

The Jubilee of 2033

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Recently, I have found myself reimagining Derek Jarman's 1978 queer punk film *Jubilee*. At its start, Queen Elizabeth I asks her adviser John Dee to summon forth a spirit in which to converse. After descending, the spirit Ariel offers Elizabeth a future vision of England. Through thick, black smoke, a collapsed and lawless London emerges, composed of fallen buildings, roaming, armed gangs, and a burning stroller. Here, the punk present of the late 1970s is rendered as a futuristic dystopia. Every time I watch this film, I find myself wondering how this scene could be rewritten for the early twenty-first century. What pressing question might a political leader ask the spirit Ariel now? After globalization, the rise of high-frequency trading, and the continued Googlification of public infrastructure, might knowledge be sought not about a particular country but about a major planetary structure or institution?¹

One inquiry could concern the future of the Internet. In such a remake of *Jubilee*, Queen Elizabeth I would be replaced by a major Silicon Valley tech executive, like Elon Musk or Mark Zuckerberg; John Dee, the adviser, is now a computer programmer, seeking answers to the future in machines, not the heavens; and the spirit Ariel is an artificial intelligence, akin to IBM's Watson. Algorithmic predictions of the year 2033 are calculated, a time for the Internet's own jubilee, and two possible futures are disclosed: (1) The Internet has been killed. Governments have exacerbated their use of Internet Kill Switches in order to terminate Internet access during times of political unrest.² These Internet shutdowns are coupled with politically motivated blocks and bans of users and websites alongside rampant dataveillance. As a result, the Internet has been reconfigured solely as governance via networks. (2) The Internet has disappeared. First prophesied in 2015 by then Google chairman Eric Schmidt, the Internet has further dispersed

into the world, fully realizing the Internet of things, which enacts a totalized integration, and therefore inseparability, of the Internet and the world. Capitalism and political unrest have thus accelerated.³

Beyond these two stalemates, might there be a third option, a queer utopian potentiality that could aid in escaping “the prison house” of the present, as José Muñoz (2009: 1) once put it? This third future could be understood as an infrastructural commons, what Keller Easterling (2014: 23) would term an “alternative extrastatecraft,” suggesting a mode of infrastructure governance that is counter to “most global powers.” In recent years around the world, technologists, activists, and artists have begun collectively building networks that do not rely on the corporate infrastructure of the Internet as we know it. From Hong Kong to New York, such network alternatives to the Internet are typically deployed to evade surveillance as well as remain functional during an Internet shutdown.⁴ Additionally, community-oriented initiatives, like the Digital Stewards in Detroit, teach neighborhoods how to build and maintain their own autonomous mesh networks.⁵ This “contra-internet” activity, as I prefer to name such endeavors, exposes a political horizon of transformation beyond the Internet, to an infrastructural commons that is beginning to thrive. Practically, an infrastructural commons—or “an open infrastructure of information and culture,” as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2009: 308) describe it—supports communication that is not proprietary and enables sharing, producing knowledge, and being together outside structures of privatization and surveillance.

What is the investment of queerness in an infrastructural commons? Tim Dean provides a unique starting point to consider this question, as his critique of networking is founded on a queer ethics of cruising. Concluding his book-length analysis on barebacking subcultures, Dean (2009: 176) offers up “cruising as a way of life,” which he defines as a promiscuous openness to

alterity. To advance his argument, Dean uses Samuel Delany's distinction between contact and networking. Contact, Delany (1999: 129) explains, can be understood as the crossing of "class lines in those public spaces in which interclass encounters are at their most frequent." Delany's examples for contact include conversation in a grocery checkout line or bar as well as masturbation between two men in a public bathroom. Alternately, networking consists of modes of social engagement that are "heavily dependent on institutions to promote the necessary propinquity" (ibid.). Parties, conferences, and classes are all instances of networking, according to Delany. Spaces of networking, Dean continues, are often privatized and therefore narrow risk and diminish pleasure. Crucially, Dean's use of networking is not restricted—or even primarily oriented—around communications infrastructure. For instance, when one cruises in a gym in which membership is required, one partakes in networking, not contact. Dean's critique of networking, then, is not strictly concerned with a moralism of bodily presence over technically mediated interaction (even though he ultimately favors bodily contact); rather, it is a critique of networking as a securitization against the public and the unknown. Preferring contact, Dean locates his queer ethics of openness, risk, and alterity resolutely against networking's foreclosure of potentiality.

{Au: The following sentence is a fragment—please clarify what the main clause is.} Yet if today's network infrastructures cut across myriad aspects of existence—queer and all—then perhaps another kind of queer ethics is needed. This would be a position that no longer vies between contact versus networking but networking versus contact *in* network infrastructures. Instead of only prizing the physical contact of bodies, let us move the network forward—out of the Internet and into the infrastructural commons!—by practically experimenting with forms of queer life and relation that might come after the Internet. Such a

project would attend to questions such as how can filter bubbles be burst so that knowledge can be circulated and shared beyond algorithmic personalization and individualism? How can “platform capitalism” be thrown asunder, in order to build infrastructure that operates like agoras (Srnicek 2017: 36)? How can policing be subtracted from network infrastructure, in order to protect vulnerable populations from insidious dataveillance? In the spirit of Delany and Dean, a queer infrastructural commons may also foster new avenues for sexual encounters, far beyond the interface aesthetics of Grindr. These fantastic and nascent pursuits would undoubtedly stretch the meaning of alterity in any queer ethics. Indeed, a queer infrastructural commons may even surpass the network form itself, opening up to other forms of organization yet unknown.

One of Queen Elizabeth I’s encounters with the future in Jarman’s *Jubilee* takes place in what appears to be an autonomous women’s center. Equipped with a modified globe depicting geopolitical insults and a history book-cum-zine, the queer punk Amyl Nitrate delivers a lecture. She speaks on the histories of England but also fantasy, desire, and their relations to reality. Concluding her talk, Amyl Nitrate pronounces, “But I wanted to dance. I wanted to defy gravity.” In the jubilee of 2033, I picture a renegade transhumanist turned feminist technoscientist delivering a queer futurist prophecy, disguised as a TED Talk. They mock Google’s ethical slogan, “Don’t be evil,” critique Silicon Valley’s colonization of the social, and challenge the audience to imagine a reality beyond networks. Yet they finish with the exact same words as Amyl Nitrate. Without a doubt, the flourishing of an infrastructural commons contra the Internet may indeed feel like defying gravity, but the desire for and work toward such a project is a commitment to a potential queer future worth cruising.

Notes

1. An example of Googlification is offered in a recent *New York Times* article that chronicles Google's impact on public education in the United States. See Singer 2017.
2. A fifty-year jubilee of the Internet is based on the date January 1, 1983, when ARPANET, a military forerunner to the Internet, adopted TCP/IP, a protocol suite used to link devices and transmit data, of which today's Internet still relies on.
3. I have written more extensively on killing and disappearing the Internet in Blas 2016.
4. For example, in 2011 the artist Dan Phiffer developed a self-contained network named *occupy.here* for Occupy activists to use in Zuccotti Park during Occupy Wall Street.
5. More on the Digital Stewards can be found at www.alliedmedia.org/dctp/digitalstewards.

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