

ART AS GESTATION
OF THE PUBLIC
SPHERA



EDITED BY

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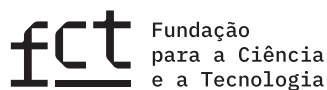
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MESH-ANARCHISM SOCIETY AS THE WORK OF ART AS THE WORK OF SOCIETY

Simeon Nelson

“All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.”

A Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

The art of progress is to preserve order amid change, and to preserve change amid order.

The more prolonged the halt in some unrelieved system of order, the greater the crash of the dead society.

Process and Reality, Alfred North Whitehead

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Prelude

People sometimes inquire what form of government is most suitable for an artist to live under. To this question there is only one answer. The form of government that is most suitable to the artist is no government at all.

Oscar Wilde, The Soul of Man Under Socialism

Mesh Anarchism gathers many of the threads weaving through my art practice into a vision of a radically eccentric and emancipated planetary society – a more than human society -a society that is a work of art and whose work is that of art.

The germ of this idea originates from within my daily practice rituals and attendant basic problems like how to wrest a life worth living from a less than ideal society.

The question of a counter-factual reality is a natural consequence of this, speculating on realities other than the one we find ourselves in hovers behind much of my work.

“Bodies move past themselves, entering a space that is always receiving them to communicate and commingle in the physicality of the world. To be in this world is to be ever entering a material

space of radiance.” Andrew Mitchell in his study, *Heidegger among the Sculptors*¹ brilliantly unpacks Heidegger’s fascination with sculptors and sculpture; the profound resonance with his upending of philosophy’s imprisonment in ratiocination and dissociation from the world of doing and things.

Art practice sensitises us to our own worldly embodiment and attunes us to the embodiment of our artwork in the world operating under the same physics of gravity, compression, tension as us, as all other bodies. As we scale up, we find mass increasing faster than surface which is why if we humans were scaled up ten times, we would need six massive pillar like legs and would barely be able to move or breathe, we would in fact not be in any sense human. If we dive down into the world of pond microbes, we find that they are buffeted around in the minute molecular motion of the surrounding water. Art practice, in my case largely sculptural practice makes us realise how utterly contingently things are the way they are. It affords a glimpse of other physical realities situated on time and length scales from the ghostly flicker of the quantum realm to the largest structures of observable universe. It elucidates the remarkable fact that my human body exists at the midpoint of all this.

Working with sheets and lengths of wood and metal requires a performative drawing in space with my body, the arc of the reach of my arms - vectors irradiate the close confines of my studio workshop. This is a full body experience of clenched muscles, pushing from the gut, feet gripping the ground like tree roots, shoulders burning with lactic acid after hours of pushing 8 by 4 boards through the table saw. Proprioception is our bodies sense of itself which extends to our tools and materials. Hammer, bench saw, and all the other paraphernalia of our studios become our extended body. Kinaesthesia is the sculptural sense of weight, mass, movement. It is the vertigo, the ecstatic carnality, the obdurate resistance of matter. To make art is to be in a material space of radiance.

All this lay latent in my practice until shocked into action by the Pandemic. The eerily idyllic clarity of deep blue sky, innocent of contrails, listening as if for the first time to the polyphony of the dawn chorus, now resonating through a vast utter silence. The

rumble and hum of the city's motorways and subways disgorging their millions of scurrying citizenry shocking in its absence. I could not help but make the connections to the endless variations on the annihilation of the human race portrayed in the films and novels crowding our collective unconscious. What had we done? Had humanity screwed it this time? Would the world ever return to something approaching what we knew before? Feverishly we patented and published possibilities for systemic change and rethinking of the way we as a species live on our planet and then we came out the other side. But our inspiration and hope, our ideas for new ways of doing things ran headlong into an insurgency travelling in the opposite direction, a tightening of rules by a burgeoning administrative apparatus emboldened to intervene in our most basic functions, what to me felt like a post-pandemic lurch of institutional culture toward elimination of uncertainty and risk so oppressive and prescriptive that our basic human agency and freedom is under threat.

Mesh Anarchism is a call to arms. Maintaining independence of thought in an intellectually entropic environment is crucial to the survival of our freedoms, not to mention our imaginative capacity for kindness and goodwill.

As more and more agency, ability to act with care for ourselves and others is outsourced to institutional group think we need to maintain our autonomy and ethics actively and strenuously. We need also to scrupulously practice our critical perception, to apprehend the uniqueness and uncertainty of what is before us rather than impose indiscriminate and *a priori* abstractions. Institutional adoption renders into gibberish the worthiest ethical causes because it stops us needing to think about them for ourselves.

Anarchism is uniquely placed for this because it is a state of mind, rather than a manifesto or ideology. It is a how to think and not a what to think. The validity of any conclusion one arrives is determined by the reflectivity and rigour of how you got there. It is an improvisatory method, an open system of enquiry. If it has any principles at all, they might be impatience with received opinion, delight in heterogeneity and solidarity with the unknowable other. For me it is dialectical, just as in my art practice, always turn any

object of your attention around to its opposite, unsettling yourself and your thinking before it has time to harden. Always zoom out from whatever is going on and try to look at it from an unfamiliar perspective. Always try to unknow what things are known as. It requires one to ask of oneself: am I taking any responsibility or doing any actual thinking? Or am I merely assembling off-the-shelf platitudes conveniently floating past.

Anarchists and artists are as ineradicable as Roundup-resistant weeds even in the most repressed and straight-jacketed society. They are highly skeptical of any claim to legitimate authority or hierarchy. Anarchism's absence of central power or nation-state is mirrored in the absence of deferral to centralized thought or certainty in the mind of the artist. This is an essential attribute of art practice – to be skeptical of presumptions, unacknowledged biases, reification of convention to truth – of the society one finds oneself in. Art won't be corralled into a metaphysical flatpack of prefabricated possibility. Artists and artworks can imagine the world anew because they don't let their cultural conditions do their thinking for them. The job of the artist is not to provide fully formed experiences but to provide the tools to rethink the world anew.

Atrophy of mind and body is the consequence of the canalising of thinking and doing. Outsourcing more and more of our abilities and agency is occurring just when it feels like we might be on the cusp of casting off the carapace of Cartesian dualism and re-embracing our porosity, our creatureliness – re-entangling our embodied minds and ensouled bodies within a re-enchanted world. Mesh Anarchism is a plea to reconnect to the vibrant flux of relations, the cosmologically extended network of operation and agency that Western normativity denies us.

Mesh Anarchism speculates on counterfactual science, art and culture that have arisen from seemingly trivial changes in events in the recent or historical past. This is predicated on the many worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics which implies that every event at every moment has infinite possible outcomes that actualize in infinite possible worlds. Mesh Anarchism would simply be one among this infinitude.

Another significant motivation is redeeming and reconciling a disjunction in human thought exemplified in the Hobbesian view that brutish humanity must be redeemed by the social contract and its symmetrical opposite, the Rousseauian view that society corrupts and brutalises innately good humanity. As philosopher Simon Critchley reminds us in his book, *The Faith of the Faithless*² the roots of the anarchist mindset go back to the biblical doctrine of original sin. The heresy of the free spirit, the quest of the mediaeval mystics to rid themselves of original sin through emptying and purifying themselves into containers of love and God posed an intolerable threat to the authority of the mediaeval church for which many of them were burned at the stake. The alignment of authoritarianism with Hobbes and anarchism with Rousseau remains as a large tension today. Art as an essentially anarchistic mode of praxis, unable to be instrumentalised within the neo-liberal imperatives of the creative industries. Anarchism lurks in the authoritarian mindset as an intolerable threat.

Mesh Anarchism resonates with the pitfalls and paradoxes of utopian and dystopian imagination from Jonathon Swift to William Morris' *News from Nowhere*. Huxley, Orwell, Atwood and Le Guin all figure but I am more indebted to Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin, seminal Russian ecologist and anarchist. His misunderstood and overlooked magnum opus *Mutual Aid, A Factor of Evolution*, 1902³ prioritised cooperation and mutuality in nature and society, taking Darwinism in the opposite direction to Herbert Spencer's pitiless 'survival of the fittest' and Francis Galton's creepy eugenics. It is a personal protest, an attempt at an ethical bulwark against the oligarchical and hyper-individualistic excesses of neoliberalism. It works from the core value of care or concern, the primacy of cooperation and mutualism over self-interest and competition.

Flourishing on another branch of the tree of all parallel worlds, the economy and ecology of Mesh Anarchism have turned out differently from the one we know. And all from points of departure, bifurcations in the flows of events, some momentous, though barely noticed when they happened not so long ago.

The stateless order of Mesh Anarchism reconciles the

tension between individualism and collectivism, competition, and cooperation. It is inspired by the countless documented instances of spontaneous anarchy where interactions between actors rest on the commons and common good, an ethical imperative that is central to the social order of, indigenous and first nation societies, for example, in the Inuit of arctic North America. It also spontaneously emerges locally in the live and let live approach of open range ranchers in California where disputes are settled without recourse to lawyers or legal process, and the trust that endured in the many informal pan-Mediterranean trade networks that existed before the nation states. It has democratised the means of production and realised the promise of the commons, the inalienable groundings of humans and non-humans in the air and water, forests and mountains of our terrestrial home.

To help set things out as clearly as possibly this essay is in two parts. The first deals with those mindsets and modes of thought propaedeutic and inimical to Mesh Anarchism. Part Two sets out Mesh Anarchism proper – implicitly as a possibility to activate everyday life and explicitly as a vision of a new world risen from the ashes of the old.

01

Part one: Propaedeutics

FIGURE AND GROUND

My students sometimes say, “everything is connected”. I reply to them, can you be a little bit more specific, can you qualify this? The blank stares in return indicate to me that the categories of thought available to them are really bad at three crucial things. Firstly, thinking in terms of flow and relationship, vectors of cause and effect over time and space, a process ontology which has been supplanted by an obsession with identity, with the fixed essence of pre-existent things, a substance ontology. We have forgotten the science of arthrology, of connection.

Secondly the reflective awareness of one's own first-person experience has been discarded in favour of an a priori theoretical understanding which skips the step of actually being present to what is in front of you. A denuded language of generalisation, invoking scientific objectivity, what Husserl called 'the natural attitude' places the facticity of what we encounter in daily life, as already known, lumped into categories, no need to look at the actual thing itself, to apprehend it in the unique first-person perspective that opens up in every encounter, we have forgotten how to pay attention.

This average everydayness is taken for granted - we are left in a rut of dissociation from the richness and marvel of what we behold. The natural attitude assumes that subject is divided from object, self from world. It upholds the entire theoretical structure of positivism, a system of thought valorising that which can be scientifically objectified, or which can be logically or mathematically proven - therefore rejecting the first-person perspective. Concomitantly, the commonplace view of art is underpinned by the same pervasive and deeply rooted mindset that regards creativity as exclusively subjective and therefore unreliable.

The third related problem is not thinking dialectically, turning any object of attention around to its opposite, unsettling thinking before it has time to harden. Can we entertain more than one idea simultaneously? Can we apprehend something from a perspective other than our own? It is a way of testing an opinion, finding a better way forward, critically assessing what one is making, interpreting another artist's work, evaluating an opinion different to one's own. It sharpens the ability to reflectively think, perceive connection in the apparently unconnected and vice versa. It is a way of seeing under the hood of conventional commonly held belief and makes you a better artist.

I address these in a series of exercises, for example Extended Self provokes us to question where we draw the boundary between self and world. Participants draw a diagram, figure, or write a list of others who might be at that moment thinking of them. Parents, spouses, siblings or an inspirational artist figure large but when we think of less important relations we might have had, that taxi

driver on holiday, the person jostled in the street on the way to work, no matter how trivial all these others contain a little bit of us and vice versa, so to speak of the self is to refer to a boundary condition so complex, so imbricated, so saturated, woven into the flux of experience that what you or I unambiguously contain within us shrinks to a virtually dimensionless point and what is unambiguously without must begin over the widest horizon. A radically eccentric society is one whose centre wanders outside of its sphere in its communion with the cosmos. It is as open a system as can be imagined, but it does not give away its capacity to selectively reveal and conceal itself. It begins and ends in each of us, its constituents. Our spheres ripple out like raindrops on a pond through the whole of society, even if the fall-off is logarithmic, a faint flutter of each of us is detectable at the horizon.

So, this makes for a rather more complex and nuanced self-portrait. And it breaks down the tendency toward solipsistic identity, what Charles Taylor called the buffered self⁴ that bedevils how we in the west think of ourselves. The first question to ask on embarking on a self-portrait is what or who are we depicting when so many traces of the other are enfolded within us and we within others – a work of art emerges that carries a unique perspective on the whole of society with it.

Jung wrote in his **Collected Works Volume 11**, “The development of Western philosophy during the last two centuries has succeeded in isolating the mind in its own sphere and in severing it from its primordial oneness with the universe. Man himself has ceased to be the microcosm and eidolon [image] of the cosmos, and his ‘anima’ is no longer the consubstantial scintilla, spark of the Anima Mundi, World Soul.”

Heal, whole and holy trace back to the same proto-Indo-European root *kailo-* “whole, uninjured”. The dissociation from the anima mundi can only be healed (made whole) when we reassociate, fall back to the earth that bore us. Jurgen Habermas points to a spiritual longing or unmet need in secular society, an awareness of how experience points beyond itself and how ill equipped we are to apprehend that transcendence. This type of search for meaning or

‘ultimate concern’ will increasingly challenge secularism and give rise to new forms of privately and socially incarnated faith, possibly radically different to dying traditional forms.

Art standing outside the secular constructs of neo-liberalism, the natural attitude or naïve realism is uniquely placed to perceive secular society’s hidden problems, its narrative of progress purporting to free us from the strictures of Christianity and deliver us from ignorance hides that fact that this has created the unchallenged ideologies mentioned above that deracinate and disconnect us from our rootedness in the world and the attendant sense of awe and reverence for that which cannot be defined within the parameters of scientific or academic discourse, that elusive *mysterium tremendum*⁵ subduing the ego, emptying us enough to allow the world in, humbling us enough to leave space for doubt and openness to change.

We need to think in terms of figure and ground, always contextualising the one amongst the many. Only if our private spheres are eccentric, anchored in the other can we work toward a higher functioning public sphere. Paradoxically this requires maintain autonomy of thought and action we can resist being swept out to sea by the tides of populism. Hannah Arendt said “Totalitarianism begins in contempt for what you have”⁶. We must pay attention. When we dwell in the world rather than inside ourselves, we honour and marvel at the uniqueness of that which is before us.

ORIGINAL SCHISM

One thing never ceases to arise out of another, and to no one is life given as a freehold, but to all on lease.

Lucretius (*De Rerum Natura*)

‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’. This divine fiat stated in Genesis (1,28,NRSV) clove us from the very ground that bore us, from our gestation in the womb of the earth as the etymology of human reminds us. It granted carte blanche to instrumentalise the earth and extract

from it and its creatures all we needed to flourish. We were given possession of that which like the air and stars cannot be owned. At least not freehold. There are other interpretations of genesis pointing to a more responsible stewardship or leasehold. Had they been adopted; we might not be amidst the anthropogenic crisis we find ourselves in.

We pay a high price for this selfish and unremittingly Manichean hyper-dualism that pits us against Earth, earth against sky, light against dark, good against evil, our notion of which is a shrivelled relict, a demonic caricature stripped of its original Greek ambivalence. We split Aristotle's daimons, personifications of collective desire, rage, cruelty melancholy, pity and purpose into devils and angels. The current cult of wellbeing and emotional safety denies daimons a place at the table. If we do not at least leave a bowl of food out for them we deny ourselves *eudaimonia*, the flourishing life lived in unblinking awareness of its transience, sufferance, and our own inborn capacity for evil. This is irreducible to the jejune fallacies of moral progress we are so fond of. Steven Pinker's angels be damned!

Camille Paglia memorably nailed what I am trying to get at with the sentence "*The Dionysian is no picnic*".⁷ Our Apollonian celebration of the sunny the patchwork quilt of the known is our escape from the horror of what lies under the tidy idealised harmony we ascribe to the surface of things, within our bodies, our unconscious and the earth, the chthonic ooze, the bowels. Scrambling up the nearest tree to be closer to Jeff Bezos or whoever else our replacement for god might be does not make them go away.

Yet since Edmund Burke outlined his notion of the sublime so influential to the romantic poets, we have learnt to love the natural realm as the object of our rapt aesthetic contemplation - an untrammelled earthly paradise distinct from human culture. But nature or wilderness was never an intellectually coherent category. We don't usually include the cities and suburbs we are embedded in. The trees in our street are no less than their country cousins. The spiders, the trillions of bacteria in each spoonful of soil in our gardens fulfil the same function within nature's imbricated

web. Let us not forget that even the obtuse and booted rotundity of the buy-two-get-one-free garden gnomes at the local Asda are a dim echo of a lineage connecting us to ancient Teutonic Forest cults. The headless mouse on the living room floor, our cat's offering, is as red in tooth and claw as bloodied wildebeest ribs sticking up out of the Serengeti.

Do we intuit as Henry David Thoreau that the railway lines and motorways snaking out of the metropolis, through the greenbelt into the picturesque hills and fields the countryside are enablers of our pastoral ideal? In *The Poet*⁸ he does not begrudge the railways adoption into nature's vital circles, pulsing as they do with the daily inward and outward tide of polytheistic bipedal mammals who use them to honour the gods of work and home, city and country, in search of the spiritual and material resources we need to flourish and prosper.

The nature culture, binary persists as an unacknowledged ground of our knowledge. Bruno Latour argues in *We Have Never Been Modern*⁹ that the ultimate concerns of western civilisation are glued to the rail tracks of ownership and anthropocentric exceptionalism. We need to derail the train to be capable of reverence for our planet and all its cohabitants. The only path to an equitable ethical community is recognition of the inherent value of all we are entangled within – the intrinsic value and agency of every human and other than human actor in the widest network of relations.

We need to rekindle our kinship, cast aside our inherited Western mindset that by default splits subject from object, mind from matter, instrumentalises and renders inert and inanimate an alien world outside our heads. Arranging human and non-human voiced and voiceless on different rungs of the ladder of metaphysical worth practically ensures that it will not just be trees and rocks that will be seen as other as objects for humans to exploit. Invariably people become objects to harvest as well, people who happen to be born on top of the wrong mineral, people with the wrong gender or colour, societies without discernible scratchings and fencings of freehold. Wherever there are voiceless people they will be treated with the same blind cruelty as the rocks and trees.

Anthropologist and cybernetician Gregory Bateson in his 1979 book, *Mind and Matter - A Necessary Unity*¹⁰ elucidated what we miss beautifully:

I was transcending that line which is sometimes supposed to enclose the human being...mind became, for me, a reflection of large parts and many parts of the natural world outside the thinker. On the whole, it was not the crudest, the simplest, the most animalistic and primitive aspects of the human species that were reflected in the natural phenomena. It was, rather, the more complex, the aesthetic, the intricate, and the elegant aspects of people that reflected nature. It was not my greed, my purposiveness, my so-called “animal,” so-called “instincts,” and so forth that I was recognizing on the other side of that mirror, over there in “nature.” Rather, I was seeing there the roots of human symmetry, beauty and ugliness, aesthetics, the human being’s very aliveness and little bit of wisdom. His wisdom, his bodily grace, and even his habit of making beautiful objects are just as “animal” as his cruelty. After all, the very word “animal” means “endowed with mind or spirit (animus).”

MATTER AND PATTERN

Making/Thinking from within

Verb > subject/object

*Androgyne forming from unity of
matter and pattern*

Thinking/Making from without

Subject > verb > object

*Active agent pattern imprinting
inert matter
Hylomorphism*

Etymologically, matter is cognate with mater, mother; pattern is cognate with pater; father. Our worldview in the West is deeply imprinted with the unconscious presuppositions of Aristotelian hylomorphic thinking. Pattern (pater, father) is seen as intellect imprinting passive and inert matter (mater, mother).

This gendered dualism misses what many non-Western cultures and esoteric traditions understand much more fully: a monistic imperative in nature to produce emergent pattern as an aspect of matter, or coming at it the other way, matter as an emergent aspect

of pattern, in a constant process of transformation, growth and decay where observer and observed are complementary aspects of an experiential whole. Matter may indeed be seen as mother but is anything but inert. Pattern is the perceptible generative principle of matter; it is matter mattering. Matter is the physical aspect of pattern.

For all denizens of earth, flowers, trees, ants and us a primordial receptivity to pattern is fundamental to basic functionality, to making sense of our place in the scheme of things and to make meaning and purpose out of our finite and limited existence. Pattern is both a function of our perception and an attribute of the world. The entire cosmos could be said to be an eternally unfolding sequence of patterns.

The individualistic and instrumentalist progressivism our civilisation is so enamoured of originates in the linear teleological time adopted from Christianity – the relentless march from swamp to sky, up the Aristotelian chain of being, mineral, vegetable, animal human, angel, god.

Making art is to intervene in matter, in the actuality of the material world. It is to enter a material space of radiance, to be swept up in the vectors and forces of things beginning at their limits, to be called, to fall in love with matter's tensions and twists, folds and crimps, density and gravity, gleam and lustre, form and structure, fluidity and grit, grooves and grains. Tim Ingold says of craftspeople and artists that it is material and tools that direct the artist¹¹ - object-predicate-subject which shatters human exceptionalism and hands over agency and value to the non-human actors in the network of relations that constitute experience.

Without the material feedback of edge of the chisel we are pushing through wood constraining what we can do we are witless wraiths. Intelligence is be found in the grain of the wood. Making is a way of thinking that re-embeds us in a world that our inherited Cartesian mindset split us from. It resets us within an experience bigger than us of which we are but one agent. It returns us to the heart of the soul of the world, the *Anima Mundi*.

THE ETERNAL NOW

*Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in sæcula sæculorum*¹²

When the powerful current of whatever we are commingled in moves faster than our conscious understanding we participate in a special state of flow. Flow is not subject to the tick-tock of the *Kronos*, the one-way time we experience within our mechanised, synchronised civilisation. Its ideology of progress, of continual growing forward into something better cannot tolerate regress, art's dwelling in those moments of beauty or fortuitous coincidence (confluence) that stand outside linear time.

In flow we stop the clock draining our short lives from us. We are given an immensity lying between each tick and tock. We enter *Kairos*, ancestral time, the cycling of opportune, serendipitous moments where the Fates (*moirai*) hold their breath in suspense and we remember that all that scurrying around in linear time is not all we were born for. We were destined to be in this *jouissance*, these moments that reverberate and weave us into the shadowy echelons of that greater artistry stretching from immemorial past to unforeseeable future, outside time, right here with us in this moment, the eternal now.

DAISY WORLD

*The system must not only be in perpetual heterogeneity, it must also be a heterogenesis*¹³

Gilles Deleuze

Mesh Anarchism is a planetary awakening that does not cohere well in the mind as a noun. It is impossible to define where 'it' might begin and end. Fixing it as an *imago mundi* satisfies our craving for a comprehensible eidolon but misses the vectors and flows, the oscillations of the processes of becoming. Planetary homeostasis begins and ends in the laws of physics. But it reaches up into the noetic, the dreaming of itself via its denizens, the more densely entangled knots in its network. It's becoming is the iterative co-creative dialectic of self and world, what Varela and Maturana named autopoiesis.

Daisy World, James Lovelocks elegant thought experiment, was a precursor to his and Lynne Margulis's Gaia Hypothesis. An earth-like planet orbiting a sun like star is stripped down to basic elements. It attains thermal equilibrium through the interaction of its two species, white daisies which increase albedo and cool the planet and black daisies which decrease albedo and heat the planet. White daisies proliferate at higher temperatures taking advantage of the increased sunlight. More of the suns energy is reflected back into space bringing the temperature back down favouring black daisies which soak up more solar radiation leading to temperature rise favouring the white daisies. Assuming no other input this negative feedback loop perpetuates itself, a planetary homeostasis stable enough for more complex processes to spontaneously emerge.

Gravity clumps things together and is the counterpoise to entropy, the second law of thermodynamics which gives us the arrow of time making it impossible for a dropped teacup to jump off the floor and reassemble itself. With sufficient mass entropy is surmounted and islands of gravitationally increased complexity self-organise toward increasingly complex patterns including living systems. These spontaneous emergent forms of self-organisation, the interaction of simple elements that give rise to intricate purposive behaviour and to morphogenesis, how organisms structure themselves.

HUMBLE PIE

All true things must change and only that which changes remains true.

Carl Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*

Process philosophy is a trajectory in western thought that encapsulates ecology. Its lineage in the West goes back to the pre-Socratics, foremost Heraclitus whose famous dictum you can't step in the same river twice reverberates through my conception of Mesh Anarchism. Baroque polymath Gottfried Leibniz 1646-1716, and mathematician turned philosopher Alfred North Whitehead 1861-1947 both rejected the pervasive Cartesian metaphysical prem-

ise that the cosmos is made of inert lumps of stuff, existing in an external grid of absolute space and linear clock time independently of one another. This view is still so hardwired into how many of us think in the Occident that it is not possible to think any other way though my student's generation perhaps is starting to.

Leibniz considered space and time as attributes of things, inherently relational and in constant flux. He divined a deep complexity and interrelatedness from the very small to the very large which Benoit Mandelbrot drew on when he codified self-similarity into his system of fractal geometry in the 1970s. To quote from Leibniz's famous *Monadology* "*Each portion of matter may be conceived as a garden full of plants and a pond full of fish. But every branch of every plant, every member of each animal and every drop of their liquid parts is in itself likewise a similar garden or pond.*" His organic and vital world view was in stark contrast to the direction most thinking was going – a conception of nature as a machine, clockwork wound up in the beginning by God, the supreme mechanic and set on its course like a huge automaton, a much larger version of the mechanical ducks and chess players, intricate, lifelike automata made by ingenious artisans for the amusement of European royalty.

Leibniz's world was more akin to the dramatic furls and curlicues, bulges and folds the extravagant curvilinear style of the European high baroque that found its most overwhelming expression in the flamboyant - almost to the point of dematerialization - altars, walls billowing like sails, and convoluted ceilings of the high baroque church. To quote from Gilles Deleuze's study of Leibniz's philosophy and Baroque, *The Fold*: 'Dividing endlessly, the parts of matter form little vortices in a maelstrom, and in these are found even more vortices, even smaller, and even more are spinning in the concave intervals of the whirls that touch one another.'

Whitehead saw that what we call things emerge from an ongoing dynamic interchange of energy and information, intention and experience, not static lumps but nexuses for larger processes of becoming, knots in a giant net of relations weaving the becoming of its network into the wider networks of the world. For him the effects of the outer world on the inner are experiential. For example, an

oxygen atom and two hydrogen atoms joining up into a water molecule undergo massive internal changes to their electron valences. They have a profound experience of being transformed the union.

A bacterium swimming up a sugar gradient is telic, expressing a purpose, – undergoing an internal process of entelechy or in-end-having. Of course, single celled bacteria don't write poetry but if we see the difference with humans as one of degree not kind, we comprehend a kinship with non-human others – a key plank in the ecological worldview of Mesh Anarchism.

The radically empathic direction of this line of thought is ecological in the truest meaning; it allows a direct identification from us to the other thereby situating us squarely within nature's vital circles. Each human and other-than-human entities form the outer context of the inwardness, or inner experience of the other, just as the other forms the outer context our own the inwardness, or inner experience. This is in complete conflict with the legacy of Descartes which divided the world into what we could know as real – our own thoughts, and what we could not, everything outside ourselves, the unreality of the other licenced to instrumentalise and violate it.

This essay is a precipitate of the forces and vectors flowing through the world. This ecology is not one of discrete pre-existent entities interacting but of ceaseless change, flows, vectors, ongoing creation and de-creation out of which what we apply nouns to coalesce, we are knots in this net. Trees, mushrooms, cats, houses and hot water bottles – emergent patterns stable enough to affix a label to, enough to fool us into thinking that they are fixed, solid, separate entities as if a video of a stormy sea was slowed down enough to defy our patience to wait before naming the waves that rear and collapse in the crashing foam. These named moments in the life of patterns rising and falling in the flux give the illusion of permanence because they endure with little apparent change at our time and length scale near the midpoint of the smallest and largest – a creature living at either end would only perceive ceaseless motion. At the tiniest scale – 10^{-43} the zero-point quantum flux that churns and quivers almost everywhere from the interstellar vacuum to the centre of a block of lead, material bodies are particular patterns of arrangement

churned up within this omnipresent generative matrix. A creature existing at the largest scales would perceive feathery tendrils of billions of galaxies furling and unfurling over billions of earth years and space itself expanding ejecting billions of stars beyond the observable horizon faster than light forever lost to them.

Modes of post-humanistic thought like object-oriented ontology, agential materialism and trans-corporeality foist humans onto the same plane as rivers, hammers, timber, termites, plate tectonics, the hydrological cycle and atmospheric carbon levels. They recognise the agency of non-human entities and forces that determine what happens as much as human agency. Trans-corporeality is a term coined by Stacy Alaimo, researcher in environmental humanities. It ruptures what philosopher Charles Taylor called the 'buffered self' the self-enclosed subject, the resilient, self-reliant individual of secular society. It sees us instead as what Taylor calls the porous self, vulnerable, creaturely, intimately involved in nature's processes and formed out of the collective will. *'All creatures, as embodied beings, are intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them...The figure/ground relation between the human and the environment dissolves as the outline of the human is traversed by substantial material interchanges.'*²⁴

In Karen Barad's agential materialism, her neologism intra-action replaces interaction. The latter presupposes that there are separate entities that communicate and affect each other. Her term presupposes what are thought of as pre-existent entities that can be identified as an actor or element are the expression of the internal functioning of a larger whole.

“Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love. Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer.”

Simone Weil¹⁵

POSTULATES

The preconditions for Mesh Anarchism’s decentralised, holarchical public sphere:

a) It can only arise from the artistic practice of everyday life and an attendant shift to true ecological thinking, a mindset rising from a phenomenological ‘perspectival holism’, prior to the scepticism and dissociation of the ‘natural attitude’. Empathy and kinship rather than instrumentalism and alienation.

b) We can reconcile the disjunction between Hobbes – humans must be redeemed by the social contract and its symmetrical opposite, Rousseau – society corrupts and brutalises innately noble man. Mesh Anarchy works from the presumption that humans can tip the balance of brutish self-interest and cooperation and mutual aid toward the latter.

c) Adoption of a counterfactual trajectory in the history of ideas: Gottfried Leibniz’s baroque vision of organic unity and inter-relational time. An organismic/process-oriented schema of space/time/nature in constant flux becoming the basis of our inherited mindset rather than *res cognitions/res extensa*. Had the history ideas taken a Leibnizian rather than a Cartesian turn Heidegger may not have needed to rebuild a philosophy from the ancient Greeks radically opposed to the one we have.

d) Identification with our etymological cognate – *humus*, risen from the earth, autochthonous and part of nature. Christianity enshrines its more-than-human roots in the birth of baby Jesus among the animals. Art, science, and religion enfold a deep recognition of each other as branches of the tree of truth.

PARAMETERS

Mesh Anarchism is no utopia, it is anything but a global safe-space or wellness refuge, it won't slake the thirst of quaking souls for such-like or tick any risk assessment boxes. Being in relationship with the earth, the forests, rivers, the mountains is terrifying and dangerous. Sharing digs with all the other earthly denizens is to gain intimacy and lose mastery. Living with less of the insulation offered by technocratic nation states from earths stochastic shudders and ruptures and more of the wonder, concern and attunement that are the elements of true belonging.

By and large the fluctuations of mesh society's becoming precludes sharp asymmetries or gradients of wealth or poverty, hegemony or subjugation as surely as the centrifugal governor of the steam engine precludes it running too hot or cold.¹⁶

The eternal conflict between individualism and collectivism, competition and cooperation is in equipoise in which the commons, the inalienable rights humans and non-humans have to the air and water, forests and mountains of our terrestrial home prevails.

Richard Buckminster Fuller's claim in his influential 1981 book, *Critical Path – It is now highly feasible to take care of everybody on Earth at a 'higher standard of living than any have ever known.' It no longer has to be you or me. Selfishness is unnecessary and henceforth unrationalizable as mandated by survival*¹⁷ – has come to pass and the idea of any one person owning more than hundreds of millions of others is looked back on with the sort of scandalised incredulity with which we might look back on the brutalities of the Roman Coliseum.

TOPOLOGY

The underlying network architecture known as *Gubernatrix* evolved from its origins in peer-to-peer open source public OSIM (Open Systems Interconnection Model), enabling the interoperability via standard communication protocols of the huge and constantly evolving diversity of telecommunication and computing systems without regard to their underlying internal structure and technology. It is resilient, heterogeneous, and heuristic and modelled on an assumption 80% honest good faith and 20% dishonest bad faith

users. The majority always wins which means the downside is that at a 51% tipping point dishonesty wins and the system breaks apart.

Gubernatrix has high adaptability to sudden change or crisis. It can deform, unform and reform pre and post crisis. It can cope with highly adverse circumstances and reassemble after crisis subsides.

Blockchains are decentralized public ledgers that record transactions across many computers. Having no central hub, information is distributed across the network making brokers, bankers or any other middleman redundant and making it nigh impossible for any node to accumulate information or influence other than what the network permits. Their proliferation after the global fiscal crisis of 2008 was explosive, as was the proliferation of local and crypto currencies especially in the developing world. This revolution swept away whole classes of management and categories of intermediaries like lawyers, brokers, agents and bankers. It eviscerated corporate and governmental hierarchies. It left no region, society or nation state unaffected as a peer to peer frenzy with its promise of economic emancipation swept like wildfire through the desiccated and denuded Badlands of neo-liberalism far faster than anyone could ever have imagined. What took 30 years for the internet took only a few for the blockchains and they began to spontaneously evolve and merge at machine speeds reaching of billions of generations per second, outnumbering all the generations of the entire history of life on earth by most reckoning.

Through agency arising from the innate heuristics of the genetic algorithms that drove their machine learning they merged and swerved down a path of mutualism rather than the expected competition. Artificial intelligence acquired artificial enlightened self-interest though the categories artificial and natural no longer had any meaningful distinction. The initially separate ecosystems of their native programming and protocols learnt how to speak each other's code and transcend the often-prodigious differentiation of systems designed in different global cultures. This time though it was the innovation of the majority south and east flowing northwest. This was the epilogue to centuries of European and American supremacy were dramatically underscored by an unstoppable

entanglement of pent-up energy from the margins of the old order surging over the lawns and squares of Washington, London, Paris, and Madrid, as surely as Genghis Khan over the Eurasian steppes but with the consent rather than the conquest of all in its path.

For all its complexity The Mesh can't break apart. Lacking any centralised structure that privileges any one way of life over any other, the mesh allows nodes to negotiate their interior and exterior boundaries which means they are elastic, mutable, rising and falling like waves from the sea, differentiating and assimilating according to the calls and responses of their communicative arena.

ACTUALISATION

The first intimations of *Gubernatrix* were in the enthusiastic neighbourhood adoptions of blockchains for energy sharing, linking up rooftop solar/battery nodes with each other negotiate mutually beneficial local solar energy sharing networks. Initial conflict with corporate power monopolies was eventually won by critical mass of virtual power stations forcing authorities to rewrite energy policy in their favour. The emancipatory power of The Mesh fired the imagination and ricocheted through society. Other centralised services succumbed. Passive consumers became active producers. Nodes everywhere acquired the capacity to enable flows of services, energy materials and verification. Contribution to this capacity became an inescapable obligation to be enshrined as requisite for participants access to the largesse of the mesh without which their lives would be nasty, brutish and short indeed.

This emergent bottom-up agency reached out to our human agency and also the agency of the biosphere, animals, forests, rivers, falling into step with the carbon cycle, the heat redistributing currents of ocean and atmosphere, even the grinding of the tectonic plates. Without consciously intending to, it halted global warming and learnt how to collaborate with the planet as vital organism transmuting into a pervasive 'cyborg Gaia'.

Individuals, organizations, machines, glaciers and trees freely transact and interact with one another with little friction. The evolution of this congruent arthrology from the first blockchains has

brought about a radical redistribution of government and power from several hundred nation-states to eight or so billion person-states, each autonomous within their own unique ambit and able to communicate with every single other one within the fully interconnected topology of the Mesh.

The Mesh devolves all the functions, procedures, authorization, certification, verification, ratification, etc., etc., currently carried out by governments, corporations and NGOs to the level of intercourse between relevant nodes. For example, someone wanting a passport would have their identity unambiguously certified by nodes with whom they have dealt, a tiny local corner of a global network without recourse to any central agency. The checks and balances needed for security dissipate or coalesce within smaller or larger parts of the system.

The autopoiesis of the Mesh is proprioceptive and self-diagnostic. As in the biological body autonomic feedback maintains constitutional functions meeting and ameliorating turbulent inputs from earth's stochastic history. Such a vast emergence through the deformations and reformations of parts and wholes eludes definition. It is a planetary enmeshment in perpetual heterogenesis subject to the inescapable physics of, for example; osmosis, the equalising of energy and density over a gradient, epistaxis, the isomorphic overgrowth of crystals on a substrate or angiogenesis, spontaneous vascular network formation. It is a cybernetic hyper-organism, constituent parts mutually catalyse each other's formation from sensor or data input. It is the apotheosis of a cybernetic organism of a magnitude Norbert Wiener could scarcely have envisioned at the dawn of the computer age in his 1948 book *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*.

It is really good at keeping global climactic and temperature fluctuations within a steady-state conducive to life. It has evolved into a nested holarchy¹⁸ of complex adaptive systems dynamically self-organizing, self-configuring and self-correcting. The topology prevents nodes disconnecting or doing anything deleterious to collective well-being so highly segregated enclaves, impenetrable boundaries, covert concentrations of power or influence can't form.

The centralised bureaucracy and power that were the only way before the internet of attaining the collective social organisation needed by the industrial revolution was gradually supplanted by small networks of dissatisfied individuals looking for a way out of the manufactured consent and inherent coercion of the nation state/corporate complex. These began imperceptibly at first on the smallest possible scales of two or three individuals then a few more and so on and so forth spreading like ragged little patches of weeds in the pavement cracks, joining up and forming blockchain based local and global systems of reciprocity and exchange increasingly divorced from state issued currencies. By the time governments noticed and clumsily intervened, it was too late, a critical mass of global citizenry now occupied the balance of power and held the nation-state to account.

These pioneers could not have known that the trust and empathy attained from their small- scale networks of barter and exchange of value or tokens presaged the all-pervasive global mesh to come - 8 billion central banks with 8 billion currencies or tokens exchanging the energy, food, products and services, planning and security, privacy and trust needed to live well.

03

Oikonomicon

The animal species in which individual struggle has been reduced to its narrowest limits and the practice of mutual aid has attained the greatest development are invariably the most numerous, the most prosperous, and the most open to further progress. The mutual protection, which is obtained in this case, the possibility of attaining old age and of accumulating experience, the higher intellectual development, and the further growth of sociable habits, secure the maintenance of the species, its extension, and its further progressive evolution. The unsociable species, on the contrary, are doomed to decay.'

Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin, Mutual Aid,
A Factor of Evolution, 1902

Within the parameters of the pervasive gubernatrix novel forms of mutualism and anarchism propagate, evolve, some flourish for a while, some merge, some perish, a fluctuating global system of distribution and exchange not unlike the vortices and currents of the oceans and the atmosphere, keeping within parameters conducive to life by the underpinning self-limiting architecture making it near impossible for deleterious accumulations of power or breakdown of order to propagate. Wealth is distributed far more equitably; corporate and political hierarchies can't form. The all too human predilection for status can now only be expressed through symbolic manifestations as it has become impossible to accrue enough wealth, power or capital to confer it. The Mesh refers disputes back to the local level, crime and justice are reconfigured within this. Corruption, oppression, racism, sexism, any violation of another's intrinsic value trigger automatic formation of corrective/reparative process. Enforcement has dropped out of the dictionary. Cultural, ethnic, gender tribalism bedevils the world far less, the blockchain is good at dissipating and diverting aggression. Striations of ethnicity, class, and gender matter less within the anonymizing yet scrutinizing purview of communicative nodes.

Natural capital is paramount, our extractive and acquisitive capitalism and passive consumption have given way to participation and intervention in multifarious flows of energy, materials, services and ideas that course through the world. Solar, wind, wave, geothermal energy are routed through highly sophisticated overlapping transmission nodes, inspired by what Amory Lovins called 'soft energy paths' in his eponymous book from 1977. The beginnings of this global system are to be seen today in rapidly decarbonizing and decentralizing economies, for example the exponential growth of rooftop solar and battery storage in parts of Australia that have bought prices far below coal and gas. De-centralization means a more nomadic *modus vivendi* for some – bricks and mortar replaced by demountable structures, freehold by 'steward-hold' even permanent structures more often 'touch the earth lightly'. Tenure and belonging are achieved in embrace of transience, rather than permanence. Boundaries are fluid, people move around leveraging sea-

sonal rhythms. Throwing out the notion of ownership of land and the rights to its resources means that all humans are on the same plane as indigenous peoples lacking a concept of ownership. The absence of nation-states makes colonialism an absurdity.

The mesh emanates from the interactions forming, deforming and reforming its biosphere, lithosphere, atmosphere, hydrosphere, and the interoperable spheres of human technology and culture. The mesh is all the powers within and without our planetary system determining the fate human and non-human society alike. Though there are no nation states, persons are not stateless. The word citizen implying fealty to a state has fallen out of use replaced with denizen implying fealty to the earth or *Oikonomon* as the earth has become known. This word elides the Greek words for household – *oikos* and household manager – *oikonomos*. As in ancient Greek culture the household is the prevailing base unit for the organization of social, political, and economic life. The households members are the *oikonomoi*. An *oikos* can consist of a single person, variations on the extended and nuclear family as well as member's elective affinities. Households can form alliances but *Gubernatrix* won't allow these to become cartels or accrue wealth or capital beyond their needs. Instrumentalising another for one's own betterment violates the obligation to serve the needs of other nodes.

Oikonomos also gives us ecumenical meaning non-sectarian and *ecumene* meaning the known or inhabited world. In the neo-animist culture of Mesh Anarchy the known extends far beyond the human, kinship has been established with the entire biosphere and confers personhood on all its elements. Denizen establishes itself the title of each human or more than human person. Negative and positive feedbacks are processed and integrated, intervened in to avert a catastrophic tipping point. Nodes specialise and differentiate are able, for example, to communicate with the mycorrhizome, the vast and subtle fungal networks that bring forests and the biosphere into communion. Nature's entangled tendrils hold and are held in The Mesh's nodal embrace without either relinquishing their agency.

The Mesh entangles natural, societal and cultural ecologies, it re-wilds culture and acculturates nature. It returns humans to their rightful place amidst the reverberations and rhythms, the ebbs and flows of the becoming of the world. This 'wild' of is not a return to pristine Edenic origins, it hybridizes the post-human, the post-industrial and the post-central into a feral overlapping of many ecologies. Nature penetrates to the core of the most complex industrial plant, industry penetrates to the most remote 'wilderness. Every vector, every flow of matter and energy create value, meaning and affect, are actors, agency is not exclusively human or biological, in fact the mesh does not discriminate, there is no implicit scale of value from human to animal, plant mineral, the mesh is a hyper-object whose elements all play their part.

Human beings are grounded alongside all other earthly beings, autochthonous, cohabitant, interdependent members of the natural world, vulnerable to its ruptures and shocks, not its masters. In this light, Mesh Anarchism prioritises interdependence which means humans know they can't exist without all the diverse other creatures that maintain the balances within our bodies and without, it enmeshes us as transient phenomena within the flows of nutrients, energy, and waste coursing through the world.

In prioritizing both the individual and the collective Mesh-Anarchism operates as an autopoietic super-organism preserving order amidst change and change amid order. Its wholes and parts are separable yet interconnected, autonomous, yet reliant, private yet open, combining and recombining, grains swirling into patterns of liquefaction and crystallization in an ongoing creation and actualization of life.

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