga, Latvia.

12. This point was drawn from a June 19, 2012, lecture by Terranova, titled "Restart the social: Gabriel Tarde and the Web 2.0," at the Post-Media Lab at Leuphana University. Lüneburg, Germany.

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