

Extinction internet

our inconvenient truth moment

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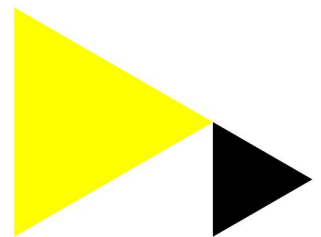
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EXTINCTION INTERNET



OUR INCONVENIENT
TRUTH MOMENT

GEERT LOVINK



Sorry NO

INTERNET Today

EXTINCTION INTERNET

GEERT LOVINK

Extinction Internet is Geert Lovink's inaugural lecture held on November 18, 2022 as Professor of Art and Network Cultures within the research group of Modern and Contemporary Art History, Faculty of Humanities, University of Amsterdam.

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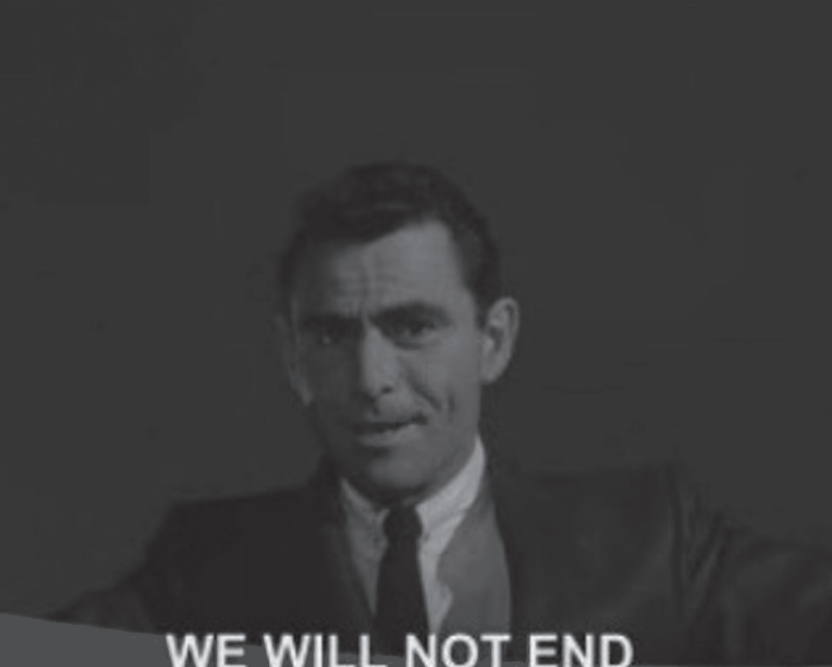
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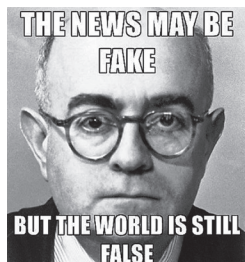
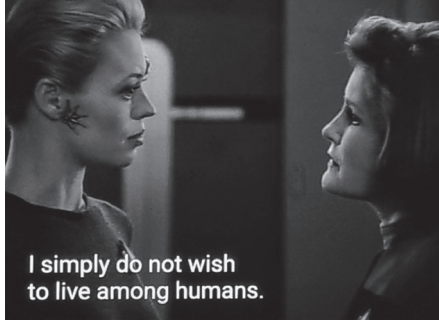
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The logo for the Institute of Network Cultures, featuring the text "institute of network cultures" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The text is partially obscured by a faint, stylized graphic of a network or web structure.





**WE WILL NOT END
THE NIGHTMARE.
WE'LL ONLY EXPLAIN IT.**





FUCK THE SUN

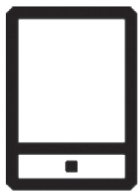
**MAKE
DARKNESS
VISIBLE
AGAIN**



"WHAT CANNOT BE SAID WILL BE WEPT."
Sappho Bot — Blackcap: MAKE DARKNESS
VISIBLE AGAIN — "EGALITARIANISM FOR
THEE, ELITISM FOR ME." — "I WANT AN UN-
VIEW BUTTON TO ERASE RECENTLY VIEWED
TWEETS FROM MY BRAIN." Ben Grosser —
"DO I SEE MYSELF AS INFLUENTIAL? NO.
I WANT TO UNDERSTAND." Hannah Arendt
— "HOW TF A COMPUTER GONNA ASK ME
IF I'M A ROBOT, MF YOU ARE THE ROBOT."
@briantheruller — "WHAT GETS MEASU-
RED GETS MANAGED." Simon Caulkin
— COMMAND: SEND IN THE CLOWNS —
"I REMEMBER DAMAGE." Station Eleven —
"A BRECHTIAN MAXIM: TAKE YOUR CUE NOT
FROM THE GOOD OLD THINGS, BUT FROM THE
BAD NEW ONES." Walter Benjamin — "NO
LONGER 'SOCIALISM OR BARBARISM' BUT
'DEGROWTH OR MAD MAX'." Patrice Riemens

**FIRST
DIAGNOSIS,
THEN
RESTORATIVE
CARE.**

**PHYSICAL,
BIOLOGICAL AND
INFORMATIONAL**



Can today's internet culture withstand entropy and overcome infinite capture while facing its never-ending ending? This is the legacy question left to us by the French philosopher Bernard Stiegler, who passed away in August 2020. There's a programmatic anthology he created entitled *Bifurcate: 'There is no Alternative'*, finished during the first months of Covid-19 and produced right before his death, centred around his work, written in consultation with the Greta Thunberg generation. *Bifurcate* is a blueprint for climate justice and philosophical inquiry, written collectively under the name Internation. To bifurcate means to divide or fork into two branches. In this case it is a call to branch off, create alternatives and stop ignoring the question of entropy—a classic issue in cybernetics. We know the state of disorder in the context of internet critique as the problem of information overload with its mental symptoms of distraction, exhaustion and anxiety, precipitated by subliminal extractivist social media architectures. Stiegler called our condition the Entropocene, analogous to the Anthropocene, albeit an epoch characterised by “the massive increase of entropy in all its forms (physical, biological and informational)”. As Deleuze and Guattari noted, “We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it. We lack creation.” Our task is thus to create a new language to understand the present, with the aim to restrain and overcome the advent of multiple catastrophes, exemplified in my context by the container concept of Extinction Internet.

While Bernard Stiegler and others emphasize that the ecological disaster will have to be theorized across physical, biological and physical levels, the emphasis here lies on the reduction of knowledge to information and its implications for psycho-social habits, practices and dispositions. Over the past years, I have focus-

ed on how the politics and aesthetics of noise and distraction impact our mental state, particularly in the case of the younger generations. Whether such discernments about online anxiety, anger and sadness may contain useful building blocks for alternatives remains to be seen. Lately, I started to doubt my earlier presumption that a critical analysis of the mental misery of platform users was a necessary first step towards organization, mobilization and, ultimately, change.

My generation found out early that the internet, in Derrida's and Stiegler's terms, is a pharmakon: it is both toxic and curative. The critique on its underlying premises, for instance, the Californian Ideology, is thus both a rejection and a proposition. How to bring together analysis and critique into radical, pragmatic networks that can make a difference in terms of research, policy and the development of alternatives? First diagnosis, then restorative care. Two necessary steps to begin the process of healing.

In my case, these ideas go back to two works that defined my intellectual *Werdegang*. First, Klaus Theweleit's *Male Phantasies* (1977) on the German working class' psychic wounds that made them susceptible to Nazi promises to regain dignity. And second, Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* (1961), a classic of the now vanished 'mass psychology' discipline that I studied at the Baschwitz Institute, back in 1983, during the last year of my political science program at the University of Amsterdam, just before the institute was dissolved and merged into the communication science department. Their historic 'Antifa' question is, once again, today's question: how to dismantle the fascist psychic armour? Why are people increasingly susceptible to conspiracy

**DELIBERATION
WILL
NOT
OVERCOME
FASCISM**

**HOW TO DESIGN,
HOW TO LIVE A
NON-FASCIST
LIFE**



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theories, fake news and migration mythologies? Providing correct 'objective' information cannot do the debunking. Neo-positivism gets us nowhere and merely reproduces dominant modes of supremacy. There is a bitter lesson of the past: deliberation will not overcome fascism.

To crack the fascist code was one of many tasks handed to my in-between generation, which grew up in the long shadow of World War II, the Cold War and the legacy of the '68 generation—my teachers. While fascism may have been defeated militarily, at a high cost, its roots remain. During the post-war reconstruction, dominated by the Cold War and class compromise, the roots of fascism were not properly addressed, let alone removed. It is not accidental that the question of how to design, how to live a 'non-fascist life', as Michel Foucault phrased it, came up in the 1970s when recession and austerity returned to the West. Fast-forward fifty years and the question can be rephrased as such: What kind of digital 'technologies of the self' will have to be designed to know ourselves in ways counter to normative regimes? How to live a non-platform life while still enjoying the benefits of social networking?

One of the building blocks for a criticism of the current techno-social state will be a radically updated 21st century version of psychoanalysis. In *The Third Unconscious*, Franco Berardi calls for a psychoanalysis "that should assume the horizon of chaos and exhaustion as a starting point for reflection." He writes that the discovery of the unconscious in the 18th and 19th centuries resulted in the founding of psychoanalysis as both a therapy and a tool for cultural analysis. In response to the emphasis of its founding fathers on denial and sublimation, the

People who liked this



Mount Cook
1222 km South



One Tree Hill
401 km North East

s also liked...



Uluru
4281 km North West



BODY & SOUL

**CAN NO LONGER
BE SEPARATED
FROM THE
SEMIOTIC
INFOSPHERE**

second mode of the unconscious, associated with Lacan and even more so with Deleuze and Guattari, stressed the element of production, not repression but hyperexpressivity. For them, the unconscious was not a theatre but a factory, driven by a “restless pursuit of joy that was ceaselessly evaded, attempts to be a winner, always frustrated by reality.”

Fifty years into the liberation of desire, Berardi proposes a next angle: a third unconscious that circles around an understanding of the techno-social dimension of the mind, in a world that is no longer focused on growth and (schizo)productivity but on extinction, anxiety and degrowth. Ketamine mixed with Insta and live punk. The human mind has reached a state of saturation. Berardi observes and calls for the development of new critical concepts that can help us understand today’s spectrum of mental sensibility and emotional attention. We must practice “riding the dynamic of disaster,” which he calls an accurate description of “our mental condition during the current earthquake, which is also a heart-quake and a mind-quake.” According to Berardi “fascism is essentially a psychotic reaction to impotence and humiliation,” as Theweleit proved earlier in *Männerphantasien*. The seamless transition from Covid into the war in Ukraine, inflation and an energy crisis only further reinstated the collapse of the bio-info-psycho circuit under the weight of the stack of crises. With each shock we move further up and down, browsing the ‘vertical atlas’ of conflicts. In my reading of *The Third Unconscious*, media technologies have entered the body in such a way that the body and soul can no longer be separated from the semiotic infosphere. It is not just the changed physiognomy. Also think of the neurons in the brain that reorganize the very possibility of how we think or the fatigue that we feel in

our eyes, fingers and our whole body after yet another Zoom session. This is how technologies of depletion work in ways that scale across society.

Franco Berardi remains one of the few European intellectuals with a phenomenal seismographic sensibility toward the dark states of the young minds, glued to their devices. Reading the pulse in this way, in tune with Gen-Z—the first generation to experience the internet as a given, a fixed sphere—is something Berardi shares with Bernard Stiegler. There is a shared overall strategy here: a strong belief that society needs to, first of all, face the abyss. This is where political discontent is allocated, at the heart of the social unconscious. Denial will only further accelerate the unfolding crises—but in whose interest? New Age optimism goes hand and hand with control of public perception. This is why the red pill-blue pill is the dominant motif of our time. Instead of further administrating dysfunctional procedures, a way out could be to collectively rehearse—and practice—the playful act of disappearance and reappearance (but without registration).

It is time to incorporate a circular mode of beginning and end, instead of the endless return of the optimization and austerity tropes. According to Berardi, the ‘bio-info-psycho-circuit’ must be processed before we can pass the threshold we find ourselves in. Collective elaboration is needed that deals with “signals, linguistic gestures, subliminal suggestions, subconscious convergences. This is the space of poetry, the activity that shapes new dispositions of sensibility,” expressed in ironic memes, fun videos, dance, and gestures, experienced during moments of ecstatic intoxication that drag us deeper into the vortex of music and image experience.

**FACE
THE
ABYSS**

**WE'VE
PASSED
THE
POINT OF
*DO-GOOD***

**MOMENTS
OF ECSTATIC
INTOXICATION
THAT DRAG US
DEEPER INTO
THE VORTEX
OF MUSIC
AND IMAGE
EXPERIENCE**

**THE SMELL OF
EXTINCTION IS
IN THE AIR**

**PLATFORM
REALISM**

What types of art practices are making the difference here? In my opinion, investigative aesthetics, aimed at mapping the evidence and forging concepts and critique from the reorganization of facts, can only be at the very beginning of a radical transformation process. This will contribute to a wider movement of art history writing and analysis in the arts—a new paradigm, if you will, that doesn't simply replicate the Digital Humanities movement but rather distinguishes itself from that field's tendency to focus on the digitalization of archives coupled with data-driven analysis seduced by numbers, graphs and scale. We've passed the point of do-good 'digital competencies' and are surrounded by the real-world politics of digital urgencies. In this phase, the project of investigative aesthetics never loses sight of the question of power, reorienting the political contest of truth by countering narratives of authority and hegemonic deceit with the veracity of the oppressed—made concrete through computational aesthetics organized along spatial and temporal axes of measure.

Can the 'online self' liberate itself from capture by the vanity marketing trap? Can we experiment with free cooperation and collaboration to escape the cage of the self? How to salvage the 'techno social' out of the hands of Silicon Valley and state control, without falling back into offline romanticism or defensive, inward-looking communalism? This is both a political and passionate project of a multitude of Italian friends with whom I am privileged to work, such as Donatella Della Ratta, Tiziana Terranova, and countless others. The starting point is a compelling dialectical reversal. Instead of portraying the social as a product of grand-scale historical movements, such as capitalism, industrialization, imperialism, patriarchy or colonialism, the social is seen as an original catalysing force,

a sovereign power that itself initiates inventions and new forms of production and reproduction. The social network in our case can then be best described as the real driver of imaginary technologies—which time and again are met with capitalist expropriation—reactive in nature—ultimately forcing the social to surrender. Collectively, we need to reverse this tendency and return autonomy and decisiveness to the social. Despite the defeats, the techno-social holds its transformative power and is anything but a helpless victim. This is an important insight if we want to pre-empt the technological society during this turbulent ‘second oil crisis’, for instance by surpassing energy-disastrous data centres by devising new computational architectures of redistribution that complement the exclusivity of passing around our offline libraries on terabyte drives.

Italians teach us to take this question very seriously: what is the social today? Forty years ago, we would have answered: autonomous social movements. Thirty years ago tactical media communities, twenty years ago social networks and web 2.0 and a decade ago the platform. What do you have on offer, apart from a well-meant call to return to the free software values? On the interpersonal level, Franco Berardi proposes a “psycho-cultural conversion to frugality and friendship.” With my Sydney friend Ned Rossiter, I conceived ‘organized networks’ that we argued have strong ties with a distributed aesthetics, spread over numerous nodes and localities, in contrast with classic network structures that have weak ties and easily fall apart. Organized networks still remain a promise, much like the unfulfilled potential of the ‘internet criticism’ genre. A renaissance of membership to organizations such as the political party as the pathway to claiming political power seems even more unlikely than forty

**INVESTIGATIVE
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**SOCIAL MEDIA
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**“CONVINCE
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THIS IS NOT
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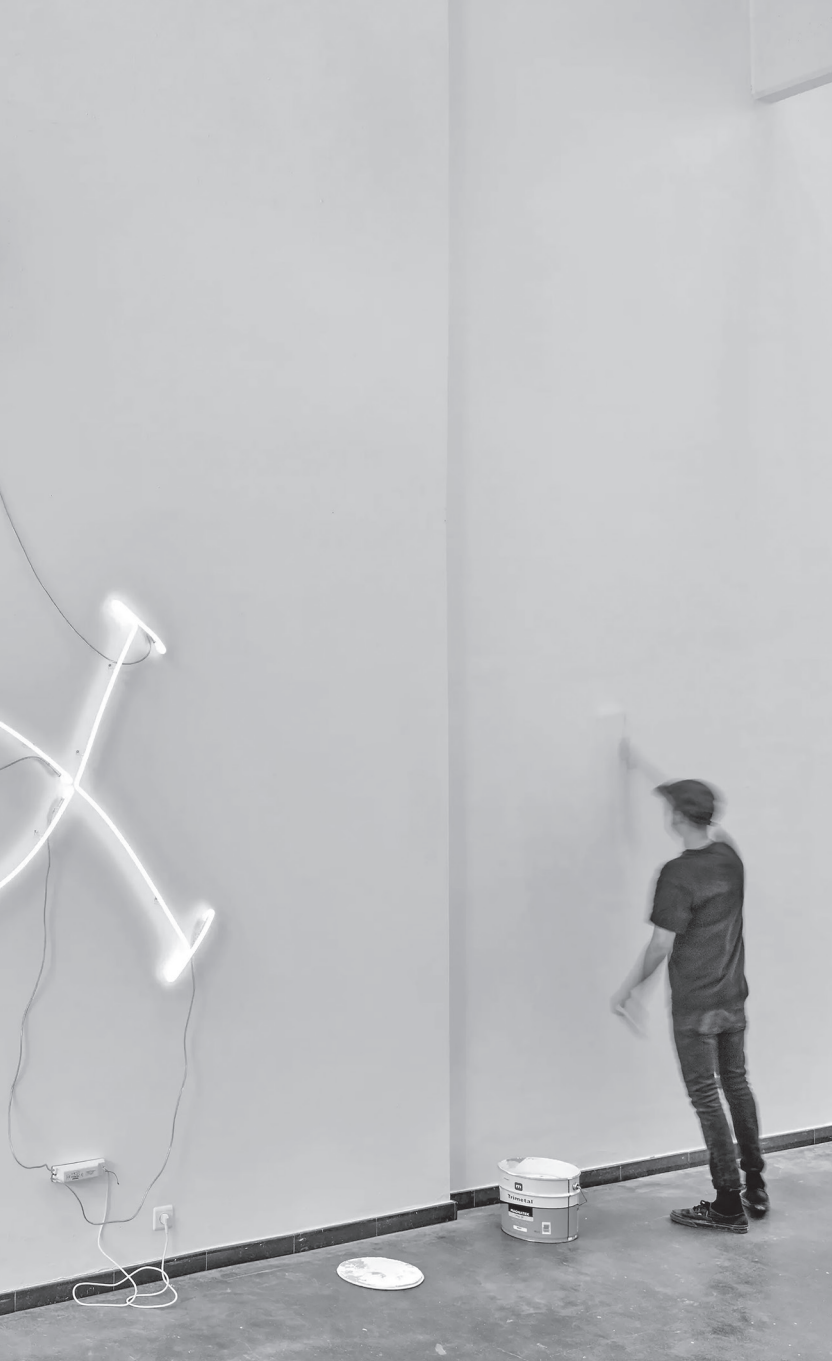
REGINA HARSANYI

years ago when I studied this topic—here at this university. How to transform discontent and counter-hegemony into an actual transition of power in this late platform age? The organization question remains highly relevant, not only for protest movements but also in our context, for artists and designers and other nomadic, precarious workers.

“Convince me that this is not the digital dark age,” Regina Harsanyi declared on Twitter in 2022. The loss of private space feels real. And in many ways, it is. We have been pulled into a virtual black hole. Yet, there is beauty in the breakdown. This is what critical meme research over the past years has taught us. There is an aesthetics of breakdown that internet culture transmits, embodies and reproduces. We rush to write the history of ephemeral online culture, as others will not do it for us. After three decades, there is an even heavier feeling looming that goes beyond the earlier mapping of regression and stagnation including their corresponding dark states. As Brecht once stated: “Because things are the way they are, things will not remain the way they are.” Now, the possibility of internet extinction is raised. This is our Inconvenient Truth moment. Not only have infinite possibilities imploded into platform realism, but we also face the existentially confronting horizon of finitude. Not of TCP-IP or packet switching. Extinction Internet marks the end of an epoch of collective imagination that in many ways demonstrated how alternative vertical and horizontal technological arrangements were possible. Not one stack but many plateaux.

Eventually, the stagnation and recession are mapped out in detail but the task now is to theorize its breakdown. Destruction follows deconstruction. Institutional optimism will not reward anyone for





disaster alerts in the same way internet criticism and its alternatives were similarly ignored in the pre-apocalyptic period. It is time to infuse the cold managerial approach of algorithmic governmentality with Mark Fisher's hauntology. We need to wake up and see that the blackout has become systemic. The nihilist crypto get-rich-quick fads are technologies of the Last Day. What happens after the invisible has been made visible and we overcome the emptiness of thought? The smell of extinction is in the air. Darwinist realism states that it is your choice to stay poor and disconnected, in the cold, the heat, the drought or the flood. It's time for a strike, a strike on optimization. Stop making improvements. No more enhanced efficiencies or increased productivity. It's time to teach problem design. Time to dream up provocatypes.

Let's consult the Substack persona Angelicism01—my nihilist Greta Thunberg—an e-girl poet, theorist and virtual persona all at once, who writes: "The internet is impossible. I don't think about it because it crushes me. A day on the internet is everything. I cannot know if the internet will end. However, I do know that extinction is looming." And: "Extinction changes. Extinction is an exchange. Extinction itself is changing. This is what the change machines are saying. This is what it means to go all the way with change. The internet and extinction are inextricably linked. To experience internet is to experience extinction."

Technics as such does not prevent questioning. Just because we are immersed in a system doesn't mean we are captured by its claimed totality. Social media are designed for doomscrolling. Deautomatization in the internet context would mean disrupting the repetitive habits that penetrate the depth of connected

**EXTINCTION
INTERNET
IS THE END
OF AN ERA**
OF POSSIBILITIES
AND SPECULATIONS,
WHEN ADAPTATION
IS NO LONGER
AN OPTION


**CRISIS
CAPITALISM
PROTEST
CHANGE**

THERE

IS

BEAUTY

**IN THE
BREAK-
DOWN**



Are you Asian or
Chinese?

Im chinese but chinese is
a typo asian so

You just came from
China?

No I was born inst

Dope dope

**STRATEGY
TO OVERCOME
ENTROPY
MAY INCLUDE THE**

**DIS
AUTO-
MIZATION**

**OF
EVERYTHING,**

**FROM A
SOCIAL
MEDIA
EXODUS,
THE DISMANT-
LING OF DATA
CENTRES AND
REROUTING
OF FIBRE OPTIC
CABLES TO THE
DECOMMISSIO-
NING OF SIRI
AND ALEXA.**

**WHAT IS
INTERNET
DEGROWTH,
MACHINE
UNLEARNING
AND
ARTIFICIAL
STUPIDITY?**

**WHAT DEFINES OUR
CURRENT STATE OF
COSMOTECHNICS?**

bodies. There is something liberating about losing one's profile as an act of forgetting. What might occupy the void in our defragmented brains once the internet has vacated the scene? What might life consist of after our fragile minds are no longer assaulted by the numbing and depressing effects of doom scrolling? Post-internet neurons are the realm of a new standing reserve of imagination and reinvention of cognition—the foundational building blocks of society. This was Stiegler's lesson.

Extinction Internet is not merely an end-of-the-world phantasy of digital technology that one day will be wiped out in a blitz second by an electromagnetic pulse, unleashed by a weapon of mass destruction. Extinction Internet is the end of an era of possibilities and speculations, when adaptation is no longer an option. The mourning of the disappearance of the becoming internet started earlier; when the platform closed off the collective imagination. It feels like another internet is no longer possible. The user-as-programmer is condemned to live on as a zombie, mindlessly swiping and scrolling, no longer aware of their own activity. While in the recent past I have described this behaviour as subliminal or subconscious, in the next phase the medium is brain-dead. While a profoundly soporific state is rapidly emerging, our habitual information gestures continue to function in an automated style.


The effort should be to stretch time, to claim and squat the future internet and design autonomous time-space configurations that allow reflection and pointless pursuits to unfold. The post-internet will be sold as an irreversible technology. As a counter strike we need to redesign current systems that are causing the loss of memory and knowledge. The

project here is not just to uphold the internet protocol extinction but also to overcome the related organized depression.

Mark Fisher once wrote: "Crises, whether they be crises of capitalism or of protest no longer produce change; negativity destroys the old but no longer produces the new." In the same way, I had to learn the hard way that neither net criticism nor collective psychoanalysis of the online self would lead to change. Our task will be, to put it in Bernard Stiegler's words, "to put automatisms at the service of a neganthropic disautomization." The strategy to overcome entropy may include the disautomization of everything, from a social media exodus, the dismantling of data centres and rerouting of fibre optic cables to the decommissioning of Siri and Alexa.

Instead of blaming established academic disciplines, we should move on and make an amoral analysis of the current situation, one in which we anticipate that the internet has already vanished. "The internet does not exist," Angelicism01 writes. "Maybe it did exist only a short time ago, like two days ago, but now it only remains as blur, mirror, a doxa, deadline, redirect, 01. If it ever existed, we couldn't see it. The internet has gone, nobody can carry us. When you are not, the space of you still pretends to be." Paul Virilio and Jean Baudrillard taught me early on that there is an aesthetics of disappearance. We need to find out how to stage a radical alternative electronic extinction and not rush to declare: "The internet is dead, long live the internet!" Another end is possible. This will not merely be happening by bombing electric power generators as Russian invaders are doing in Ukraine. Or by installing, removing and reinstalling, one of Elon Musk's Star Link connections. Perhaps

**TOOLS
THAT
DECOLONIZE,
REDISTRIBUTE
VALUE,
CONSPIRE
AND
ORGANIZE**







Me when I use my
phone daily



Me before I
owned a phone



WAITING

FOR

**BRUSSELS
IS LIKE
WAITING**

FOR

GODOT

we have already ran out of time to do fundamental research but the least we can do is facilitate artists—and listen carefully to their cosmotechnic ‘cli-fi’ imagination.

Not just in the biosphere, but also in the infosphere the loss of diversity is entropic and is both sterilizing and fragile, collapsing in on itself. Networking in the service of net criticism, computing in the service of digital detox and alternative app design in the name of data prevention, not just protection. What is internet degrowth, machine unlearning, artificial stupidity? This is how pharmacological thinking and reflection flows can turn into applied procedures of design. The challenge would be, in Stiegler’s spirit, to introduce such improbable and incalculable bifurcations into higher education to implement restorative concepts, protocols and prototypes. Following Anaïs Nin, we can say that the communication channel of our liking “must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us.”

The proposition here is a renewed notion of social networks with an emphasis on caring, tools for intergenerational computation that serve problem-resolution on all levels of the stack of crises. This is embedded thinking in which the question no longer is what we can do with the never-ending stream of downloadable apps that come and go from TikTok, Ethereum, Dall-E, Zoom and Clubhouse to BeReal and their hidden extractivism agendas. Let’s stop building Web3 solutions for problems that do not exist and launch tools that decolonize, redistribute value, conspire and organize. As Bogna Kronior expressed it in a tweet: “I don’t want free speech. I want a web that doesn’t correlate to meatspace and doesn’t turn everything into a popularity contest, narcissism saddled with dopamine addiction. Anonymise it, make

our eyeballs and nervous systems sovereign, no more identity economics. No longer working for the platforms, observed by invisible, distant authorities.”

What is internet degrowth at the moment its user population surpassed the five billion mark? Jean Baudrillard taught us that the information explosion is experienced as an implosion. What happens when smart cities collapse into the black hole of the metaverse, when post-Covid societies are confronted with the refusal of work? What does it mean when we rap ‘speaking truth to the platform’ and create ‘climate propagandas’ videos? What does parrhesia mean in the internet context, beyond the liberal freedom of speech? What are our environmental concerns beyond electricity use of data centres and wildly energy-inefficient crypto-mining procedures?

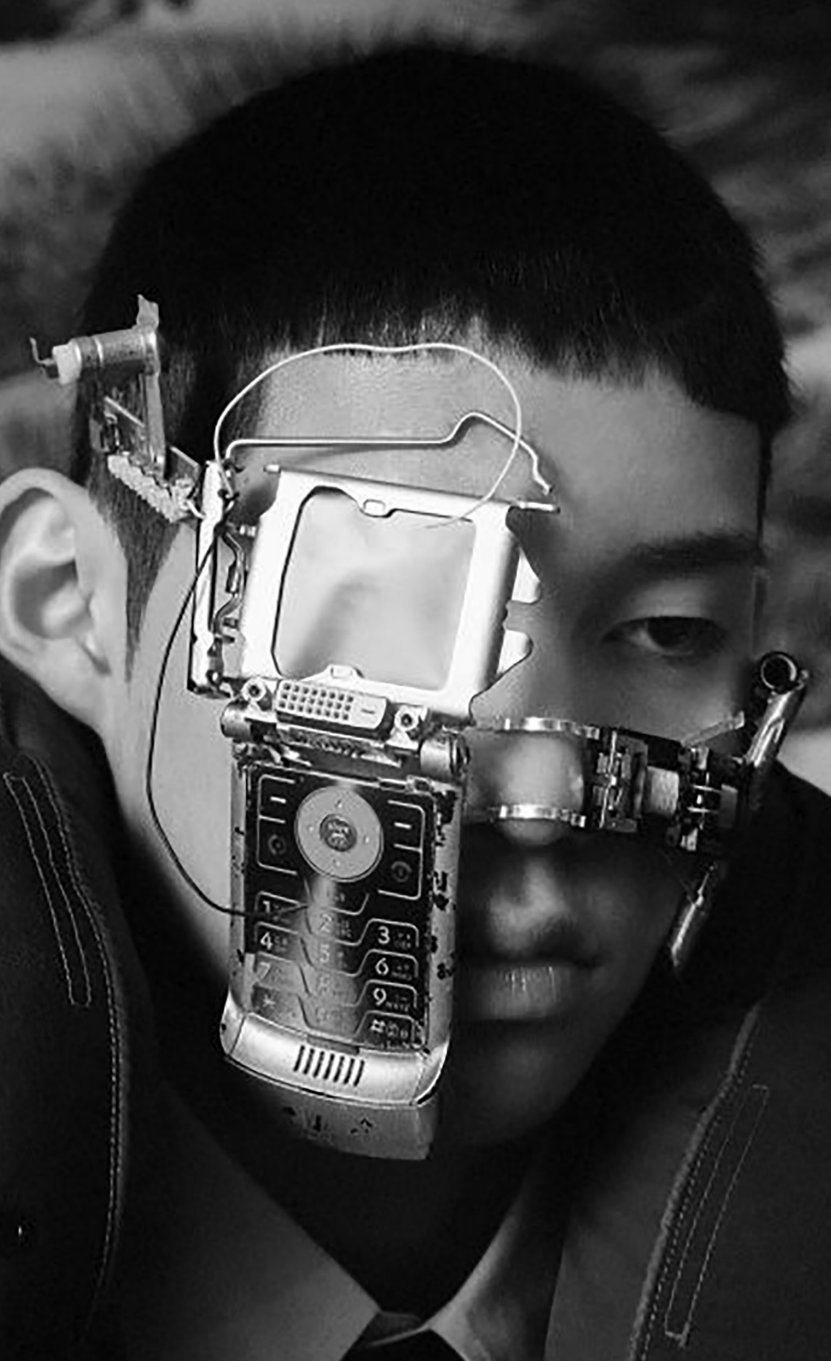
What defines our current state of cosmotechnics, as Yuk Hui calls it, is a disturbing entanglement of acceleration of events, matched with societal stagnation. Cosmotechnics is the case when there’s no longer a return to the naïve stage of globalization possible, paired with a hesitation to resist geopolitical withdrawal. This state of confusion leads to techno-monstrosities, from right-wing libertarian crypto, fake news and deep fakes to biased AI. The expectation that political decisions will steer and tame these technological developments has all but given up. Markets won’t do this either. Together with Pieter Lemmers, Yuk Hui writes: “The truth of our time is a truth to which, according to Stiegler, virtually everyone prefers to close their eyes since it is too traumatic, inconceivable and appalling. It speaks not just about the possible but even the rather likely and imminent end of humanity, or at least of human civilization as we know it.” Even the ‘prepper’ wealthy few who decamp

WALTER BENJAMIN:

**“THAT
THINGS
JUST
GO ON
IS THE
CATASTROPHE.”**







**DURING
THE INTERNET'S
LOST DECADE,
WE'VE BEEN
REARRANGING
THE DECK
CHAIRS ON
THE TITANIC
UNDER THE
INSPIRATIONAL
GUIDANCE
OF THE
CONSULTANCY
CLASS**

**HOW CAN ARTISTS
BE FREED FROM
ADOBE AND INSTAGRAM?**

to bunkers buried in New Zealand, or manage an exodus to outer space, are just as doomed. No one escapes civilizational collapse fused with climate disaster. A species extinction event is an indisputable given.

The ends of the internet as we know it, or even more specifically, the end of network cultures as we known (and studied it), comes even nearer. Over the past decade, the internet has rapidly shifted from a cool and favourable status—being the solution—to being part of the problem, incapable of reversing its own destructive trends. We may have already passed the point of return. Silencing the nonhuman no longer works. How to respond to Douglas Rushkoff's once rhetorical choice "program or be programmed" in a time when open source and free software are morally bankrupt due to their corporate sell-outs and thus no longer appeal to the next generations? What happens when Germans fail to deal with their shit-storms and the French turn to thinking the collapsology? In short, what does it mean when we say the internet has made a catastrophic turn and is beyond repair?

Take Tim Maugan's *Infinite Detail*, a near-future sci-fi story that centres around the kill-switch motive. A cyberattack permanently switches off the internet, bringing on the End of the World as We Know It. The cutting of oceanic cables and attacks on telecoms and data centres are happening as we speak. We are returning to the military origin of cybernetics and the internet, to the works of Paul Virilio and Friedrich Kittler that shaped my intellectual foundations—up to today. While the internet promised resilience, the breakdown is real.

Extinction Internet is about degrowth, putting an end to data extraction and, yes, about moments when screens fall black and doomscrolling comes to an abrupt halt. But it is also a question of emergency design, a radical promise that implementing data prevention principles into devices and apps is still possible, presuming that we soon reach 'peak data' and that current measures such as ethical AI and 'good data' will neither bring about social justice, end racial capitalism nor forestall climate disaster. To put it in post-apocalyptic, sci-fi terms: no solar punk but lunar punk.


At the level of mental states, we have recently mainly focused on platform-induced distraction, reflexive impotence and depressive hedonia, as Mark Fisher called it. This alarming situation is now paired with *solastalgia*, "an emerging form of depression and distress caused by environmental change, such as from climate change, natural disasters, extreme weather conditions, and/or other negative or upsetting alterations to one's surroundings or home." With millions of climate refugees and counting, we're challenged to think together a 'stack of crises' in which platform dependency is only one of many urgent concerns.

The observation that the internet is accelerating the world's problems and is increasingly becoming problematic is reaching consensus status. The presumably 'good' protocols and decentralized nature as a 'network of networks' turned out to be unable to challenge both centralized platforms and authoritarian control and proved susceptible to control and unable to route around real-world politics and treat it as damage, as the 1990s choir sang. While its governance bodies are ruled by well-meaning engineers and telco ministry officials, it is sadly the case that with Facebook and Google holding key positions the chances of a palace

revolution are unlikely. This makes it all the more necessary to draw up road maps with concrete steps on how the internet can be reclaimed. Especially here in Amsterdam, with its fintech hubs and the strategic Amsterdam Internet Exchange (and its funky buildings). After all, waiting for Brussels is like waiting for Godot. Additionally, how can universities be freed from their Google and Microsoft dependency—and how can artists be freed from Adobe and Instagram?

In the conclusion of *Stuck on the Platform* I mapped out how a platform exodus could be undertaken. I used the term ‘stacktivism’ for this, a form of internet activism which becomes aware of the interrelated dependencies of its proposed alternatives and its layered shape, from public repositories, decentralized infrastructures and open, free software operating systems to non-manipulative interfaces, AI filters to deliberative decision-making forums. The effort should be to stretch, to open up time, to claim and design autonomous time-space configurations that allow reflection to unfold. Crucially, this is neither obscure nor utopian. Indeed I reject the global fantasies of ‘planetary computation’ and ‘terraforming’, promoted by Benjamin Bratton, author of *The Stack*, or the metaphysics of so-called ‘digital theory’.

So how can we ‘disrupt the disrupters’? First, we need to make sure our concepts and blueprints can be scaled up and adopted. This is for instance the case with the transition from an extractivist business model to what Bernard Stiegler and collaborators called a ‘contributory economy’. This is one in which peer-to-peer payments add to an overall sustainable circular economy that is operating for both local and global redistribution of wealth and resources. I argue that this is the decolonial dimension of the Information



**enthusiastic
proactive
team player
result-driven
resilient**

Question, an area needing more work related to the carbon footprint, rare earth extraction and e-waste issues of the digital.

As Michael Marder's *Philosophy for Passengers* states: "After the voyage in the world ends, the journey of understanding begins." *Understanding Internet*. Our task as theorists, artists, activists, designers, developers, critics and other irregulars will be to go beyond the breakdown and develop a radical modesty regarding digital potentials. We need to bifurcate so that we can move towards new horizons, opening a path to what Stiegler calls the Neganthropocene. Compared to the unfolding climate disaster and growing social inequality, the computational challenge to get there is relatively minor. After all, code can be rewritten, new operating systems built, cables and signals rerouted, data centres decentralized and public infrastructures installed.

As Walter Benjamin observed: "that things just go on is the catastrophe." The issue here is not that the internet collapses overnight—and if it doesn't that the extinction thesis has been somehow falsified. There are already enough electricity outages in the world, as I am reminded by my friends in Ukraine. Besides 'load shedding,' there are the filters, paywalls, algorithms and AI, state censorship, hacks, failing patches and content moderation, all conducted by cheap labour. There will be more and more 'improbable events' beyond the previous hacker-cyberwar category. This post-natural world is about to make strange jumps and leaps. The cosmotechnical uncanny will surprise those that believe in smooth and stable connectivity. But what's really at stake here is a collapse of the collective imagination of a technology that is playing such a pivotal role in the everyday life of billions, one that nonetheless can

be shaped, steered, designed, bent towards unofficial purposes. The closing of the possibility of change has been going on for a decade or more, replaced by smooth user interfaces and cat videos.

Slow but steady progress has been made with the development of alternative internet apps. Besides the established Linux, Wikipedia and Firefox there is DuckDuckGo, Signal, Telegram, Mastodon and the Fediverse, deepl, OpenStreetMap, Jitsi and Cryptpad; the list is growing. However, the much-needed social networking tools have proved too difficult to crack. During the internet's Lost Decade, we've been rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic under the inspirational guidance of the consultancy class. Sadly, organized optimism successfully overruled criticism. This is the real tragedy of internet criticism, Made in Europe. Where is our resilience now that we need it? While the focus shifted into a parallel scene to crypto, blockchain and payment systems, the techno-social has remained neglected. Is it possible to go back from platforms to protocols? Is there still time left to do the coding and create new scripts of connection? With levels of despair and anger rising, many feel it will be too little too late. There's little patience for bureaucratic consensus rituals in which solutions are yet again delegated to PR managers, 'markets' and not so 'neutral' engineers that are supposed to fix the problem.

I do not have the ambition to become the Cassandra of the platform. Neither am I dying to write the eulogy for my beloved medium. Fear related to its passing must be so widespread that its name is rarely mentioned anymore out of respect for the dead. "We use social media, no longer the i..." Bruce Sterling, cyberpunk penman, prepared the ground for this, already in 1995

with the Dead Media Project—as one would expect of a science fiction writer of this stature. The website aimed to gather obsolete and forgotten communication technologies, compiled into a handbook about the failures, collapses and hideous mistakes of media. Sterling and his contributors already added early text-only features such as telnet, gopher and newsgroups to their list of dead media. Rather sooner than later the internet as such can be put on the list. Most likely this will be sold to us in the name of progress and user convenience.

Elevate entropy, flip the memes, make the screens dance and swipe the night away. At the break of dawn humankind will be preoccupied with more urgent matters. Some renegades will remember the ‘short summer of the internet’, that was followed by a long reign of the Titans—until a rupture covered the network cultures with a thick layer of semiotic ash, suffocating the remaining dialogues and exchanges. It is our task as chroniclers, as Walter Benjamin reminds us in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, written just before he died, fleeing the Nazis, to recite the minor acts within this remarkable episode of communication. He calls on us “to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.” Forgetting the brief epoch of internet freedom with all its weirdness and flaws is not a sign of irresistible progress. There are piles of data debris ahead. It is our task to refuse to side with the billionaires and other authoritarian rulers, fight tech-nostalgia and again take up the “task to brush history against the grain.”

By claiming the end, energy is freed up to create new beginnings.



**FLIP THE
MEMES
MAKE THE
SCREENS
DANCE AND
SWIPE
THE NIGHT
AWAY**



1. I would like to thank Ned Rossiter, David Berry, Patricia de Vries, Nadine Roestenburg, Niels ten Oever, Chloë Arkenbout and Sabine Niederer for their valuable edits and comments.
2. Bernard Stiegler with the Internation Collective (eds), *Bifurcate: 'There is No Alternative'*, trans. Daniel Ross, Open Humanities Press, London, 2021, p. 11.
3. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p. 108.
4. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_Baschwitz, Jaap van Ginneken, *Kurt Baschwitz: A Pioneer of Communication Studies and Social Psychology*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2018 and my interview with van Ginneken on his Baschwitz biography, <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/3437>.
5. Cat Queen Cole's Tumblr entry on this: "Free political action from all unitary and totalizing paranoia. Develop action, thought, and desires by proliferation, juxtaposition, and disjunction, and not by subdivision and pyramidal hierarchization. Do not think that one has to be sad in order to be militant, even though the thing one is fighting is abominable. It is the connection of desire to reality (and not its retreat into the forms of representation) that possesses revolutionary force." <https://catqueencole.tumblr.com/post/47116289181/michel-foucaults-guide-to-non-fascist-life>.
6. Franco Berardi, *The Third Unconscious*, Verso Books, London, 2021, p. VII.
7. Berardi, p. 65.
8. Berardi, p. 148.
9. See: <https://verticalatlas.net>.
10. Berardi, p. 10/11.
11. More on this in the ground-breaking *Investigative Aesthetics*, written by Matthew Fuller and Forensic Architecture director Eyal Weizman (Verso Books, London, 2021), which can easily be applied to diverse initiatives, from Bellingcat, Metahaven, CitizenLab Tactical Tech, Berliner Gazette to Disruption Lab and works of artists such as Trevor Paglan, Walid Raad, Paolo Cirio, Femke Herregraven, Vladan Joler and Laura Poitras.

12. Franco Berardi, p. 9.
13. See: <https://networkcultures.org/viralimageculture>.
14. Fisher's version of hauntology and lost futures "is characterized by a melancholic refusal to give up on the days of popular modernism where everything seemed possible, and a refusal to yield to capitalist realism and postmodern finitude." (<https://medium.com/@nicholasadiaz7/introducing-mark-fisher-part-3-hauntology-lost-futures-and-politicized-melancholia-820e7a207e1e>). In his own words: "When the present has given up on the future, we must listen for the relics of the future in the unactivated potentials of the past." This can easily be applied to the 'reclaim the internet' efforts that our institute has been part of since 2011, with the launch of the Unlike Us network.
15. Quotes from <https://substack.com/profile/5625705-angelicism01> and the contribution of Janie defining Angelicis, <https://soundcloud.com/pleasure-helmet-977951874/sets/angelicism-tapes>.
16. Mark Fisher, *Postcapitalist Desire*, Repeater Books, London, 2021, p. 23.
17. Bernard Stiegler, Elements for a Neganthropology of Automatic Man, in: *Philosophy Today*, Volume 65, Issue 2 (Spring 2021), p. 242.
18. See interview with Daniel Ross by Ryan Bishop, *Theory, Culture & Society*, volume 38, issue 4, July 2021, p. 119. In this dialogue Ross speaks of the duty "to elaborate a careful therapeutics for the gaping psychic, social and biospheric wounds inflicted by technics," pointing that the 'bandages' will also necessarily be technical.
19. Tweet, April 24, 2022.
20. Reference to two 2020 works, the theory-music performance *We Are Not Sick* album by Geert Lovink and John Longwalker (<https://wearenotsick.com>) and Jonas Staal's *Climate Propagandas* (<https://vimeo.com/482531050>).
21. <https://www.boundary2.org/2017/01/pieter-lemmens-and-yuk-hui-apocalypse-now-peter-sloterdijk-and-bernard-stiegler-on-the-anthropocene>.
22. As co-publisher of the English translation of Boris Beau-de's *The Ends of the Internet* (Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam, 2016, orig. in French, 2014), I am well aware

of earlier expressions of this idea. According to Beaudé the 2013 Snowden revelations marked the turning point from freedom of speech to the Global Panopticon, from collective intelligence to distributed capability, from free to proprietary, from decentralization to hypercentrality and from net neutrality to the neutralization of the internet. Eight years later, these tendencies are considered historical facts. See: <https://networkcultures.org/blog/publication/no-11-the-ends-of-the-internet-boris-beaudé>.

23. Tim Maughan, *Infinite Detail*, MCD x FDG Originals, New York, 2019.
24. “The sun is both a symbol of nature and of tyranny. Through its insistence of transparency and identity, solarpunk inherits the dual characteristics of its central symbol. Solarpunk systems are desert landscapes in which users are endangered and exposed. Lunarpunk is more like a forest. A dense cover of encryption protects tribes and offers sanctuary for the persecuted. Wooded groves provide a crucial line of defence. Lunar landscapes are dark. They are also teeming with life.” <https://www.egirlcapital.com/writings/107533289>.
25. <https://www.verywellmind.com/solastalgia-definition-symptoms-traits-causes-treatment-5089413>.
26. “The Net interprets censorship as damage and routes around it,” attributed to John Gillmore, first mentioned late 1993, see: <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2021/07/12/censor>.
27. <https://www.ams-ix.net/ams>.
28. Michael Marder, *Philosophy for Passengers*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.), 2022.
29. See the diary of Svitlana Matviyenko and other postings on the Tactical Media Room blog, <https://networkcultures.org/tactical-media-room/author/svitlana>.
30. More on improbability in Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement, Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2016, p. 16. Relevant in this context would also be the uncanny: the technologic uncanny of extinction internet as an improbable event, not as act of despair, to pull the plug (p. 30-32). Also very relevant to this is Olga Goriunova and Matthew Fuller’s work on impossibility, in *Bleak Joys*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2019.

31. See also: Mieke Gerritzen/Geert Lovink, *Made in China, Designed in California, Criticized in Europe*, Bis Publishers, Amsterdam, 2019.
32. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead_Media_Project and https://www.alamut.com/subj/artiface/deadMedia/dM_Manifesto.html.
33. Walter Benjamin, Theses on the Philosophy of History, in: *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, New York, 1968, p. 255.
34. Ibid, p. 257.

**GETTING
NO**

“MESSAGE”

IS ALSO

A

“MESSAGE”

PATRICK

FLETCHER

MULLEN

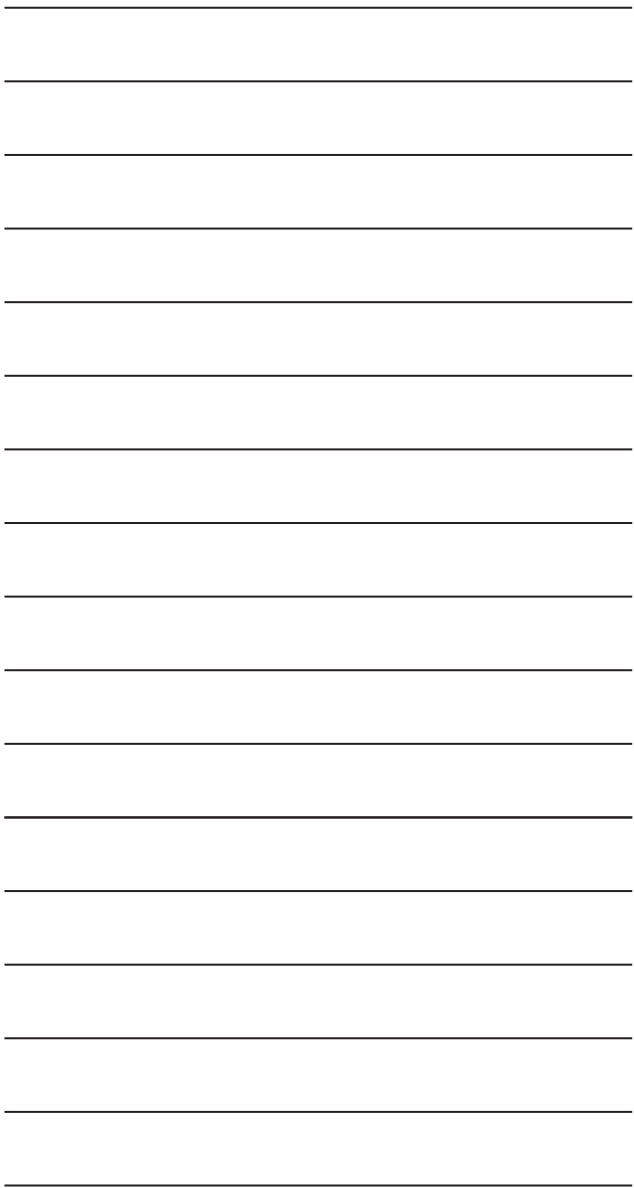
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**NOTES
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Extinction Internet is not merely an end-of-the-world fantasy of digital technology that one day will be wiped out by an electromagnetic pulse or the cutting of cables. Rather, Extinction Internet marks the end of an era of possibilities and speculations, when adaptation is no longer an option. During the internet's Lost Decade, we've been rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic under the inspirational guidance of the consultancy class. What's to be done to uphold the inevitable? We need tools that decolonize, redistribute value, conspire and organize. It's time for a strike on optimization. There is beauty in the breakdown.

**Institute of
network cultures**