Possibilities after corona

How will we relate to freedom after this crisis?

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What to do?

So what can we concretely do to aid this change?

To avoid groupthink and social power, I propose what I call constant opposition. It means to oppose whenever you see a power inequality emerging. Non-hierarchical communities could stay this way because they had a mechanism against hierarchy whenever they saw it emerging.

But it means also to oppose your own negative thoughts and behavior, to critically look at what you are doing, and not just keep using the same methods because you are used to it. To get out of the hole you've stranded in.

Specifically in relation to this crisis, it is a good idea to do what is necessary to avoid being contaminated and contaminating others, and to inform yourself so as to know how to do that. That includes thinking critically, and not just doing whatever the governments says or allows. To me this is a scientific attitude. But it is also acknowledging that you don't know it all, and get information from scientific experts (which is different from the government, you should especially pay attention if those two disagree). It's also not just doing things because the government forbids it. To not just stick to your old habits when they now posit a health danger.

The main challenge to build an alternative economy is to coordinate different initiatives. This can be through stigmergy, and doesn't need to happen centrally. We shouldn't aim for a winner who takes it all, but to get the right thing to the right person.

Avoiding hubs (central positions) is also a good way to temper the spread of disease. Supermarkets are important hubs, these could be relieved by accommodating online reservation of food or even more direct distribution.

In general, recognizing general mechanisms can inform your actions, and I hope this text has helped with that.

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IP protocol, or to distributed file sharing like torrents, where the same reaction can be linked to different offer network 'sites'.

Depending on how people use it, the offer network could be mainly a gift economy, if people realize it is the easiest to get their offers away if they don't ask anything in return, while the network provides for their needs. Or it could be more like barter, if people cannot offer things if they don't get resources. It will probably be a hybrid, where more complex reactions could also be useful for coordination, also in social life.

One of the reasons it is so important to work on alternative economies right now, is because it is clear that we are facing an economical crisis. This is mainly because our current economical system only functions if there is constant economic growth, and thus it cannot deal with a standstill as we are facing today.

Social life

And one of the new avenues capitalism was already exploring to be able to satisfy this need for growth, is social life. Our social interactions become more and more mediated through social media, with big corporations behind it. The current crisis has accelerated this trend, as it created a situation were almost all our social communication had to go through the internet.

There is a danger that this trend continues after the crisis, were video-calling and telework become the standard. It might well be that the growth of the maker movement we currently see gets incorporated by capitalism, and that it becomes an aid for this new phase of capitalism rather than an alternative to it.

But the current situation could also make people realize how much they value real-life connection, and search for it as soon as they can. In general, as people's normal lives are disrupted, a lot of people now have the time to think about what they want, which has a huge potential for change.

backs play a huge role, where some posts go viral, often mainly due to random factors, while thousands of others remain hidden.

By making better use of stigmergy and feedback cycles, specific information can come to the person who needs it. It isn't necessary that one message spreads to everyone, it is more important that the right message reaches the right person.

Now, this question about coordination between initiatives is actually about economy. Because it is about goods and services that should get to people who want it. These initiatives could grow into an alternative economy.

Right now, this is a gift economy: people give things and services without excepting anything in return. While from our current paradigm we might think that people are too egoistic for this, experience from give-away shops show that it is often more difficult to get rid of things than to acquire them. This is partly an organizational and logistical problem.

But nowadays it is very one-directional, with some people giving things and services, and others needing them. While at the moment people are still motivated to voluntarily do things, this might not continue when people need to get back to work or face lack of basics to survive. Also, people often have difficulty taking things when they cannot offer something in return. So these initiatives will profit from it when it grows, so that people giving things can also get other things (and that doesn't have to be material). This might be necessary to avoid that these initiatives evolve into for-profit businesses or government-subsidized organizations.

One theory that can help matching offers and demands, is 'offer networks'. Here, anyone can add what they want (A) to be able to offer B, shortly A → B . Given all these 'reactions', (intertwined) cycles can be found, where all offers match demands. This can work decentralized, where every user can have different preferences, and with different systems having different specifics. While these different systems ánd existing initiatives should also coordinate between each other. This could be similar to the TCP/

Everything you read is about corona nowadays, and yes, I'll also go with that flow. But I want to specifically speak about possible futures after this crisis, especially on organizing without government.

I'll start with discussing some trends I already see today, to extrapolate possibilities. My observations are made from the context I live in in Belgium, though I think often similar things happen worldwide. Some aspects give hope, others bring fear for a possible grim future. Some (overlapping) topics I'll touch are economy, social life, groupthink and control.

Groupthink

The first thing that struck me, was the groupthink I saw, it seemed as if we were all thinking the same. First there was denial, we felt that this couldn't happen to us, to our country, or that it wouldn't be that bad. I felt this, my impression was that the media coverage was like that, even the experts. After realization, there was mass solidarity: everybody wanted to do something against it, to help. Yes, some people also first reacted with self-protection, like hoarding (*hamsteren*). Though I think most of the 'egoistic' behavior were actually people still in the 'denial' phase, for example with the 'lock-down parties'. More in general, disagreements surrounding certain behavior arose because of people having a different sense of urgency and different priorities.

And this brings us to the phase I see more and more emerging at the moment: that of social control. This state of emergency is used to condemn anyone not strictly following social norms. Sure, some social norms, like social distancing, are in this case understandable and necessary to flatten the curve. But the danger is that they become followed too strictly and narrowly, and just because the government or everybody says so, not because of any scientific reason. For example, people are condemned for camp-

ing alone in the wild because that's prohibited by the government, while people doing non-essential economic activity that is still allowed by the government, don't hear a thing. For the government it's important that the economy can keep on running, while for a lot of people, social needs are for example more important. That's a question about which aspects of their life people consider most important, and that cannot be put into government regulations.

But another example is that before the lockdown-light, there were still (mass-)gatherings and people coming back from inflicted areas just going to work and school. That was clearly not a good idea at that moment, but since the government didn't prohibited it, we still did so. At the moment, we still mainly just blindly follow the government regulations, and that is not always the best thing to do.

I do want to note that these phases of denial, (self-protection,) solidarity and social control are in reality usually not completely separate, behaviors from different phases can occur at the same time. Those can interact, can conflict with each other, can give rise to another phase.

A bit more on the mechanisms behind groupthink. Usually there is social power at play: because everybody is doing things a certain way, it is difficult to do otherwise. But by also doing the same, you strengthen the social power. This brings rigidity: the system gets into a hole which is difficult to get out of. In general, that's a result of a positive feedback: when the more there is of something, the more of it gets created. That's what causes the exponential growth in this pandemic. It is also the cause of the hoarding problem: because people buy a bit more, certain products aren't as much available anymore, which make people buy them even more because of the (partly real) fear they won't be there anymore next time, and so on.

Economy

But now some positivism: the solidarity initiatives. I followed the 'maker movement' from close by, and it made me hopeful to see a lot of people making masks, but also more complicated medical equipment, just bottom-up, while still being careful with being safe and healthy. While the government was failing or sometimes even blocked things rather than helping: masks not delivered or having problems, not allowing equipment because it is not official, while the alternative (often nothing) wasn't any better.

Now, I'm not saying we are already there, and that we could have faced this crisis without the infrastructure and expertise the government has been built up for centuries. But to me, everything that has been built up in just a couple of weeks, shows again that we can organize this without the government, and that we would do it better. And now as before, to me these things are mainly done by individual health workers and volunteers, not by CEO's or government officials.

Not saying everything is already perfect. The main thing that can be improved, is the coordination between initiatives. Right now it is still often a chaos, nobody knows what's going on, people are doing things in parallel and offers don't reach demands or vice versa.

A solution for this that doesn't require central coordination, is 'stigmergy'. This is when traces are left in the environment on which others can build on. The term originates from describing ants that leave pheromones other ants can follow. Wikipedia is another example.

The problem nowadays is that while there are a lot of traces left, usually they are snowed under by other traces, and cannot be built on further. This is what we generally see on the internet nowadays, where there is an information overload. This leads to a preference for the short term and easy-to-digest information. Positive feed-