Netless

In today's network society, messages, ideas and discourses are generated and diffused within a socialized communication realm, created around digital networks. Communication power has actually become the central power of our era, as Manuel Castells argues. We are at a point where we are not only exchanging information in the interconnected space of electronic communication; we also build our thoughts and beliefs within them. As culture is being integrated more and more into communication processes, power relationships unavoidably are to be found at the points where information exchange is activated and can be controlled. Evolving within, through and by digital networks, the different forms of power exercised, can influence, define or even disrupt our communication, making one need clear; the urge for tactics of resistance that can escape centralization and control.

Danja Vasiliev's *Netless* is a model for a grassroots communication network. It is based on an interconnection of nodes but it includes no central hubs, switchers or gatekeepers. It demands no permanent connectivity and it is not dependent on the internet. Vasiliev proposes a parasitic network liberated from standard data carriers or radio channels, taking advantage of the city transportation infrastructure. The same way a network of buses, trains and trams provides efficient traffic flow for the city inhabitants, information flow can also be facilitated if communication nodes are attached to the transportation vehicles. Inspired by the sneakernet system that allows the physical transfer of removable media, *Netless* invites users to swap data as they are moving around, changing from one train to another during their daily city life. When the nodes attached to the vehicles meet, a shortrange wireless communication session is established and information is exchanged.

The network is therefore activated by the users, their movement and their desire to communicate. It is based on a mesh network topology and on a protocol which is open, inclusive and driven from values and interests, opposed to the ones supported by the main social networking sites. The particular system demands no personal data and keeps no log files. It purposefully does not support any kind of mnemonic function as its aim is to offer an open communication platform that can expand via its nodes, just like an urban transportation system can grow from the city center to the suburbs. At the same time, *Netless* should not be approached as an alternative system for private communication. On the contrary, it is rather a tactical platform for information diffusion in the city environment, allowing messages to spread as a virus, informing passengers or calling them for action.

Netless interestingly offers a model of studying and understanding networks, focusing on users' potentiality. It informs and assists, encouraging users to take the situation in their hands. In addition to his model, Vasiliev invites people to start building their own nodes and take them along in their everyday city travel. Utopian as it may seem, the challenge of escaping control is real. And so can such experiments be. Although power in the network society is asymmetrical, there is still a ground for opposition and resistance. And to succeed, as Bifo has noted we need to consider disobedience "not only with respect to the rules but also to the motivations and expectations of life".

Daphne Dragona, 2012