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ELECTRONIC POTLATCH

**A STUDY ON NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND PRIMITIVE
ECONOMIC BEHAVIORS**

SPECIAL VERSION FOR THE WAREZ SCENE

RESPECT

Copywroing alf rehn 2001

Special note: This is the full text of my Ph.D.-thesis in Industrial management, which I defended at the Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden. List of references has been omitted due to me being lazy and all. This text may be freely distributed wherever.

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...being an essay on the economic...

Tsuyoshi enjoyed his work. Quite often he came across bits and pieces of videotape that were of archival interest. He would pass the images on to the net. The really big network databases, with their armies of search engines, indexers, and catalogs, had some very arcane interests. The net machines would never pay for data, because the global information networks were non-commercial. But the net machines were very polite, and had excellent net etiquette. They returned a favor for a favor, and since they were machines with excellent, enormous memories, they never forgot a good deed.

[...]

“I’m not a gangster at all. I never do anyone any harm.”

“Oh no?” Louise glowered at him. “Listen, pal, I know a lot more about your set-up, and your kind of people, than you think I do. I’ve been studying your outfit for a long time now. We computer cops have names for your kind of people. Digital panarchies. Segmented, polycephalous, integrated influence networks. What about all these free goods and services you’re getting all this time?”

She pointed a finger at him. “Ha! Do you ever pay taxes on those? Do you ever declare that income and those benefits? All the free shipments from other countries! The little homemade cookies, and the free pens and pencils and bumper stickers, and the used bicycles, and the helpful news about fire sales... You’re a tax evader! You’re living through kickbacks! And bribes! And influence peddling! And all kinds of corrupt off-the-books transactions!”

Tsuyoshi blinked. “Look, I don’t know anything about all that. I’m just living my life.”

“Well, your network gift economy is undermining the lawful, government-approved, regulated economy!”

“Well,” Tsuyoshi said gently, “maybe my economy is better than your economy.”

“Says who?” she scoffed. “Why would anyone think that?”

“It’s better because we’re happier than you are. What’s wrong with acts of kindness? Everyone likes gifts. Midsummer gifts. New Year’s Day gifts. Year-end presents. Wedding presents. Everybody likes those.”

From “A Good Old-Fashioned Future” by Bruce Sterling (1999)

In “Maneki Neko”, the short story quoted above, the hapless hero Tsuyoshi wanders in postmodern Tokyo without any clear goal, save for having agreed to deliver a package his wife promised to get to a hotel. Neither he nor his wife know why they are delivering a basically worthless cat figurine to someone they do not know, as a favor to a stranger. Led by his “pokkecon”, an advanced personal digital assistant (PDA), he performs little chores on the way, without having any real insight into the reasons and meaning of these either. Among other things, he is instructed to buy a cup of coffee to a haggard-looking businessman, just because. Little things, networked, led by no-one in particular, creating a remarkably efficient system of... well. That’s the problem. It all seems... strange. Alien, even.

Notice that in more formal language, ‘essay’ stands for an attempt. An essay is never the final word, but rather a way to handle a knotty and complex issue, where the tentative nature of the essay allows for a certain tolerance when it comes to trying things out and testing ideas. This is such an endeavor, cautious and provisional. Rather than being a careful analysis of a small issue, it is an argument that circles several larger ones. It is an attempt towards a critique of political economy, but rather than being an encyclopedic treatment it is far more of a rough draft. Anthropological in scope, it is an essay on certain observed behaviors in a modern ‘tribe’ and the relation of these to prevailing ideas in the popular thinking of economy and the existing critique hereof. On one level, this amounts simply to a description of a community that just happens to exhibit certain oddities in their relation to economy, and the way in which an

understanding of them might require a more 'primitive' outlook. But on another level it can be seen as a part in a larger argument regarding the hegemony of bourgeois capitalism and the market economy in general. It deals with the question of the gift (Mauss 1924), the notion of expenditure (Bataille 1933) and the primitive foundations of economy. In addition, it deals with the joy of beating someone in a game, the sublime pleasures of software and the idea of a 'new economy'. It is in this way an essay on economy, in a general sense.

Now, why economy? Central in writing this is the fact that economy has become one of the few, if not **the** dominating paradigm of our age. Following public dialogue we can readily observe how what was once an area of social life that one did not bring up in civil company has now turned into a central part of the discourse. Other issues are often handled specifically through the lens of this, a tendency sometimes called 'economism'. Economy has become sexy and inherently meaningful. One of the ways in which we can ascertain this can be found in how economy has become part of the popular culture. Often neglected in the analysis of society, popular culture can arguably show us exactly what it is we are, in fact, talking about. Today, business and economy is a spectator sport. The move towards this could be sensed during the gay 80's, when "Wall Street" was a box-office hit, and accounts of investment banking could be found on bestseller lists. During the slump that followed, this movement waned a bit, only to boom and boom again during the later part of the '90s. Now we can choose freely among glossy magazines dealing with the allure of business, and television channels can devote themselves entirely to following the markets. Semi-fictional business books are hot again and entrepreneurs give the best parties. We can follow the economy through any and every medium, including but not limited to getting up-to-the-minute market data sent to your mobile phone or PDA. Central business figures are in the media followed with the reverence formerly lavished on movie stars, musicians and good-looking members of royal houses. Today, rappers can sing about their economic rather than their sexual prowess - where the Rolling Stones sang about liking rock 'n roll, Juvenile and the Cash Money Millionaires profess their love of the "bling-bling" and rap about how much their necklaces cost ("Man, I got the prize of mansion / Round my neck and wrists"). Today, one can **do** economy like one would music or fashion, follow it, live it vicariously. We play the markets, in a very real sense, and the casual observer can very well have problems separating the sport scores from stock tickers. A similar case could be made about other areas of the public conversation, and e.g. Frank (2000) has argued that 'the economy' and 'the market' today gets to represent 'the people' and 'the will of the people' in a way that would have seemed inane just a few decades ago. Markets vote, markets make decisions and markets contain the fountain of knowledge from which justice and liberty for all can be obtained. Where we had politics we now have economy. Economy is omnipresent, and - assumedly - the same goes by logical extension for the market. The idea that one today could refer to anything besides the market when discussing economy is seen as more or less ludicrous.

Still, we know that the Western, capitalist version of the market economy is not the only possible economic order. We know of different tribal economies, of cultural variations, of primitive economies; a thousand attempts. What differentiates these from modern capitalism is simple, both in the eyes of the latter's proponents and its discontents. It won. Marx, among many others, lost. This is at least the simple explanation given by CEOs firing people for pennies more to the stockowners, to anyone silly enough to ask. "It's the economy, stupid!"

Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historical organization of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allow insights into the structure and relations of production of all the vanished social

formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along within it, whose mere nuances have developed explicit significance within it.

Marx in *Grundrisse*, quoted in Yang (2000)

It is a relatively usual assumption. We still view economy as something akin to Hobbes nihilistic primal situation, one where *homo homini lupus* and life has “No arts; no letters; no society”. Specifically, this is the crude view of economic competition on a meta-level, one where one economic system (i.e. capitalism) by necessity must dominate and engulf others. And as capitalism so clearly has been successful, other systems are almost automatically viewed as weaker and less fit. It is a stunted view of the evolution of economy, one where the strongest of the stupid animals is seen as a conqueror, much as the Tyrannosaurus Rex is now idolized as the prime dinosaur. In a way that is strangely sympathetic to Marx, we see capitalism and the way it makes everything economy as the most developed form of this economy. Alternatives are juxtaposed against this, and usually found lacking, if sometimes aesthetically pleasing. In Marx analysis, bourgeois capitalism was simply too efficient a system to be anything besides conquering, and his hope lay not in developing a better economy, but in showing the brutality of this efficiency. It is thus not without reason that Marx now, in this era of the NASDAQ, experiences a revival as an analyst of economy (When 1999).

Economic orders that differ from capitalism are usually/popularly viewed either with condescension or with sympathetic concern (cf. Castells 1996). Broadly speaking, they can from the perspective of capitalism be divided into two groups, dysfunctional and undeveloped. The latter group consists of such economies that are stuck in what is thought of as an earlier form of economy, such as peasant economies. These are perceived as basically capitalist, merely lacking in infrastructure or, in some cases, resources. The dysfunctional group consists of economies that are developed, i.e. materially reminiscent of capitalist economies, but function with markedly different logics. Planned economies and kleptocracies are often perceived as belonging to this group. From the viewpoint of capitalism, there exists a true economy that can be attained, and there exists perversions of it. E.g. socialist economies are often viewed with a distinct superciliousness, as it from a capitalist perspective is clear that they have opted for a model that stands at odds with the true logic of economy, which surprisingly is synonymous with the capitalist logic. Primitive economies sometimes fare a bit better, as they are often viewed with sympathy (and some entrepreneurial spirit on behalf of the observers). They also have the benefit of being charming and decidedly unthreatening. Among those economic logics that are viewed with amusement rather than disdain rank those that are based on ideas of kinship and other ‘archaic’ logics. Although kinship relations are sometimes viewed as exogenous and disturbing factors in what could be a ‘good’ market economy, they are often viewed as an inevitable part of economy in certain societies. As for gift economies, i.e. economic orders that are founded on the exchange of gifts rather than the exchange of commodities, these are seldom if ever referred to as anything besides a charming archaic custom. When contrasted with capitalism, there often remains an implicit assumption that both types will convert to market economies, in time either through natural development or through collapse.

An interesting challenge to such a view is presented in *Russia’s Economy of Favours* (Ledeneva 1998). We are here presented with an ethnography of the *blat*, a phenomenon that is shown to have a tremendously important place in Soviet and post-Soviet economic behavior. Simply stated, the *blat* refers to the use of social relations to complement the prevailing, centralized mechanisms of distribution. It can be seen as a particular form of a gift economy,

where influence gained through social practices can be used within the economic sphere. As access to resources was stratified, the blat developed as a way to organize this stratification in a dynamic fashion, through the use of sociality rather than the marketplace. Favors and counter-favors replace the economic logic of the market, and in Ledeneva's analysis form a stabilizing structure to the often stifling inefficiencies of centralized planning. Social networks, which form independently, proved to be a pragmatic way of accessing what would otherwise have remained within a closed sphere of the 'purely economic'. The same processes have then carried over into the market economy of the post-Soviet era. In both cases, blat serves as a way to subvert totalizing economic systems, and although we could moralize about the shortcomings of such subversions, blat can be shown to be a fascinatingly sturdy economic order. This concurrent existence of a hegemonic economic order (planned or market) and an informal network of economic behavior with a wholly different logic is an example of what Yang (2000) has referred to as *economic hybridity*. Following the feminist critique of Gibson-Graham (1996), where 'global penetration of capitalist logics' is viewed as too dominant a trope in the face of how differing economic forms can and do co-exist, she tries to show how market economies can metaphorically 'hide' alternative forms. In this perspective, economic orders are often constructed from a variety of logics, only some of which follow the laws of the markets. The discourse of communist economy hid the fact that Soviet in one sense was the epitome of the market - a state where individual entrepreneurship (through e.g. the blat) was a necessary part of everyday life - and the discourse of market economy hides the fact that post-Soviet economy is still controlled by an oligarchic use of the blat. Hybridity is thus a strategy to analyze both capitalism and the critique of the market economy. Through questioning hegemony on an ontological level, it could be a critique that transcends trivial politicization and instead focuses on the functioning of economy in general. By working with the idea of co-existence of several economic logics, the simplified and too easily vilified view of the markets as encompassing all could possibly be enriched.

Critiques of the prevailing state of economy, the hegemony of the market and the 'triumph' of capitalism are not particularly rare (cf. Lash & Urry 1987). Beginning with Marx, an artificial but accepted historiographic starting point, capitalism and the market has been critically appraised by a number of writers during the years. One specific strand of this is of interest here, namely the (predominantly French) discussion on capitalism from an 'outside' perspective. A starting point for this was the work of Marcel Mauss, particularly his *The Gift* (1924/1990). This can be read in a number of ways, but in one sense it is an argument on the origins of economy. The usual setup in this discussion was (and in a sense still is) the opposite views of Adam Smith and Karl Marx. The former saw economy as grown out of a primitive market, evermore sophisticated, whereas the latter thought these origins to have been an early utopia of communist togetherness, later corrupted. Mauss criticizes both, and instead presents us with gifts. Archaic man, says Mauss, didn't have markets or communes but gifts as their 'total social phenomenon', giving as an ordering principle. The birth of economy lies not in the maximization of Smith, nor in the selflessness of Marx. Instead, it lays in the social act of gifts and counter-gifts, primitive phenomena of reciprocity out of which trade and contracts have later grown. Gifts are viewed as both the root of the market economy (in one contingency) and a position outside it, and in later readings this position got to be one from where an attack on capitalism can be launched (cf. Schrift 1997).

Picking up where Mauss left off, thinkers as varied as Georges Bataille (1933, 1967/1991), Marshall Sahlins (1972), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1949/1969), Jean Baudrillard (1981, 1993), Jacques Derrida (1992) and Pierre Bourdieu (1990) have followed suit in analyzing the

role of the gift. What is particular about the gift is that it sets up a system of reciprocities that is wholly alien to the idea of unrelated actors meeting in a marketplace. Following from this, it is relatively easy to juxtapose gift economy with capitalism, in order to show the weaknesses of the latter – the atomistic view of the exchange, its antisocial nature etc. As a body of critique, these approaches share the aforementioned ‘outsider’ perspective. Implicit in all has been the idea of capitalism as an isolated sphere, with gift economies as something qualitatively different. They also share in the tension that exists between Marxist views of economy and the analysis of *consumption* that can be traced from Mauss through Bataille and which finds itself in a radical *cul-de-sac* in the work of Baudrillard. Marxists, particularly structuralist such, have been accused of reductionism through their focus on ‘modes of production’, arguing that economy is a question of production. Such a view might be applicable to all economies, but as among others Baudrillard (1981) has argued, it does not explain how economy becomes meaningful or symbolic. Studying the symbolic nature of economy, he claims that at least post-industrial economies instead have consumption as the basis of the social order. What gift-exchange does is that it in a sense transcends this. Relations in a gift economy are not merely material, but embedded into the social sphere on the whole. Whereas a meeting on the market normally is a consumer relating with a producer, the same does not hold for the exchange of gifts. Here, production and consumption are intermingled, both parties producing and consuming at once. Compared with a vulgar view of the market, gift-exchange becomes strictly *alien*. If we take the blat as an example: Using favors to get hold of e.g. building materials, we do not see the simple exchange of one unit of favor for a specified amount of material. Rather, the participants in this exchange re-produce their relation, shifting the balance of reciprocities somewhat – strengthening their relation instead of annulling it. The materials that shift hands are not merely something that will be consumed, but part of a larger chain of interaction. Using favors is simultaneously to consume and produce them, a process very much unlike the clear-cut functions of the assumed ideal market. Such fundamental foreignness questions the logic of the market, but additionally it begs the question whether such behavior is truly alien to it or if this merely is a hidden aspect of the same. The outside/inside distinction might be difficult to uphold.

Gibson-Graham (1996) has called for an analysis of global capitalism that would enhance our understanding of its margins. Based on this idea, that the usual theoretical languages used for explaining capitalism are self-justificatory and present it as inevitable and its movement as unalterable, we should seek new ways of portraying economic behavior – particularly hidden such. One arena for doing just this would, and should, be the ‘new economy’. As advances in technology have created what in many quarters is referred to as a ‘revolution’ for business, it would seem that capitalism has found yet another vista to colonize. Companies have made immense fortunes through this new technology, and more than one political pundit has in the ‘net seen the final victory of the unbridled market with capital roaming free, without limitations or boundaries. And it is towards this I will turn, and it is in the margins of this networked society that I found my alien economy – the warez scene.

This text thus deals with happenings in the meeting and hybridization of economy and technology. It is not a text on the new technologies of the ‘internet age’ as such, nor is it a text on economy as something metaphysical. Instead, it is a discussion on what happens in the interface between technologies – economic, social and technological technologies – where some are more material than others. In the example I will present, new technologies have created a very particular (some would say peculiar) instance of economy, one that some would like to call ‘new’. But my discussion will not concentrate on this perceived ‘newness’. That technologies

have effects on economic behavior is almost tautological, and that technologies with as much potential as computers and information networks will have great effects on, well, everything, is so too. So the driving force in my arguments will not be that there have been changes, as there a) always are, and b) these have been discussed at length elsewhere. Instead, I have chosen to focus on a particular phenomenon, that of the gift. The thesis put forth here is that as technologies have made specific forms of production and distribution more tenable, the notion of the economic must be extended accordingly. New technologies make more economy possible, and although I don't see the economic behavior discussed here as particularly new and I do not dwell on this development of economy as much as some might like, I still acknowledge the dynamic potential of technology. I will try to downplay the technological in the following not because I do not find it interesting, but because I think focusing on it draws our interest away from something more fundamental. And this is a possibility that should not be left unstudied. As a final *nota bene* I wish to state that I am fully aware of the numerous other paths my discussion of this strange little world could have taken. The role of any science, social or otherwise, is to clarify one aspect of a phenomenon whilst rekindling interest in others. I actually hope that people will find avenues they feel should have been pursued further in this text. That would mean that this essay has managed to achieve one of the overarching goals of science, to make people think...

I

INTRODUCTION

OXYGEN RELEASES SOUND FORGE

Sound Forge 4.5h is an excellent wave editor, meaning that as a program it is very well suited to handle and manipulate waveforms. If this sounds unintelligible, it is basically just a complicated way to say that it is a program designed to help you play around with those pings, blips and 'You've got mail'-sounds that your computer uses to communicate with you. You can also use it to work with certain music files, and since it is a program for professionals, this is what it is primarily used for - music and sound effects. It has what is affectionately referred to as 'tons of features', and is extremely versatile once you learn to use it, a process that can easily take a couple of months. For the average person it is not particularly useful, simply because it is a specialized software package and not primarily designed for doing things the easy way. It is also a tad on the expensive side, retailing for about \$500 in the stores. If you have to pay for it, that is. Normally people do pay for such programs, and the normality of doing so is so ingrained in our society that the production and sale of this kind of digital information is a big part both of the economy in general and specifically so in the so-called 'new economy'.

You could also get it for free over the net, if you know how to do such illegal things. I do and I have. A group of dedicated people have, for reasons best known to themselves, released their own version of the same program, one where all those pesky copy-protection functions have been disabled. This is actually no mean programming feat, as most commercial software houses will do their very best to make such manipulation impossible. It is not without peril, either, as the same software houses are often happy to sue any and all persons found messing with their intellectual property. They will call it software piracy, and claim that they are seriously disadvantaged by such goings-on. They will also call it theft, and *this we know* to be the direct opposite to ordered and generally approved economic activity.

This notwithstanding, there are manipulated versions circulating in certain groupings, versions that have all the functionality of the original and the added function of being free. Since I have a modicum of knowledge about the distribution of such versions, it wasn't all that hard to find a link on a web page that led me directly to a file named o-sf45h.zip. This compressed file contains two files that are of interest right here. Naturally, there is the program file that enables you to set the program up on your computer. Without such a file none of this would be particularly interesting. But there are also a couple of text-files appended to this program, and it is to one of these that I will now turn.

On the opposing page I have placed the text from what in the vernacular of the originating community is known as an NFO-file. Unsurprisingly, this stands for iNFOrmation, and serves as a kind of manifesto for the release/program version. The text is originally rendered in ASCII, so the version you see is slightly different from the original. I have also erased some empty lines and redundant graphics in order to make the text fit a single page, something I wish to apologize to 'UniSO_n_' for. All the information contained in the original file is present, though. According to my computer, the file is dated August 26th 2000.

SURF'N'TURF

Before we get to immerse ourselves in the intricacies of this file, the question of where I came upon it should maybe be addressed. I didn't find it accidentally, but neither did I go searching for this particular piece of software, this particular file. I do not know the persons who have prepared these files, and they most certainly aren't my creations. Rather, I have a fair working knowledge of what could be called the surface of the computer underground, those points in cyberspace where the assorted debris of this loose network of misbehavior appears. Although my connections to the inner circles of these networks are tentative at best, I kind of know how to look. I rarely make the simple mistakes newbies do, I know how to behave myself and I have a certain feeling for whether I'm on track or not. Another way to put this would be to say that I have patience and too much time on my hands. These networks move all the time, and one can almost see the decay in their manifestations. All that is solid melts into air. Down in the networks you can't hold up a solid front for long when what you do is so clearly illegal. Instead, you move, route around.

I found the file I'm referring to on a web page. Which one doesn't really matter, as it almost certainly is 404 (the code for a non-existent page on the www) by the time I write this. On this web page there was a link to a file, placed on one of the free webspace-services on the net. I clicked the link, and a few minutes later had the file in its entirety on my hard drive. One address and one click, and that's about all it took to get hold of a top-of-the-line wave editor for free. Gratis, without paying anybody a dime, last of all \$500 to Sonic Foundry. Efficient as hell. Really lives up to the promises made about the new economy. And the thing is, it works just as well. Somebody has put a lot of effort in making this program available for free, ignoring legal standpoints and incurring costs in the process. At the very least, the party has dedicated a fair amount of his or her time to make it possible for me to try out a fancy piece of software.

Not only has someone gotten hold of the original issue of the program, possibly even paying for it, but someone has gone through the trouble of removing any protection there might be embedded in this. Then this someone has taken out the necessary files for a functioning program, leaving out needless filler and packaged this in a handy parcel. And then someone has taken the time to distribute it and distribute it further. All this adds up to the simple fact of me getting something for nothing. And the aforementioned getting nothing for quite a lot. This does not seem economical, at least not in the usual sense.

It does seem a bit odd that it is possible for me to get this kind of proverbial free lunch. But this is not half as odd that there obviously are people out there doing there darndest to serve me this lunch in the most efficient manner, and devoting a lot of resources to do so. Fortunately they've left a note, a short (9329 bytes, originally) message so as to tell me/us who lies behind this act of kindness towards strangers. We shall now look at this note a bit closer.

A MESSAGE FROM OXYGEN¹

Due to the density of data contained within it, the file seems to be a self-contained whole, designed to contain all the information that 'belongs' to this particular release. In a sense it feels like a table of contents for the program, in its present guise. It might or might not be important that it is entitled *oxygen.nfo* and not e.g. *soundforge45h.nfo*. If we read it in parts, starting from the top, we can find the following:

The header/lead-in is a fine piece of ASCII-art. The stylized rendering of e.g. the groups name using only signs that computers universally can display is a cultural form unto itself. Although it seems like a childish scribble, the execution of such headers is rather difficult, particularly when one layers the text. If you look at the header from a distance, you can observe how the 'e' is designed to mesh with the capital 'N' in a way that gives it an almost three-dimensional appearance. The group has obviously wanted to make it clear that this is an OxYGeN production, as the first thing you see when you open the file is this oversize and exaggeratedly complicated logo. But as I said, ASCII-art is its own scene, and we should maybe only note the aesthetic sensibilities present in wanting to adorn a brief informational notice in this way. The header ends with an intro: OxYGeN-PRESENTz.

The first box holds the name of the program and a series of informational statements. We learn that a person called HaRdLoCk has acted both as cracker, supplier and packager for this particular release. This is then the person I should thank, I guess. The information also includes statements to what the program does (Wave Editing) and the homepage for the original producer of the software (<http://www.sonicfoundry.com/>). In addition to this we learn that the program retails for \$499 and that this release of the program consists of one file of 9000 kB. Finally, we get REL# 118, which seems to mean that this is the 118th release from OxYGeN. As a group, probably counting from when they started. So they have gone through the process described above 118 times. That's a lot of work and a whole lot of software. Of course, it could just be some internal code and mean nothing at all.

When we continue on to the second box we get more specific information about this release. And a short promotional message that tells us that this is a good program, followed by a note urging us to buy the product if we "keep using it". The latter could be read in several different ways. It might be an attempt to work in a legal loophole, a disclaimer, with the way it tries to hide the copyright infringements inherent in making a program 'try-before-you-buy'. It could also be read as a moral statement about the position the releaser wishes to take towards the software industry. However we wish to interpret it, it acknowledges the moral issues present in releases such as this. OxYGeN **knows** that people could go on using their release indefinitely. And they know this to be illegal. The second box is in a way continued in the third box, where information about how one should install the program is given, complete with a warning about a bug. Note the professional tone in the last sentence: "...and we are satisfied that this is not crack-related". Obviously this is a matter of some professional pride, seeing to that the release functions as well (or as badly) as the original version.

Greetings to others figure in the fourth box. Naturally, we cannot know (but perhaps guess) this beforehand, but the names alluded to here are those of other groups engaged in similar activities. Cheating just a bit, I can say that BLiZZARD happens to be a release/cracking group, Phrozen Crew maybe the finest cracking-crew operating right now and Radium is a legendary release group in the field of audio software. The listing of these is probably (an educated ethnographic guess) a way to show allegiance and cooperation between different actors in this particular social setting. A similar listing is present in the next box, where the roster of OxYGeN-members is shown. With their odd aliases, and even odder groupings, these are the people that forgo other uses for their time, knowledge and money to supply the end-user (me) with software. Being listed here is probably important, as this seems to be the way in which we can learn who the people behind this version of the program are.

News, as they are presented here, really don't seem to tell us all that much. "We are back after a few weeks break from the scene." Rather trite. Or maybe it tells us a lot? Usually, we

focus so hard on finding the special and the scandalous that the particulars inherent in mundane statements such as this pass us by. The return to the “scene” is obviously important enough to broadcast in this way. One could wonder if it is so for the group itself or for some imagined reader. Also, the fact that “a few weeks break” is significant suggests that this scene is rather active. If you have to communicate the break on this level, we at least get the idea that one normally engages in these interactions on at least a weekly basis. And maybe the most suggestive thing, the allusion to the existence of a ‘scene’ points us towards a field of social interaction that at least for OxYGeN has a nature of its own. It might in fact be that this is one of the most telling parts of the document.

OxYGeN even leaves contact information, in the last real box of the NFO. The fact that they explicitly have to point out that they do “NOT provide technical assistance” might differentiate them from a normal purveyor of software, but to my mind it reads like a sort of service agreement – ‘No shirt, no shoes = no service’. It is the law of movement; you can’t allow yourself get burdened by what lies in the past. Obviously, once the program has left the hands of the releasers, they no longer feel they have an obligation to help you use it. In a way it sounds like a contract, with exceptions clearly stated. As in the case above, we can wonder why these exceptions are so marked and whether this tells us something. Since they find they have to address such issues they obviously have some idea about their responsibilities, and the limits of these. There seems to be an implicit contract here. But what about?

The message ends with a timestamp for the last update and what could be understood as a copyright notice. This has been a message from OxYGeN, informing the general public (?) about their release of Sound Forge 4.5h.

TIMEO DANAOS ET DONA FERENTIS²

Even this simple enough transaction, OxYGeN releasing a program into the general atmosphere of the computer underground and this trickling onto my hard drive, provokes a series of questions. The normal string of questions in the (social) sciences apply: How, who, what, where and why? In this case, the ‘Why?’ question might be the most relevant. Why would anybody go through all the trouble associated with doing this? But we can also wonder who the people that would do such a thing are, and how they go about their ‘business’. What form of interaction this constitutes might also be interesting. In addition, how they do whatever it really is they do might interest some. Where these interactions take place might give further clues.

In this particular case, we can tentatively answer some of these questions. The reader has to bear with me, as some of these questions can only be answered with some background information, but I will here try to approach them with as little of this inside information as possible. ‘Who?’ as we’ve seen, is a simple question. They’ve pasted it over everything, so we know that we’re dealing with a group that calls itself OxYGeN. Who they are in real life probably doesn’t matter. For them, in doing this, they are OxYGeN. That’s what people know them as, that’s how they exist in this world. But why have these people decided to form a group? Why not just do what they do as individuals, so that this would be a release by HaRdLoCk? That there is a reason to do this should be obvious, as it seems that just that individual has done all work for this particular release. To assume that s/he is a part of a group by mistake would be a rather precarious step. From the way HaRdLoCk is portrayed in the NFO we learn some things about how this kind of undertaking works. There has to be someone who ‘cracks’, somebody who ‘supplies’ and someone who ‘packages’. If we look further down on the NFO-page, we also find job-descriptions such as ‘siteOP’ and ‘courier’. The latter seems to refer to

some form of distribution (as the word is normally used), and the former generically stands for site operator, i.e. someone who operates a site on the net. What all this means is still a bit murky, although we have some indication that there are people that engage in giving away software for free, and have rather a complicated machinery/organization in place to do precisely that. We also have some clues as to the fact that this is done in a quite efficient manner; things such as the 118 claimed releases (if that is what the enigmatic REL# 118 stands for) and that a few weeks is a meaningful absence from the “scene”. This scene is obviously some form of ‘Where?’ – if only in a mediated sense. But it is the question of ‘Why?’ that is the real issue. If we assume standard conceptions of rationality, OxYGeN’s release of Sound Forge is very difficult to understand. Why on earth would anybody, let alone a group of obviously talented computer aficionados, manipulate a program in this fashion and then just give it away? If they were to make money on it, the matter would be different. Were I to know the people in OxYGeN personally, and this would be done as a direct favor to me, it would hardly be interesting enough to write about. But as the matter now stands it is a question of highly skilled people devoting substantive amounts of time in order for a complete stranger to utilize advanced software. And doing this for free.

This is my starting point. People doing things for free and giving the fruit of their labors as gifts to total strangers. Were I to think that this is a total description of what has taken place I would probably be talking nonsense. Although people do irrational things quite regularly, such irrationalities usually have far more structure and ordering than is implied by this caricature of a description. And it is towards this structure and ordering that I will turn.

II

THE WAREZ SCENE

WAREZONIA

One could say I stumbled upon it by mistake. Lodged in the networks, the land of the warez dudes didn't seem like a 'there' to begin with. It has no natural beauty, and is inhospitable to strangers. The inhabitants of this land have no official name for themselves, or any of our institutions. There are no embassies. They know of the outside world, live in it and find it amusing, but see little to gain by making themselves more known than they already are. It is hard to estimate their number, as there are many who travel in these lands, but the tribe itself seems to consist of just some thousands of persons, maybe ten thousand in all³. I call this land Warezonian. It can only be reached through the screen of a computer. You can sometimes hear the odd story or a brief mention about it from people who travel in these parts. A short article by Thomas & Meyer (1990) presented a positive interpretation of Warezonian life, but did not go far to describe it. They, the Warezonians, have been written about in some magazine articles (Wired UK 3.02, Macworld 10/97), and given passing mention in some texts on the internet cultures. One article on the 'Noosphere' (Raymond 1998) talks about Warezonian at a bit more length, but this still amounts to but a paragraph or two. Usually they are referred to parenthetically, alluded to as the bogey-men of the computer underground, lurking mortal enemies to software and intellectual property. Neighboring tribes have been discussed extensively; particularly Hackers (see Levy 1984, Sterling 1992, Taylor 1999). In addition much has been made of the Pirates, the profiteers that Warezonians so habitually are confused with. As for Warezonian itself, it is almost like the uncharted land of an only partially discovered tribe.

Well everyone knows that Prestige was an awesome force in 1996 with these guys earning many accolades including the breaking of Tdu-Jam's record for the maximum number of releases in a month (35). Unfortunately some of these games were lacking in the quality stakes, but in general Prestige has done one hell of a good job with excellent releases. But like every group Prestige did have it's ups and downs with some uncracked and non working releases but most people have forgotten about those by now. Prestige is a kick ass group with a great reputation, awesome sites and a nice courier crew. But whether if Prestige will be around in 1997 is another story, the loss of a few important members including their leader to Class won't help.
Defacto 2; Premier issue, January 1997⁴

What then of the warez scene? First, what is the warez 'scene'? The choice of words might not be particularly important. The term *scene* is perhaps the most commonly used in the internal discussions of the interactions in question. One could talk of a *network*, but to what end? Network is more or less just a word we use as an abbreviation of organized interaction in general, and thus often contains little more than a rhetorical flourish through an association with particular technological or organizational solutions. Another popular expression is the *underground*, and although this might be a better expression it isn't very informative in itself. The warez scene could perhaps be described as a *sub-culture*. Sub-cultures are often viewed as consisting of groups of people who exhibit strong social bonds due to highly similar interests. Typical versions would be semi-organized resistance in organizations and gatherings of fans

(such as Trekkers). What defines a sub-culture is often that the shared norms and values it exhibits are the *raison d'être* for it, so that the motive for formation is primary and the structuring secondary. On the warez scene, this becomes a tad more complicated. So sub-culture is not very good either. Other words are sometimes used, including the theatrical "Brotherhood of Warez" (the name of a modestly popular, now defunct/dormant zine), but none as often and as commonly as the 'warez scene'.

Also you may think RAZOR released DRIVER before ORIGIN. well they did. But there version does not count. Why? Well for many reasons but the biggest is that they used the German executable from the german version by BLH as a crack. As they had no crack of their own. This resulted in their version having GERMAN text in the game, where there should have been ENGLISH. Thus their crack of DRIVER is not the FULL 100% English version. Also as this crack was done by BLH for the GERMAN version, they needed permission to use it. Which BLH now tell us they NEVER gave to razor! Thats becuase CLS actually cracked it for BLH, and therefore they did not have the permission to give it to RZR anyway. Now we could go on about how lame RZR are for having no english crack and also STEALING a crack from another group. But we are not going to do that, all we are going to say is NUKE the RZR release for being a GERMAN DUPE of the BLH release and accept the ORiGiN release for being 100% english first working version and also its cracked by us and not STOLEN like the RZR version. NUKE RZR!
Netmonkey Weekly Report (NWR); Issue LIX, September 26th 1999

Briefly described, the warez scene consists of groupings of people that compete in giving away commercial software and the people who participate in this as either intermediaries or 'fans'/consumers. This is organized in a concentric fashion, with the latter group forming the fuzzy boundaries of the scene. At the center there is the hard core of the scene, consisting solely of those who give software to others, with the aim of being the most efficient and overall best provider of warez. The term 'warez', again, denotes programs, soft-ware, with the telltale zed in the end being a form of shorthand for the computer underground (where odd spelling and incongruous use of capital letters are if not *de rigueur*, then at least definitional).

Warez d00dz get illegal copies of copyrighted software. If it has copy protection on it, they break the protection so the software can be copied. Then they distribute it around the world via several gateways. Warez d00dz form badass group names like RAZOR and the like. They put up boards that distribute the latest ware, or pirate program. The whole point of the Warez sub-culture is to get the pirate program released and distributed before any other group. I know, I know. But don't ask, and it won't hurt as much. This is how they prove their poweress [sic]. It gives them the right to say, "I released King's Quest IVXIX before you so obviously my testicles are larger." Again don't ask...

Ozone Pilot quoted under the heading 'warez d00dz' in the Jargon Dictionary,
<http://info.astrian.net/jargon/>

(Note that this is from a hacker dictionary and therefore somewhat prejudiced against the warez culture)

Of course, such a description of the warez scene scarcely begins to describe it. As in any ethnography, the point would/should be to provide a "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of the studied phenomenon in order to enable an understanding of it. Such a description would entail a discussion of the norms and values of the studied culture, its language, rituals, traditions and other cultural characteristics of this specific grouping of people. In addition such

an analysis should contain descriptions of the material conditions of these social interactions as well as any and all incidental information that can increase our understanding of the studied society. Anthropology as a discipline has a long tradition of doing just this, but the problem here is that the studied social structure doesn't easily fit into the gathering of tribes, clans and organizations that is normally the subject of the anthropological gaze. Instead, the scene is a very loose network of behavior, kept in check more by an idea of rules and the correct way to play the game than any clear organizing entity. We could even say that it more closely resembles a religion or an ideology, although what is studied here is not the priesthood of such a structure but its workings.

THERE IS NO THERE THERE

In the social sciences, much has been written about the problem of 'being there', with actual presence often seen as the hallmark of a good study. Frequent and heated debate has also raged concerning the problem of access. Different forms of access, or different conceptions about what constitutes access, have been important in defining the form of study that has been conducted. In my studies on the warez community, the initial problem was not the transportation to the studied area or the gaining of access to materials. Instead it consisted of realizing that there was such a community to be studied. Normally when we discuss a sub-culture or a community we implicitly make the assumption that this is a clearly defined and easily distinguishable grouping of people, often conveniently and stably located at an office or at least on a defined geographical site. Not so with the Warezonians.

Warezonian is very hard, although not wholly impossible, to geographically delineate. As it is a virtual community, and a highly distributed one at that, it lacks a clear space of activity. If one reads other ethnographies that have been conducted on virtual societies, these have normally focused on very tight and centralized structures. Examples of this would be the high level of interest in MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons, by any other name) and similar forums. Although these are not centralized when it comes to questions of power or access, they still are rather stable structures in that the social interaction takes place at a pre-determined place and that this place shows at least moderate longevity. Reading what has been written on virtual ethnography most, if not all, texts focus on mailing lists, Usenet newsgroups and the aforementioned MUDs – or milieus like focus groups where the researcher has a very high degree of control (see e.g. Hine 2000). This has created the illusion that virtual communities might actually be *easier* to study than their real-life equivalents, as the forums are stable (and often come with decent archives) and the participants easily approached. In their discussion of ethics in qualitative studies of the internet Mann & Stewart (2000) actually work from the premise that data gathering in such communities is so easy that questions of dispersal and obtaining consent are the central ethical problems. This of course presupposes that one can readily point at a node in cyberspace and state that this is one's field of study. Studies on computer-aided communication has normally done just this, started from a pre-existing forum and designated this as their field of research. In this case, such an approach would have been counter-productive in the extreme.

I can't recall when I first saw a sign of Warezonian. I do know that it must have been through my downloading a release and sifting through an NFO-file for instructions regarding installation and/or a serial number with which to install. Actually, it might have been slightly before this, surfing on the www for something to download (learning to search for "warez") or in a Usenet newsgroup, looking for the same. In any case, by participating in a warez

transaction, I started grasping the idea of a Warezonian. In the beginning I was a lamer. A lamer is someone that has accidentally stumbled into these transactions and who doesn't know decorum, or even the most basic technological facts. On the www, lamers are rife. There will always be those who would want to get something for nothing. In the eyes of the Warezonians these people are often seen as a form of weed, as inane questions and pleas for help inevitably flood any forum that allows lamers. This was my starting point. Although somewhat knowledgeable, my first experience with a release baffled me. What I had in form of access was a bunch of data-files, purportedly a commercial program (probably a game). It was packaged in several data parcels, as zip-files. Zip being the most commonly used method of data compression, I had no problems with it, although I couldn't grasp why anyone would package a file like this. What baffled me even more was the fact that this zipped archive contained files with extensions such as .arj, .a00, .a01 and so on. This is Arj-compression, then the vogue among some of the releasers. Trying to unpack this resulted in a message stating that I lacked a file, having only downloaded 4 out of five archives. Going back to where I got the first files, I found out that the site no longer existed. End of story. This is obviously not uncommon in ethnographic fieldwork. As the uninformed anthropologist, not even capable of handling basic instruments, tries to make sense of a ritual or way of working s/he will probably make an unholy mess of it all. The good thing with having hands-on access to the field studied is that there often are heaps of informants around, more or less willing to at least briefly show how something is to be done. The bad thing about doing this in Warezonian is that not only are the natives uninterested in helping and sometimes aggressive if you ask them to, they probably aren't even around. Blink, and you'll miss them.

Warezonian is fluid where it is accessible and inaccessible where it is stable. This, more than any other trait, is characteristic for it. The same is true for the Warezonians. Both fear of the law and a general lack of interest for outsiders make them difficult to get to. What is accessible, and what has here been studied, are the processes of Warezonian. Trying to find a stable structure, a static form will result in finding either nothing at all or merely a trivial trace. *There is no there there.* And, as any practicing anthropologist will be able to tell you, it is only through being informed about processes and recurring rituals that one can create a recognizable pattern for oneself in what at first glance seems irrational and chaotic. As warez take place on and basically only on computer networks, getting access to anything stable and recurring can be daunting at first. But by following up what happened on the constantly moving and shifting sites on the www, looking up leads for promising FTP-sites and lurking on Usenet and IRC-channels, I started to gain a better understanding for the Warezonians. In many ways, this form of empirical study blurs the boundaries between field studies and archival work. As the nets can be understood as a dispersed archive (albeit without any rules regarding archiving), it is hard to state whether I've observed actual dealings or reconstructed them through the traces they leave. Stated differently, even I don't know if my observations are "from the door of his tent" or "armchair anthropology". To live among the natives in Warezonian is to sit at one's desk and shuffle things around, as the natives have traded the corporeal place for the distributed space of mediated communication. My node in this space has been just as real, just not as central, as any participant's. The traces of dealings on my computer are identical with those 'out there', to the extent that talking about an 'out there' as something separate becomes somewhat strained. Studies by e.g. Turkle (1995) point toward a view of identity and place in 'cyberspace' (an unfortunate word in that it alludes to something more fantastic than the quotidian experience of the nets) as less tied to a specific form or position than these notions are in 'meatspace'. Instead, the place of activity is distributed so that the individual user's physical reality (desk and computer) reaches into the free-flowing network in a way that doesn't

allow for a clean epistemological break between 'there' and 'another there'. So my armchair does in some sense reach out into the field, but not in the classical sense of 'being there'. Again - there is no there there. But there are parts of there here, just enough to work on.

The empirical material upon which this study is built is culled from a wide range of available sources. Much of it is in the form of 'field diaries', although the term might seem more definite and clear-cut than it is. In my case, it refers to notes and observations gathered during the time I spent observing behavior on the net. I do not possess a stack of notebooks, dutifully written in eye-pleasing longhand. The mythical 'field diary', the archetypal little black book with dates and places written in at the beginning of every observation recorded therein, is in my case a jumble of loose notes, scribbles written on other papers, printed snippets and the like. As a complement to these there is my fallible but normally fair memory, and the fact that although I most definitively have 'gone native', this specific separation shouldn't render me incapable of relating my observations in a more general sense. The community studied here is not **that** strange, and taking on some of its views should arguably not distance me from the academic community to such an extent as to make my analysis unintelligible. Usually, the problem of 'going native' has been seen as the problem of no longer being able to reflect upon the observed situation as one has taken on the perspective and norms of what has been studied. What seems normal in the group is then portrayed **as** factually normal. But as is also well known, at least a partial embeddedness in social norms is necessary for understanding society as a whole. In anthropology, the discussion of nearness/distance and tacit social knowledge has been ongoing for decades, and as I have nothing new to bring to this discussion, I just wish to acknowledge it here. Suffice to say that much of my empirical material stems from having gained an understanding for particular social behaviors by observing and partaking in them.

In addition to this I have gathered a wealth of written material. A community that exists on the nets is by necessity highly dependent on the written word. The NFO-files that were alluded to on the very first pages of this text are an excellent example of this, and I have personally collected hundreds of these, with an additional 2500 at my disposal courtesy of tOAST from the group rAZOR 1911, who upholds a classic NFO-archive (see <http://www.uoguelph.ca/~shost/toast.html>). I also have collections from a variety of what could be described as the newspapers of Warezonian; e.g. Netmonkey Weekly Report (NWR), Couriers Weektop Scorecard (CWS), Defacto 2, Just The Facts and Brotherhood of Warez. There are also texts, explanatory and inflammatory, written by community members; web pages that cater to the scene; and other 'internal documents' and assorted written material. By no means can I claim that my collection is a complete set of information concerning the field, but I do claim that it gives a fairly accurate picture of it. On my computer I have gathered roughly a thousand documents regarding Warezonian, not counting the additional 3000-4000 documents I have as 'archives', collections amassed by community insiders. A goldmine in this regard is the 'scene portal' Defacto 2 (<http://www.defacto2.net/>) which keeps a very extensive scene archive (see also <http://scenearchive.cjb.net/>, and note that these are prone to disappear) - a godsend for a researcher. Descriptive quotes will often come from the Netmonkey Weekly Report, the United States Courier Report and the Couriers Weektop Scorecard, a state of affairs mainly due to the fact that taken together these particular scene periodicals have been published diligently for a long time (measured in the short-term perspective of Warezonian) and are unusually well written and articulate. Still, the quotations used are usually biased observations, in line with interview data. The decision to utilize them in the extent I have was based on my belief that this keeps the overall 'feel' for the material, as it is transmitted to the reader,

relatively coherent. Another point that I wish to bring forward is that other than my personal observations, all material used is in the public domain. Although some of the documents can be a bit tricky to locate, I wished to utilize only such documents that any researcher can get hold of without having to resort to lengthy participant observations, as I have done. The documents are listed in the references and are available on request. Validation and reliability of the data used is thus left an open issue, but an easily addressed one. In addition this has served an ethical purpose, as I through this do not place anyone at risk by publishing something that isn't accessible already.

Taken together, this forms the basis and the starting point for the discussion that will follow. My initial experiences in hunting down elusive software, reading strange documents, deciphering ASCII-graphics and the like made me increasingly aware of having stumbled onto alien soil. As I've stated, starting my foray into Warezonian I didn't even know I was conducting a study. Gradually, as I started seeing a pattern or paradigm (inside joke), I began thinking more seriously about how some of the things I saw were both interesting and counter-intuitive to one with a background in management studies, efficiencies where there should be none, order without that which orders. Continuing thus with data-collection and background work, without really having a clear idea about what was researched, resulted in the usual chaotic mass of ethnographic data, a starting point as good as any.

But what then has been my study? Merely the collection of readily available documents? Or the distillation of too much time spent by a web-browser, an FTP-client, and the IRC (Internet Relay Chat)? To *feel* the society discussed here the mere shuffling of documents is insufficient. This has required for me to spend quite a few hundred hours (thousands, probably, and this thought is somewhat depressing – as recollections of squandered time usually tends to be) in front of a computer screen. But as I hope will become clear over the next one hundred or so pages, the actual day-to-day interactions on the scene are far less than thrilling, which is the reason I will not go into the minutiae of this life. This text is written on the basis of the documents described above, something which might make this an archival study after all. Everything contained within these pages can be reconstructed through archival work on the internet. It might also partially make this a work of historical writing, as the scene changes with frightening rapidity. That my time spent on the nets has enhanced my understanding of these documents is an undeniable fact, even to the point that I could have written it without resorting to illustration through documentation. The methodology used in this study is thus more than somewhat ambiguous.

ANTHROPO-LOGICS

Whilst born out of mediated chaos, this text has at least one explicit purpose. It is the contention of this essay that the study of **any** economy, but particularly the one in question, must incorporate some sensitivity to the primitive forms of economic behavior. Furthermore, I will contend that the hybridity of economies has usually been insufficiently analyzed. In most textbooks on economics, there exists a basic acknowledgement of the fact of economic hybridity, often through a short paragraph stating that most economies are *mixed*, i.e. they are not pure instances of market or plan. This makes it seem like the result of a recipe, where you take two parts market to one part plan, add a dash of good will and season with gift-exchange. In the perspective of this text economies seem to be more like the world upon which they are built, hybrid creatures where e.g. gift-exchange has traveled with the economic system, mutated and changed but never left us. Quoting John Dewey (1925/1989, p. 89): “A classified and

hierarchically ordered set of pluralities, of variants, has none of the sting of the miscellaneous and uncoordinated plurals of our actual world.” Scratch the surface of any assumedly rational economic transaction and you can find behaviors that seem curiously similar to those of far less ‘developed’ economies. What this essay does is examine these in a field that could be called hyper-modern, one where technology has changed the economy... into an earlier form of itself?

I will argue that the possibility exists for a ‘new primitivism’ in business studies, a way to observe phenomena in economy with a sensitivity borrowed from anthropology (cf. Czarniawska-Joerges 1992) and the expressed intention of examining the foundations of economic logic, without the prejudice of viewing markets as the basis of economy. And doing so based on data, the ‘thick descriptions’ of Geertz. In a sense this is a continuation of the program laid forth by Sahlins in *Culture and Practical Reason*, where he in the preface states the point of his book as: “an anthropological critique of the idea that human cultures are formulated out of practical activity and, behind that, utilitarian interest.” Sahlins’s book, being one of the most strongly worded arguments for the stand that (economic) rationality is contingent and that all the values that form such rationality are cultural constructs, is a critique of the “origin myth of capitalist society” (Sahlins 1976, p. 53). This essay, then, could be seen as the analysis of the child of this same capitalist society, the analysis of a child that has developed without the religious convictions regarding the market that drove the parent.

Now, entering a field, even one where presence might be too strong a word, the researcher will find himself wondering what he is actually doing. I would like to call this an anthropology/ethnography (I do not discriminate between these terms here) of Warezonian. The reason for this is simple: I cannot claim to have understood the Warezonians, at least not initially. They are very much like a tribe, with a vernacular and culture of their own and, particularly, a logic of their own, one not initially shared by this researcher. Their interaction constitutes a society, and one that I felt should be analyzed for the ways in which it incorporates what initially seems incongruent. This anthropological stance is thus due to the fact that I attempt to describe this community in a holistic fashion, and the way I have worked to do this is by submerging myself into this cultural form, attempting to understand it as a complete whole. Instead of hypothesizing a particular form or reason for a particular observed interaction (motivation, aim, etc.) I’ve tried to describe what social life in Warezonian is, what people actually do within this sphere and how this is meaningful to them. Only at a later stage have I tried to postulate some ideas how this could be understood, and even here I do not claim to present reasons or explanations for Warezonian, but rather interpretations of this sociality. I am in debt to some of the classics of anthropology in writing this, particularly the works of Malinowski (1922), Mauss (1924/1990) and Sahlins (1972, 1976), but do not claim to follow any of them in any strict methodological sense. Actually, I do not wish to pledge allegiance to any methodological school, barring accounting for my influences and attempting for a logical form in the presentation. Even my use of the term ‘anthropology’ might well be off-putting for some. I do not wish to claim that this is an anthropological study, in the disciplinary sense. Instead, this is a study of organizing and economic behavior, and, if it belongs to a discipline, it is the study of ‘organization and management’. I have sometimes wished to refer to my work as ‘critical management studies’, but in doing so I have wanted to relate what I write specifically to *management*. Still, my approach has been influenced by cultural and (particularly and specifically) economic anthropology (cf. Wilk 1996), as the study of cultural practices present in these specialties most closely have resembled the way in which I’ve tried to come to grips with Warezonian. Referring to ‘anthropology’ is then for me a way to evoke a certain feel for the research process. I’ve drawn on the trappings of anthropology, its

holistic approach and direct and prolonged contact with what is studied, much more than I've used the disciplinary basis of it. In a sense, I borrow freely from disciplines what I feel I can use, creating a tentative structure for this instance of economic anthropology, mediated and mediating. Recently, Barbara Czarniawska (2001a) has referred to something similar as 'poaching' (a word she poached from de Certeau), the practice of intellectual borrowing, sponging and stealing from wherever one can find something useful. The illicit sound of this word is in perfect harmony with both the subject and method of this essay, and I therefore use it gleefully.

Still, I feel that I have to make a stronger case for the way I have drawn on material that to a great extent comes from a field limited enough to be referred to as 'economic anthropology'. Although I am not an anthropologist *per se*, I would like to see this extended essay as an argument for the use of economic anthropology in the study of modern economic organizing and organizations. Economic anthropology has by and large concentrated on the 'primitive', but largely left this state of 'being primitive' unproblematized. But by this I do not refer to any lack of reflection concerning ethnocentric bias or differing regimes of development, both of which are thoroughly addressed in the literature. Instead, I'm referring to the notion of original and basic ways of economic being (not beings), primitive behavior defined as less institutionalized behavior – universal features, if you wish. Even if we assume that all values are culturally contingent, we can assume that there can be certain patterns of behavior (being social, interacting, communicating) that form the basis of any economic structure. The belief that that an unbiased study of economies should address such patterns is fundamental for this text – it is the 'new primitivism' alluded to earlier. And economic anthropology is crucial to such an understanding. The problem is that economic anthropology really hasn't made enough of its position. Studying basic forms of economy, it has made little impact on e.g. organization theory (a statement certain to provoke some controversy). It is not that anthropology isn't referred to, it is more a question of the way in which sensitivities are utilized. My argument is that it isn't the technical methodology (participant observation, shadowing, ethnographies) that has been lacking from e.g. management studies. Rather, it is the comparative and theory-building nature of economic anthropology that I would like to bring forth. By analyzing the intersections between cultural development, material paradigms and social provisioning, thinkers like Maurice Godelier (1977) have managed to create engaging illustration of e.g. the function of money in primitive societies. And this is not merely a question of empirical sensitivity. Modern studies of organizations and management have mainly (exclusively?) focused on the goings-on in contemporary economies, structures created by political economy (cf. Callon 1998). By doing so, the comparative element has to a great extent disappeared, and when one compares behaviors, this is often done in relation to other developed structures – i.e. capitalist navel-gazing. The strength of economic anthropology has been the way in which it has encompassed a multitude of logics and behaviors, as in Yang's (2000) study of archaic ritual in the postsocialist market economy of Wenzhou. And although there have been fine studies of economies as cultures (e.g. Douglas & Isherwood 1979, Abolafia 1996) the comparative element, particularly the sensitivity to 'earlier', more 'primitive' forms, has been somewhat lackluster (though it has found a strong voice in the work of George Marcus (1998, Marcus & Hall 1992)). So by using e.g. the comparative method as developed by Mauss (1924/1990), a more complete picture of human economic being could perchance be achieved. The program briefly and sketchily constructed on these pages, then, is the utilization of economic anthropology in the more business-oriented fields – a new primitivism of management and organization studies.

This said, there are both benefits and problems to adopting such a perspective. The ethnographic perspective in the study of organizations, management and economy has become increasingly popular (see e.g. Douglas 1986, Czarniawska 1997, Silverman 2001), but often this seems to run the risk of becoming a way to simplify research instead of enhancing it. We can often achieve much with pure description, but I feel that this ethnographic stance has sometimes (although not in the cases I've referred to) been used in a non-reflexive way, as a way of avoiding theorizing. But theoretical reflexivity is crucial to an anthropology, and maybe particularly so in this case. In some sense Warezonian should be an ideal space in which to study organizing, if we by ideal refer to the predominance of form over substance, the purity of the insubstantial (*sic*). As Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges (1992, p. 53) remarks in her critique of Geertz, the study of organizations and organizational practices usually can't afford the idealism of 'pure' cultural anthropology:

Organizations are filled with things that cut, puncture, print, mold, ride, and drill at the same time as they denote, describe, represent, and signify. Our ambition should therefore be both aspects of their simultaneity; the materialization of ideas and the symbolic and practical aspects of things.

One of my main problems in studying Warezonian might very well have been the **total absence** of things that "cut, puncture, print, mold, ride, and drill". Yes, there are computers, router, servers, hard drives and similar technological implements. But the interaction and the organizing is undertaken in a field with little physical presence. And although I could take the assemblage of technologies (in a material sense) into account, à la actor-network theory (see Pickering 1995, Hassard & Law 1999), I have chosen not to. It is a choice, but I will not dwell on technology, and the choice to do so makes the studied field at least seemingly ethereal. For many, such absences in the current climate of organizational studies (both critical and mainstream) mark the gap from which great things can spring. For postmodernists, ruptures and absences are as important, and very possibly more important than the mundane and maybe oppressive idea of anything actually present. For proponents of virtual organizations, imaginary organizations and networks, the immaterial nature of Warezonian could be touted as proof positive of their ideas about new forms of organizing. Unburdened by the usual dull materiality of organizational life, the Warezonians should be able to enact wholly new forms of working together. For me, it formed a problem insofar as I at no time had anything particularly tangible to depict, merely a flow of information, which to some marks nefarious illegalities and to others an incomprehensible waste of time. Instead of meetings, offices and machinery I have traces and inscriptions, fragmentary archives. We could call it a *mediated ethnography*. Whereas classical ethnographers deal with being present and often interview their studied subjects endlessly, a mediated world presents its own particular demands and limitations. Although one can well interview in such a milieu, this interview will always be just as mediated as other information one can access. A community that exists only on the nets will already present the researcher with all the information she requires. All discussions, all actions, all comments, all that constitutes their way of life will be present, just not in the usual sense. Instead, all will be present in the form of mediations, traces of technological interactions. It could be likened to a real-time archive study, research on a culture with an obsession for archiving reports of everything they do – albeit with an almost total disregard for order.

A study of Warezonian will also by necessity be fractional. As warez life totally circulates around the internally mundane act of transferring files, the plethora of social interactions that otherwise dominates organizational life is largely absent. Describing Warezonian is to a great

extent a description of this act, and attempting to understand the way in which it can exist as a process. As there is little stability, in the ordinary organizational sense, and none of the long-term process and projects that form at least a semi-stable core to 'normal' businesses, the researcher must pay attention to the *implicit* stability and permanence one can infer from observations. The danger is naturally that any such inference can be subjected to critique and alternative explanations. Due to the archival nature of a virtual community – as data is by necessity mediated through technology – an almost archeological (if not in the Foucauldian sense) approach is necessary. What the researcher has to do is to piece together documents, traces of transactions and snippets of textual interaction, and try to make this into a coherent whole. Warezonian might even be viewed as a grammatological society (cf. Derrida 1976), one of 'only texts'. Here, in this setting, speech is nothing and writing is everything. Somewhat less philosophically, Michael Fischer (1999) has noted that any anthropology of "Late or Post-modernities" has to be more fragmented than the more ordered narratives of the early masters, partly due to the need to access a broader set of localities and processes and also due to the fact that we are dealing with "emergent forms of life". The community I've observed is not a thousand years old, in fact we have to stretch the definition of it quite a bit if we want to claim that it is 20 years old. Someone who has been a part of it for ten years can rightly claim that 'he's seen it all'. A kind of seniority can be achieved in one to two years, meritocracy-wise. New sites, new groups, shifts in power; all happen on a weekly basis. What is a central and accessible node in the morning may very well be abandoned in the afternoon. And as was stated earlier, there is simply no straightforward location present that can be referred back to. Instead, Warezonian – spatially, politically, socially – is recreated daily by the partial reappearance of its inhabitants. This speed and this continuous emergence and change in cultures make any total description problematic. Instead, a certain laxity is preferable, to evoke the feeling of the scene rather than represent it fully. Much as the early anthropologies had to invent their 'methodology' on the spot, rather than in the scholastics' chamber, I have not attempted to analyze Warezonian through the lens of a particular method. Rather, I've attempted to view them through a particular perspective, namely that of economic behavior.

Still, the fractionality of my account leads to at least two questions. One, can it be argued that there exists a greater whole behind these veils of text-snippets and digitized transfers? Two, am I not discussing a fragment of an economy? I will address these issues in my treatment throughout, but some remarks are still in order.

When it comes to the issue of a greater whole I can simply refer back to the impact of the scene. Although it is formed through fragments, the participants (and I) have obviously managed to pull these together into a tentatively coherent whole for long enough to create, produce and distribute illegal software *en masse*. We could additionally wonder whether this is not the issue for all studies of organized behavior. We have no way of portraying the studied subject totally, as 'the perfect model of a cat is... another cat'. Furthermore, we can question if the world ever presents itself as a totality, to anyone. Feyerabend (1999), among others, has argued that any form of knowledge about the world has to be based on limiting one's view, of shutting things out so as not to be flooded with interminable complexity. Likewise, in Weick (1995) knowledge about the world is in fact the piecing together of impulses that left to their own devices really do not manage to make sense. McCloud (1993, p. 61-83) has talked about the fixing of greater wholes through fragments as 'closure', and remarks that any form of expression is in fact founded on the audience 'filling in the blanks'. Sensemaking is the collecting of fragments to create wholes, and that this process can be subconscious on a social level, i.e. that culture itself over long periods of time can create more or less stable patterns by

which such comprehension can be reached, has been shown with lucidity in the work of Norbert Elias (1978a, 1991).

The second objection, that Warezonian is not an economy, is more complicated. It is true that the interactions here analyzed do not provision the participants in the material sense. A Warezonian depends on other economies in order to eat and clothe himself. This would seem to make the scene a petty aberration. I will here only give two brief retorts to this. One, so was industrial capitalism in the beginning. Two, so is the world of fashion, and the world of art, the world of telecommunications and the world of most anything besides agriculture – and most of that too, nowadays. In other words, while it is true that Warezonian is not a complete economy, i.e. it does not contain what we could call a subsistence economy, it can still function as an economy unto itself. Neither do we know that the scene could not develop into something more complex and encompassing (as Sterling (1999) suggests). What we do know is that it is a structure based on a specific ‘mode of production’ (to use the Marxist vernacular) and that it is at least moderately stable and successful. **It exists**, and this alone is reason enough to study it.

Continuing with the discussion of what kind of study this might be, in yet another sense a study of Warezonian could be seen as an experiment in reflexive social science, as any ethnography of economies must be. Lacking the easy coherence of a clearly demarcated organization or immediate and total cultural traits, any analysis of the scene will clearly be an interpretive one. Similarly, the relative obscurity of the scene would allow for a certain creative approach to its study, one where objective truth could be relinquish in favor of a more dramatic description. I have not opted for the latter, but have chosen a particular interpretation, namely viewing Warezonian as an economy (the reasons for which will be explicated later), albeit in a cultural sense. This does not mean that I think that this is the only possible perspective, and I imagine that a study of Warezonian as politics or gendered practices or text would be both possible and productive. Rather, I feel that I have to fight for the privilege of adopting a particular perspective, at least to the extent of showing it viable. My telling of Warezonian will be “*partial* – committed and incomplete” (Clifford & Marcus 1986, p. 7), and does clearly reflect my inclinations. This of course requires me to question my motives. Am I thereby merely forcing my subjects into categories that happen to be convenient for me? In a sense, I am. In another, this is necessary for any knowledge, as noted by e.g. Feyerabend (1999, see above). Any abstraction or explanation involves simplifying that which is explained, reducing its inherent complexity and attachments. Again, the only full representation of a phenomenon is the phenomenon itself. My tale of Warezonian as an economy is a simplification, but hopefully a reasonably enlightened such.

There are still more problems. As has been remarked by e.g. Brekhus (2000), the problem with much of the studies conducted in the social sciences, is that empirical data are presented as much more interesting than they have to be. This *making exotic* takes away from what can actually be learnt from observations. Examples in the area of management studies could be the unnecessary emphasis on leaders and companies in exceptional circumstances – large-scale change processes, dynamic growth and successes (or dire straits) have received far more interest than the normal processes of stasis and business as usual. Brekhus (ibid., p. 94-96) makes the case that factually and morally interesting studies (i.e. cases that either portray something extraordinary or are simply deemed important) are rife, while *analytically* interesting studies are few and far between. This could be compared to the discussion of management studies as genre (Czarniawska 1999), insofar as it addresses the problem of *why* we are drawn to (or repelled from) a particular study. My problem is that Warezonian might be **too** (factually)

interesting for its own good. A roving, internationally connected group of bandits that (purportedly) costs the industry up to billions of dollars yearly, nurse anarchistic political views and a distinct Robin Hood-complex, are technologically adept, loquacious and cocky, **and** are engaged in an illegal competition of donations – this is simply too good a story. My argument will by necessity suffer from this. It is easy, dangerously easy, to present the Warezonians as interesting. What they do all day is weird, exotic, and yes, even interesting to the average person. The question is then how to present them as anything besides a sociological freak show? This has been one reason for me to forgo a more narrative presentation of Warezonian (although calling the scene ‘Warezonian’ is naturally a rhetorical device). I could have presented the scene through a plot, telling the story of e.g. the dramatic episode of releasing Quake. I have opted not to, as this in my view would have functioned as a way to artificially make the community even more interesting – something I do not think is necessary or even desirable. Instead, my presentation is somewhat flatter, and intentionally less exhilarating. Warezonian as wicked weirdness would make a grand book, but to learn something from the warez scene, it would perhaps be wise to study them as something... normal. Just a different kind of normal.

As a text and as anthropology, this will be a *collage*. I cannot bring all of Warezonian onto these pages. What I can do is to present a mix of observations, theoretical asides, comments from the scene, snippets from Warezonian texts, some imagery, my explanations and the likes. Lacking a distinct chronological narrative, this collage is meant to carry forward the image of the scene, reproduce it in a way that makes understanding possible. I have not wished to emphasize the artistic possibilities of such an approach, and I will not present personal poetic or artistic renditions of the scene, but the text as a whole is clearly my creation. It is me making Warezonian meaningful. It is even a political stance, an attempt to rescue-by-creating-meanings a form of software piracy from those who wish to present it in a totally different light. Although there are many who get their voices reproduced within these pages, they do so on my behalf, me being the one who controls the polyphony. No matter whether I like it or not, writing this makes me one voice for all of Warezonian, and it is up to the reader to from this collage re-construct the necessary fragmentation of meaning inherent in any social phenomenon.

THE WAREZONIANS

Although no real demographics exist, it is possible to give a fair profile of the Warezonians. They are mainly males from Europe and the Americas. Even if there exists a stereotype concerning participants in the computer underground as being pimply teens, many of the Warezonians are old enough to hold regular jobs and have families. According to one of the very few articles in a mass-market publication written on the warez dudes (Wired 3.02 UK) all of the interviewed were over the age of 23, most in their 30's and at least one almost 50. The language primarily used is English, but this is true only on the larger scene. On a regional level, the Warezonians use their native language. They are technologically savvy, but far from the idealized picture of the underground consisting solely of computer geniuses. On the whole they are not unlike such bands of technologically interested bands of males that can be found in any school, university or company. On the whole they seem to come from and exist in just such groupings, meaning that you could very well know some of the Warezonians without knowing it. Some are even teenage girls:

Today is a boring day, nothing new, nothing exciting. But I did find something to zip up and release to contribute to the scene. Infact I had gotten it last night, but totally forgot about it till

now. It is a car addon for some game called SpeedBusters by UbiSoft, and it is the biggest car addon I have ever seen (4 megs!). As we speak I am trying to zip up this bad boy and upload it, but alas, eight minutes had passed and I am still zipping, grrrr. Sometimes I swear my CPU in my computer is a hamster doing laps inside a metal wheel, perhaps that could explain the slowness of my computer.
March 13th 1999

I think SUNNY_dee from Paradigm is really an asshole by day and a jerk off by night. Why? He simply has no respect for women, and his dictionary of vocabulary that he uses is rather laughable. To top this all off, this fool believes he is Romeo. But I must respect his talent and what he contributes to The Scene.

Another person I dislike is eRUPT of Razor, can you say he's a racist? These two clowns would probably be the people I pick off first if I were a hitwoman. Course, the two groups are fabulous (Razor, Paradigm), don't get me wrong! Just they happen to both have a black sheep in the family. But who doesn't right?
March 28th 1999

From the web-diaries of “`mystic” (sic), an eighteen-year old female courier,
available at <http://www.multimania.com/hetero/mystic>

Warezonians are not hackers. They co-exist in the underground, and on a more general level we can talk of HPVAC (or h/p/v/a/c) - Hacking, Phreaking, Virus, Anarchy and Cracking - where hackers hack security systems (see Taylor 1999), phreakers mess with telephone systems, virii-guys enjoy playing with computer viruses and crackers crack (break) stuff, mainly security (note the difference between a hack and a crack). Working with warez it might sometimes be necessary or advantageous to hack (e.g. to work around sabotage), but this seems to be unusual. Warezonians aren't hackers, and there is often a certain tension between these two groups. Hackers sometimes (often) view Warezonians as more or less lame, and even use the term 'warez pups' or 'warez kiddies' to show their disdain. Although this is not a general state (I suspect most hackers aren't interested enough to care one way or another), Warezonians seem to have mixed feelings towards hackers. Ethically and politically they are somewhat similar, though hackers tend to be more explicit with their political views. As libertarianism and anarchism are adopted as a kind of 'house politics', Warezonians will sometimes use such rhetoric, but this seems to be rare. HPVAC is not in itself anything even close to a structure or a movement, but rather a field of more or less similar activities and trends in the computer underground. In actuality it seems that the groupings present in this abbreviation are almost totally self-contained and only share information on a more superficial level. As all these groupings have definite internal structures and hierarchies, it would be pointless to talk of any of them as a part of HPVAC as a greater whole. One could even see the divisions between these groupings as a form of reverse synergy - or idiergy, in the words of Gustafsson (2001). The specialization that has developed when hackers do not work with virii and crackers don't mess with phones has perhaps strengthened these divergent interests. In addition, I should point out that some think that the cracking of software doesn't really belong in HPVAC, and should indeed be considered an area all its own.

It is also **extremely important** to understand that Warezonians are not pirates. The term pirate is sometimes used generically for any participant in the computer underground that deals in software, but in order to simplify I will here use pirate in one, clearly defined sense. A computer pirate is someone who sells illegally copied software with profit as his/her primary motive. Warezonians do not do this. Instead, they give away and share illegally copied software

without a profit motive. The difference matters little to the industry, which goes after both groups with gusto, but it is immensely important for my purposes. On the warez scene this not-for-profit-ethos is strictly adhered to, and in many ways defines the community.

COREPDA is a non profit organisation! We're here for the fun!
From the NFO of CorePDA (sub-division of Core), dated January 30th 2000

*ALWAYS REMEMBER:
WE DO THIS JUST FOR FUN! AND WE ARE AGAINST COMMERCIALISATION!
IN FACT WE BUY ALL OUR OWN GAMES, AS WE LOVE GAMES, AND WE ARE
NOT JOKING!*

IF YOU LIKE THIS GAME, BUY IT, WE DID!
Identical text found on NFO of both Myth (dated September 30th 2000)
and Deviance (dated August 4th 2000).

So, the Warezonians are not pirates. I cannot emphasize the importance of this enough, both for the scene itself and for the argument put forth later in this essay.

What additionally distinguishes Warezonians is their love for software. In many ways we can in this love for the coded word see both a gathering instinct and an extension of other interests. Warezonians that only work with games are often quite fanatical gamers and lovers of the genre, and very much apt to write long and incisive reviews about new game titles. Likewise there are those with an obvious burning passion for advanced graphical work – naturally done with the most advanced software packages available. All of the members of the community are knowledgeable in at the very least the release schedule for software, and many have very definite views on the strengths and weaknesses of commercially available software. They are also packrats; a warezonian will often have a software collection far beyond what s/he will ever know what to do with. E.g. during the empirical work for writing this I have at one point in time had seven different 3D-modelling packages installed simultaneously on my computer, without the working knowledge of even one of these. Put in the most simplistic of terms, Warezonians revel in the ownership and commandeering of software. It is not the utility of software that is central here, much as utility in totemic masks among the Kwaikutl (Mauss 1924/1990, p. 39) isn't the central aspect of these. But neither is it a simple question of hoarding, an activity well theorized in economics. Rather it is a question of having a feeling for the collected software, where programs take on qualities that are not limited to their direct use-function. To exemplify, looking at my own development in Warezonian I have detected a change in the way I view software. It is no longer a question of having sufficient software installed, but increasingly of having the latest and most desirable programs available. Even though my skills in the field of music are limited, I feel an urge to have some of the most advanced editors available, **in some form**. It is not necessary for me to have them installed, but the need to know that I could work with top-of-the-line software if the need arose has become very strong. I am more than willing to use most of a day hunting for updates and patches for programs I hardly use, simply to know that I have access to the best of the best. This could be likened to how Baudrillard (1975) used Freud to portray the postmodern consumer as an (potentially) obsessive collector, where the illusory strive for wholeness can be seen as a re-collection of oneself. We enter a field where objects take on a logic of symbolic value, representing e.g. technological prowess through ownership. Warezonian is a land of symbolic values, and its inhabitants are distinctly desirous when it comes to the circulating objects.

The Warezonians are also competitive, sometimes to extremes. It is important to understand that they represent a codified structure where direct competition is not the way in which a balance in resources is constituted, but a structure where competition is its own reason. Much of what I could observe and happened among the Warezonians didn't become graspable until I understood the centrality of competition within the community. The competition and the minor contests that form it control almost every aspect of Warezonian life. This forms the identity of the Warezonians; it orders the structure of their networks. It is what Warezonian life is, a competition. Predictably, this also makes pride an important aspect of the overall demeanor of the Warezonians. Wanting to be the best and taking pride in one's achievements is both a way to build identity and a way to communicate within the field. If an artist is only as good as her last performance, the same is very much so for these people. Resulting in a wide array of different competitions and competitive structures, this spirit of an ongoing contest permeates Warezonian life to such a degree that much of the ongoing discussion seems to be about questions such as who 'rules' or 'owns' something at the moment, who 'cheats' and who is falling behind.

RiSC is the longest lasting courier grp by far, and continues to bring honor and respect to the courier scene as only RiSC can. To our supporters we can only say, that YOU are what keeps the group going. And to our competitors we say, keep trying guys, you can only aspire.

From the NFO of RiSC (RiSE iN SUPERiOR COURiERiNG),
dated January 21st 1998

AOD: Can you spell "ownage"? I can, A-O-D. Darkwolf grabbed the #1 spot this week with 171 points. Some solid numbers from Faith and a nice showing from sax. He is definately one to look out for in the weeks to come. Straight trading this week from AOD with little to no pre.

They are definately the ones to beat.

Overall: 9/10

[...]

RiSC: For a while there, I thought RiSC really had something going for them. Definately not the RiSC of old times, but definately a step in the right direction. Where did everyone go? Now, all I see is Brain appear on VDR weektop now and then. Get it together guys.

Overall: 1/10

From "bohnz's Biased Courier Section" printed in NWR;
Issue LXXII, January 19th 2000

Warezonians are also, as should be clear from the quotes above, very vociferous about themselves and the state of Warezonian life. It seems to be a matter of some pride for Warezonians to have an opinion regarding almost any facet of community life. Disputes and heated arguments are common, something that probably has to do with so much of these discussions taking place as direct chats, i.e. on IRC. Also, as Warezonian life so clearly is a 'rivalocracy', constant argumentation regarding the competition seems to be an important way to create and maintain identities. Competition is the engine that keeps the discussion alive, as the different aspects of competitive behavior need to be related to each other. And as the competition is the main organizing principle of the community, this intermingles these discussions into social life to an extent that the discussion is the community. There exists a demand to be able to respond (promptly) to questions or challenges, as the low barriers for communication make it difficult to maintain distance in arguments. With little or no obstacles to instant communication, independent of geographic locale, there are strong social norms concerning participation. Avoidance is often seen as hesitance or fear. The density of this discussion, i.e. the frequency

and participant coverage of it, also creates a very active space of moralization. Misconducts, real or contested, are aired very quickly and very publicly. Even small transgressions are brought to people's attention and then extensively discussed – a type of judicial forum in this anarchy.

In summation, Warezonians display all the characteristics we can assume from a society that has developed in the fairly isolated milieu of the computer underground. Like many a sub-culture, the members are somewhat homogenous to begin with and have developed increasingly similar world-views through their participation in a 'common cause'. What distinguishes them is a love both of the software their culture is formed around and of the game. The latter part is probably the most important. Warezonians are players in a game, and their other characteristics seem to have developed out of this. This makes it imperative to distinguish them from others engaging in seemingly the same kind of activities (i.e. pirates and hackers). Where the pirates can be seen as renegade businessmen and hackers play with unwilling participants, Warezonians are inherently social in their internal network and asocial outside of it. We could compare them to a distant tribe, one that has both knowledge and trade with the external world, but who still prefers keeping dealings as internal as possible. Put as succinctly as possible, warez is a culture.

A short note on spelling(Z) and word(z)

An observant reader has probably noted that there are certain mannerisms when it comes to spelling and generally communicating through the written word within the scene. Among these we can particularly note the predilection for using the letter 'z' at the end of words and a characteristic use of capital letters, abbreviations and numbers in the place of letters. A self-conscious and exaggerated example of this:

Phear ye, phear ye! Just when you thought it was safe to cancel your subscription to Bugtraq, comes the return of BoW. That0s right folks, the people who brought you the ever-pheared .rhosts explo1t and sh0ck3d th3 world with the release of d4l3 dr3w0s gerbling photos are back in 1999 with h-bomb force.

Brotherhood of Warez #9; May/June 1999

When this gets taken to its (humorous) extreme, text basically becomes encrypted:

d1s b th0 1 & th0 Only Br0th3r M1ch3r0b Of th3 Y0rksh1r3 P0\$\$3 (ph33r, 14ym0rzZ!@#\$. th1z 1z 4 f1l3 k0nt41n1ng sUm v3ry 0-dAy x-pL0itZz and 1npH(), s0 eY3 4m trU\$t1ng 1n u BoW r34d1ng e18 du0dz t0 k33p th1z s3krUt t3kn1q Out Of th3 h4ndz Of 14ym0rz.

Brotherhood of Warez #9; May/June 1999

It is especially the letter 'z' that instantly identifies something as belonging to the underground. As Beelzebub wryly states in his warez guide, "[t]he z apparently symbolises rebellion". One talks about warez, crackz, serialz (serial numbers) and sitez – among other things. Partly, this is probably due to the desire to state the uniqueness of the scene, 'this thing of ours'. By adopting a vernacular of its own, the scene can cultivate its identity. It also has the added (unintended) benefit of making searches easier; by discerning crackz from cracks you can search the nets for crack-files without being deluged with information about cocaine and breakage. To properly understand why these forms of spelling are so popular we have to keep in mind that much/all of the communication on the scene is done over networks, and that the programs used often use fixed-width ANSI-type. When you write in ANSI, an 'E' and a '3' look

rather similar, for instance. A '4' resembles an 'A', a '1' becomes an 'I' and so forth. Also, if you communicate with a keyboard, abbreviations are a functional way to speed up exchanges. Download becomes d/l, people ppl and 'what the fuck?' wtf. LOL means 'Laughing Out Loud', and most any feeling can be conveyed through the liberal use of smileys (i.e. face-ideograms a la :-). The technical constraints of the scene have in this way changed the vernacular of it.

Of course, much of this is simply a question of wanting to seem special and developing a style that is incomprehensible to the outsider and distinguishes insiders. The mundane act of spelling thus becomes a way to delineate the social structure of the scene.

There is also the question of vocabulary. As any sub-culture, Warezonian has a lot of terminology that mirrors its values. I will not make this a linguistic analysis, but I still want to clarify some terms:

Elite = a general term to describe the upper echelons of the underground hierarchies. To be elite (other forms include 'leet and misspellings as in the above) is to be truly knowledgeable and connected. Subsequently there are far more of those who claim to be elite than those who are actually viewed as such. Actually, claiming to be elite means one isn't.

Lamer = the opposite of elite. Simply a derogatory term that refers to someone that is not sufficiently 'with it'. To claim one is elite is a telltale mark of a lamer. Inept or socially awkward.

Newbie = newcomer that is yet unaware of decorum. Derogatory but also descriptive.

Most other terms will be/have been clarified in context or defined in the text.

THE BASIC FORM OF A WAREZ RELEASE

OxYGeNs release of SoundForge 4.5h served as a brief illustration of a fairly standard warez release, but this description needs to be filled out if we are to understand the workings of the warez scene at all. Although the notion of warez isn't all that complicated, the structures behind it can be bewildering.

A pirate group's goal is to release a commercially available game, with all copy protection removed or bypassed, in a format that reflects the original games purpose, and is generally considered "playable".

From "Beowulf's Thoughts on the CD-RIP'ing Scene"

One of the usual ways a program comes into scene is extremely prosaic. It is called a store pickup, and it just means that somebody drives to a store and buys the program. Slightly more adventurous is to have a person that works at such a store as an insider and receive programs from him/her on loan or for free. Although both of these are easy ways to obtain software, it is however not in the least unheard of for people in the warez scene to additionally have collaborators on the inside of the very software companies that hold them as their worst enemies. This is in fact what almost all release groups strive to, as having this is cheap and quick, and can turn into a continuous supply. Still, no matter where the material comes from, the Warezonians will get hold of their programs.

In this day and age, getting software is often synonymous with getting a CD-Rom with the program on it. Although some suppliers can provide the releasing parties of the warez scene with the pure code of the software, this too is often in the form of a CD image. This means

that the manipulation of a program to a release involves two distinct steps. In order to make a release functional for the end-user, it is necessary to remove all such embedded security functions that protect it from illegal copying. This process is called 'cracking', as in cracking a program open. Involving both the removal of direct copy protection (such as serial numbers and function delimiting) and indirect security (such as validation required to access multiplayer-functions), this is what most people associate with computer piracy. With the increasing sophistication of crackers, many software companies have all but ignored copy protection. Often, programs are protected by a mere serial number, something that can be bypassed by simply sharing your own, legitimate serial. There are other, more sophisticated forms, but none that have proven reliable in the long run - even protection by hardware, "dongles", has been cracked repeatedly.

Cracking can be seen as only one part of the more general process of 'ripping', extracting only those parts of a program package that are deemed necessary. As many new programs can take up most of the 700+Mb of a CD-Rom, and some even go beyond this (i.e. span multiple discs), you have to 'rip' out a functional version while leaving less vital files (often help-files and non-essential multimedia) behind. The process of 'packaging', compressing files both internally and into distributable files, complements this. In this process one also adds informational files. Combined, this can whittle down a program to a far more manageable size, in the case of application often reducing the size of a package to a mere 20-30% of the original. This is the delivery size, optimized for transportation over networks and considerate to the limitations in transmission speed of the average user.

After a package is finished, it goes out to the 'couriers'. As the name implies, these are the delivery troops of the scene. A release will go up one site, get picked up by a courier and spread around other sites, often at or approaching the speed of the network. Couriers also battle for supremacy, and often go to extreme lengths to be the first to spread a particularly desirable program. They also go for quantity, and exist in a dependent/semi-antagonistic relationship with 'siteOPs', the operators of the sites warez are spread on. These sites are either semi- or extremely exclusive, and are for the use of the scene only. From here warez seep out onto the web, where enthusiast keep up 'storefronts' for warez. In effect, this is a divider between the 'real' warez scene and the wannabe warez scene, due to the basically open nature of the www.

On the net, warez are spread in a more haphazard fashion, drifting from site to site. Although there are homepages with lists of new and available warez, these are rarely very reliable and can often be more or less fraudulent. Many such sites seem to exist mainly to improve their ranking on the various top-lists and to lure visitors to porn-sites in order to earn referral fees. This said, it is not that hard to find most common programs for free on the www. Although the selection is far more limited than on the scene proper, standard packages are abundant and available.

Which brings us to the end-users. Here, end-users are seen as existing wholly outside the warez scene. Although the established warez guys also function as users, both of the warez themselves and the field in general, they are not end-users in the sense that the warez transaction could be seen as ending in them. Instead, there are outsiders that only get their programs through the web, and that function as a type of final customers for the warez transactions. These are at best marginal to the scene, and will receive little attention here.

We shall now discuss some of these actors more thoroughly.

Suppliers

In an NFO-file, the group that has released a particular program often lists themselves under the label 'Supplier'. Although this can be correct in several ways, I'm using the term to refer to the people that supply the groups with the original software. Sometimes, as mentioned, this is in fact the group, e.g. in cases where the original is store-bought. In other cases, the 'insider' is a part of the group, and isn't credited directly due to concerns about repercussions. Or, s/he might be just a valued associate without being a direct member. In any case, these individuals are critical for the scene as originators of the transaction that follows.

In my mind, what makes a good utils group is having inside contacts, and getting stuff from your work to supply. Back when i first started this stuff, there were no web pages to card software off of, there was no such thing as "WebWarez". We all had to scrape our resources to find something good to release. Back then, there wasn't as much crap as there is today being released. Certain groups that i wont mention seem to like to get all of their stuff that way. They aren't a utils group, but sometimes that stuff is useful.

UncleJohn, Corp leader, being interviewed in NWR; Issue XXII, November 3rd 1998

A good supply/supplier is highly valued, something which can be seen in the general disdain shown for e.g. the practice of 'carding'. As the web has become an important distribution channel for the industry, some groups have specialized in either getting shareware and cracking it or buying software with illicit credit cards (thus the term 'carding'). This is often seen as highly problematic.

*Carding is lame, totally lame. Buying is ok, contacts are best!
All carding does is get more people on our backs trying to take us down, cause you're talking real dollars, not "potential" dollar sales.*

kflex, SiEGE leader, being interviewed in NWR; Issue XXII, November 3rd 1998

As can be seen in these quotations, the supply is of some political and moral importance. A group that 'merely' take shareware from the web and cracks it into warez (or just supply the crackz for people who want to register their shareware or demos for free) is seen as less of a group than one that picks up commercial software from a shop. Source of supply in this way creates a hierarchy where nearness to the origin or source is symbolically linked to legitimacy. Having an inside contact within the software industry is then the 'highest' form of supply, as it proves both the connections of the group and is the most direct source of new software. Store pick-ups are also seen as worthy, although more pedestrian than having an insider as a supplier.

Release Groups

Release groups could be described as the real core of the warez scene. Although these groups are constantly changing, they are what make the rest of the scene possible, by power of being the main 'productive' class. A release group is a supplier of warez – an organization that obtains programs, manipulates them and releases them in a packaged form. They often have a clear internal hierarchy and defined specialized functions, and are in many ways organized much like the software companies they rip off (*sic*). Originally, the releasers were independent operators, enthusiasts that did all the work themselves. Although there still are some that work on their own, almost all warez releasing today is done by groups. The reasons are twofold. One,

the increasing complexity and sophistication of programs and copy protection has made solitary work more difficult. Two, the race to be the first to release and to release 'enough' makes co-operation more attractive. In many ways the formation of release groups follows the classic argument concerning organizing as uncertainty avoidance and buffering (see Thompson 1967), a release group thus being an organization devoted to facilitating the production of warez.

This facilitation can also be seen in the fact that release groups are highly specialized. Normally, a group is known as either a games or an apps group, the latter being a group that only handles applications. Nowadays this simple split has been made more complicated, with at least seven definite release specializations (games, apps, ISO, trainers/add-ons, webware/cracking, PDA-ware, consoleware and movies), although the specifics of these are not important right here. There are groups that have an almost federal structure, i.e. work in several fields with specialized departments. As an example, Core started divisions such as CoreUtils and CorePDA in order to enhance the Core 'empire'. Still, this can be seen as an form of specialization, and keeping with the simpler split, groups also specialize according to interest and internal structure. The legendary group Radium only released audio applications, due to the fact that it consisted of people with a special interest in this type of programs. Also, since Radium's core team consisted of people who worked in music shops and the music business they had easy access to such software. Similar circumstances can create a situation where one group is said to 'own' a particular series of programs, due to e.g. a well-placed supplier. Normally, a group will want to create a profile/identity that neither places them in a niche (although there are exceptions) nor makes it seem that they just release what they can get their hands on. Instead, many aim for a mix where they'll ideally release high quality but generic programs and simultaneously programs that set them apart. As an example, Class (a major games group) release many strategy titles, but also more mass-market stuff such as arcade or racing games. Such specializations serve the double function of diminishing competition and creating an identity for the groups, with Radium being the extreme example. Release groups identify to a great extent with their releases, with marking them as theirs ("Close_Combat_4_Patch_2-CLS") being only one aspect of it.

Release groups are also highly instrumental in their thinking. The actual products/warez are basically just a way to achieve a higher goal, namely to gain a name for the group. Ideally, each group wants to become the "greatest group in x", where the X can stand for gaming, applications, ISOs et cetera. As this can only be achieved through dominating the scene by releasing more and better warez than any other group, the groups compete fiercely. As this domination has to be upheld on at least a monthly basis (cf. "a few weeks break"), groups cannot achieve their goal by unplanned mass-releasing. Instead they, as any active participant in an economy, have to plan strategically and manage their business much like a company would. This also involves a division of labor. Typical assignments in a release group can be supplier (see above), cracker, tester, courier (see separate entry below), stripper, packager and siteOP. Now, these assignments aren't defined in any real sense and can be substituted internally (strippers often pack, crackers test, suppliers can crack and courier, etc.), and the terms can be different in the different groups. Still, these assignments go some way towards describing what a group does. A **cracker** is the person who removes security from the original program. The **stripper**, who removes unwanted files and/or compresses such files that can be so handled, supplements him. While the **tester** functions as quality control, the **packager** sees to it that the stripped and cracked program is made into a package of predetermined size, adds information files and can additionally add installers. Any self-respecting release group has its own (normally

several) site/server, called a headquarters (HQ, usually so that there is one WorldHQ and several regional HQs plus some specialized sites), and these need a **siteOP**. Assignments aside, a group also has a direct leadership and can have a council/board and formal or informal structures of seniority. Each group is normally represented by a leader that has been appointed by voting or on merit, as can be the case with e.g. group founders. Organizing structures in groups thus closely resemble a classic hierarchy, albeit with some network properties.

The work of a release group can be described thus: get a program from a supplier, crack and pack it, give it to the couriers and hope they move swiftly. If you have been the first to do so with a particular program, you win. You get to bask in the glory of having been the first to release e.g. "South Park Rally". All groups compete to be the first, though. If two versions reach the sites, the one that gets theirs out first wins while the other gets 'nuked' (erased) off the sites. Releasing a program second is referred to as releasing a 'dupe' (as in duplicate), and is seen as unprofessional. Releasing a program that needs a patch or a fix to function properly isn't quite as bad, but definitively undesirable. Also, releasing just one program in any given week is seen as laziness or incompetence. To be taken seriously thus means having to release several fully functional programs a week, fix all mistakes promptly, and see to it that everything is released as a first. Generally being a professional. Failure to do so is swiftly and mercilessly noticed and remarked upon.

PARADIGM:

RELEASES:	POINTS:
BliX_LevelCodes-PARADiGM	1
South_Park_Rally-PARADiGM	4
Janes_FA18_Regsetup-Fix-PARADiGM	-.5
Age_of_Empires_Rise_of_Rome_Update_1.0c-PARADiGM	1
Le_Mans_24_Hours-PARADiGM	1
Janes_FA18-PARADiGM	3

Total: 9.5

Comments:

PDM took South Park Rally. No one was suprised. In fact someone promised me a week ago that they would. Glad I didn't be against them. In a dull week for the games scene PDM was the only group of note, but not necessarily for the right reasons.

The Good:

South Park Rally. I still find the show funny, but the last game sucked. Hopefully this one will be better.

The Bad:

Jane's needed a Reg Fix. Welcome to Windows Registry for Utter Fucking Morons. The class will last 3 weeks. Attendance is mandatory for all Paradigm members.

The Ugly:

LeMans 24HRS could have been half the size with audio conversion. PDM themselves have been proponents of both audio conversion and making releases as small as possible while keeping quality, so that modem users and users paying for net access can save time and money. So they should probably practice what they preach. Do the whole foot fit in that mouth?

*From OMG YET ANOTHER GAMES REPORT ISSUE #3 by
The Preacher Kane, printed in NWR; Issue LXXII, January 19th 2000*

From the excerpt above we can see how very closely the scene looks at the releases a group puts out. It is far from enough just to release programs. A kind of internal review grades each group and release, and sloppiness gets severely criticized. Groups thus have to contend with two competing inclinations. On one hand there is the strive to be the first, which can lead to sloppy work. On the other hand there is the demand for perfection, which takes time. Although some prestige can be regained by releasing a fix/patch, to have to do so is proof that you rush releases. If a program is unplayable it is also considered 'naked' (nonfunctional and therefore erased), which of course is shameful. In addition to this there are policies and decorum regarding size and stripping to take into consideration. And even if all this is handled correctly, there is still the behavior of the couriers left to deal with. The road to greatness is lined with perils.

Couriers

Couriers or 'currys' are often seen as the whipping boys of the scene. In the early days, when the notorious "Humble Guys" were the ruling force of warez, couriers even had to use the names "slave" followed by a number to access their server. Today, even though their importance is noted they rarely get the same respect that the release groups do, although this may be changing. What couriers do is compete, much as the release groups, about who is the first to get a program onto sites. But whereas groups primarily strive to get a release out and onto one noted site, couriers strive to get as many programs as possible out on as many sites as possible.

Whereas release groups clearly are in some sense productive, this is slightly more questionable when it comes to couriers. Basically they are the distribution function of Warezonian, their job being to copy software from one place to another, something that might not seem particularly demanding in these networked times. Couriers often compensate this lack of technological complexity with sly political maneuvering, particularly when it comes to trying to get 'pre's (pre-releases) from release groups. As primacy among the couriers is built upon getting software to a distribution site before anyone else, it is of utmost importance to be the first to react when new warez become available. If you can get a group to give you software before it goes out to a site where every courier with an account can access it, you will have first-mover advantage. Note that couriers are also engaged in a kind of technological arms race. The specifics of couriering (a.k.a. trading) might be simple, but in order to be a good courier one will need a sophisticated setup, often with highly customized 'shells'. Couriers could be seen as the optimizing function of the network, engaged in a competition with regards to how well distribution can be handled.

Each site (of the recognized sites) keeps a tally of the activities of the couriers/traders, and this can be compiled into a 'weektop'. A weektop tells us who has been the most active trader on a particular site or, if the different tallies are combined and compared, tells us who have been the top traders/couriers and the top courier group at a particular time. As these counts are done on purely quantitative indicators (read: Mb traded), the temptation to cheat is substantial. The top trader is the one that has moved the greatest amount of warez, period.

Sure he would be labeled a cheater these days, and he did plenty of underhanded shit to win. But he did it all, he was able to proxy before anyone even knew what it was. No matter what kind of lead you had on him during the week, before that weektop reset, he would make sure that he had pulled ahead of you, either with pre's or just faking releases to get the extra megs.

[...]

I can also recall the countless headaches he gave Druidkin and the Razor net team. We would be ready to put out a release and all of a sudden it would be (Dupe Darkhosis) and we would all scurry around and try to figure out where the fuck he got it. Either by hacking a shell or he would go onto BBS's and d/l the release and get it to the net first.

In an eulogy of the "Top courier of all time" Darkhosis by Lester, Netmonkey Weekly Report; Issue XXVIII, December 22nd 1998

Even couriers can be 'dupe'd, and as couriers can just copy and go speed becomes essential. This has led to the aforementioned arms race among couriers, as well as protracted arguments as to what constitutes 'real' trading/couriering. At this point it should suffice to say that couriers are those operators within the warez scene that work with the least constraints and who therefore compete most fiercely. A result of this has also been that most couriering is done as a part of a courier group, with groups then battling for supremacy on the 'grouptops'. Courier groups are then often affiliated with release groups and run trading sites of their own. As the battle between couriers is more fierce than between release groups, this also means that these political dealings are more important for couriers. It would be unfair to state that couriers are at the mercy of release groups, but there does exist a certain level of dependency.

We Welcome two new sites to our devotion Family You know what site those are already and If you don't join #SEiKOROX and ask JoeCamel about them.

We also welcome nutcase to our Camel Herd . He single handedly stopped a RiSC member from bribing My DOG with Dog treats so he could trade for them.

We are having a great year thanks to our hard working traders ,siteops and members . Rumours are that 2 groups will get together to make our life in sites much harder than it really is . This group will be desgigned to dethrone our little winning streak . RiSC and MnM are also talking about merging to dethrone IND as number 5 group

- Garoto

From the NFO-file of Devotion, updated on June 4th 1999

(IND refers to independent releasers, so Garoto is in fact ridiculing the prowess of RiSC and MnM.)

SiteOPs

A siteOP is normally affiliated with one or several groups, but works more individually than couriers and releasers. What is involved in this line of work is simply the maintenance and policing of a particular site. As warez have to be posted and spread for them and the groups to be noticed, the siteOPs provide crucial infrastructure for the scene. If you want to keep to the image of a network, siteOPs are the nodes of an otherwise free-flowing rhizome. Wielding total control of their servers, they have the power to exclude or include people, as well as limiting access. All changes done on a server are subject to review by a siteOP, meaning that they can remove or add material or functions at their leisure. They also function as arbiters in disputes, such as who was the first to release/courier a particular program.

To be a siteOP is to have a position of great responsibility. Although not as public as e.g. releaser, a siteOP has a very definite position within the scene. They are often closely identified with their site, so the OP of a popular site is highly thought of. Having ultimate power in that they can do what they like on their sites they are often called upon to regulate the scene, as in barring cheaters or nuking releases that are deemed unworthy for whatever reason. This can also lead to clearly political moves, such as barring good couriers from a site in order to promote ones own affiliated couriers. With releases this is especially important, as the rule basically is that the first release that has finished uploading on a server wins priority (while the runner-up is seen as a dupe). It is often up to the siteOP to nuke releases that have lost this race. It is also up to the OP to log releases, putting him/her in a position where the control of information can be a source of power.

Still, although they have the possibility to exert dominating power over the scene, siteOPs generally seem to be rather anonymous. Often content with just providing the backbone of the warez transaction they ostensibly participate mostly as observers. If we view release groups as the means of production and couriers as the means of distribution (following a basically Marxist view of the structures of economy), siteOPs fulfill a role of consumption, partaking in re-distribution.

The Warez Circle

Summarizing the above, warez become and move as follows:

A supplier acquires a program for a release group. They crack and repackage it, and give it to an affiliated courier who places it on one of the central HQ-sites. From here, any courier that has received an account from the siteOP can download it and transfer it to other sites.

Status is acquired through being good at this. Releasers try to be good at getting releases out, couriers try to be good at spreading the warez and siteOPs try to keep their sites good. The prestige of members is almost solely a function of the way in which this process of contribution is handled.

Only the first release counts, anywhere, i.e. release groups compete with other release groups. Only the first instance of a new warez release on a specific site counts, i.e. couriers compete against other couriers. SiteOPs want to be on good terms with the best of both groups. Suppliers do not compete, and are (almost) always respected.

It is a game, but a serious one.

SOME SOCIO-HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF WAREZONIA⁶

The Warezonian I talk of is what could be called the new 'new Warezonian'. There was a warez scene around long before the PC scene formed. Ippgi (see endnote) claims that the first similar community in the modern sense was probably an Apple II scene in the late 1970's. From 1982 onwards there existed the Commodore 64 scene (which morphed into the Amiga scene), something that is still referred back to with a certain reverence. Later, driven by technological standardization in the area of operative systems, the scene migrated to form the PC scene. Today, despite the disdain towards Microsoft and despite the common use of Unix/Linux-boxes, most of Warezonian circles around programs created for the Windows platform.

The original Warezonian existed as a loose network of so called BBS's (Bulletin Board Systems). These are servers into which you phone in, i.e. you have to get the phone number for a BBS to access it. Due to the high costs of calling into these systems, this created a certain automatic weeding process. By allying themselves with phreakers (people who specialize in hacking phone systems, i.e. arranging long-distance calls for free), the original Warezonians had a playing field whose functioning has carried over to the modern scene. BBS's were expensive, both for the siteOP (investments in hardware) and the users (if you couldn't phreak), but were still dutifully maintained – a golden age, of sorts. A semi-official end date for this scene is February 1997, when the “infamous Cyberstrike campaign” closed down five of the top systems in the space of a single week. Even before this there was a strong movement towards the internet, but after the campaign Warezonian moved permanently to its present address.

At the moment, Warezonian lives on the internet, and although there might be clusters of activity outside it, for the purpose of this study Warezonian will be perceived as existing on and only on the internet. This existence, as has been stated repeatedly, is of a distributed nature. By this I refer to the lack of clear hierarchies in the physical make-up of the community, with Warezonian bring a network in the material sense, consisting of nodes and connections instead of a centralized and stable structure. If we examine the community historically, we can see that this networked nature has taken different forms over time. The original BBS scene consisted of central servers and users acting as terminals. Users did act as connections between different BBS's, but as the connection-forms were limited to transmission to or transmission from these central units, the structure can be viewed as at least semi-centralized. Usually, one of these centrals acted as a clearing house, constituting the main node of the network. Ipggi refers to “Park Central”, a BBS located in New York, as “the number one BBS in the world and [...] a central link for the scene”. It was nodes such as this that were the place of activity, and winning a release race meant having uploaded an application to such a central server. The job of distributing these then became the work of couriers who downloaded from one BBS, phoned in to another and uploaded there. Couriers were thus the links in the network, whereas releasers (although these could be one and the same person) were more closely affiliated with particular central nodes. Both the geographical and the systemic centrality of this structure brought on a set of problems. Dispersal was comparatively slow and the system was easier to target by the judicial system as files existed centrally and were in the sysOPs private possession. The benefit of the system was its exclusivity. As participation required acquiring both the phone number for a BBS and being granted access, keeping unwanted individuals out was easy. This kept the BBS scene as a rather private affair, although open to attacks from law enforcement. As the uninitiated could be kept on the outside, the Warezonians could develop a cultural form in reasonably isolated surroundings.

The constituting proto-network that was the BBS scene made it easy for the Warezonians to move to the internet. Surprisingly, although one would think that the possibilities inherent in a far more powerful network would make it irresistible, at first some of the Warezonians seem to have been wary of it. In the early 1990's, warez-activity on the internet was low and most of the action still took place on BBS's. In the mid-90's, some groups started to migrate aggressively to the internet (e.g. Devotion, formed in 1996, who would only courier on the internet) and the electronic magazine Defacto 2 started their first issue (January 1997) by reviewing the previous year and stating: “There was the final transition from BBS to Internet which by the end of the year, left BBS's a thing of the past”, and a little later: “now at the end of 1996 BBS's have lost their importance in the chain of releasing and are now just another medium to trade to after the program is released on the Internet. Just like the Internet

was two/three years ago". This move can be said to have affected Warezonian in two ways. One, by harnessing the power of the internet, the scene grew in strength and could function more efficiently when some of the barriers inherent in the BBS-structure were removed. Two, the inherently more open nature of this new environment brought parts of what had amounted to a secret society out into the open. Most blatantly this happened with #fatefiles, something that can act as an introductory moral tale from Warezonian.

In 1995 a courier group called Fate was at the top of their game. Well-respected, it had even managed to assimilate other groups and was seen as a serious player on the scene. If we read their NFO from October 9th 1995 their president is seemingly very serious about the group's future:

Well we're done pulling our shit together and reorganizing the group, so now it is time to go into ass-kick mode. Keep an eye on us, cuz we are coming strong, VERY strong, and we are ready to tear it up and take all. We ARE going to bring back respect to the fATE name by showing WTF we are made of. We do this with maturity and respect for others, we have nothing to hide. If you want to be a part of the action, your welcome to be. We require talent, quality, and commitment.
-aNTi-DeRiVaTiVe

Their NFO from February 20th 1996 is similarly boastful:

Greetings from Doobie !!
YO! FATE's reorganization has left other groups in the wake. Our T3's and 10 megabit sites are stocked full of warez! With new releasers & return of exclusives, fATE's kick-ass impact as a major force in the International Scene is growing in leaps and bounds. The overwhelming support of our new and hard working staff has astounded me! Appreciates to all my friends on the net!!! New acquisition interests include: Multi-Node BBS's and Releasing Groups. Remember the new image is "Friendly fATE", feel free to catch me on your #channel and say hello!!!
Doobie
[Senior Courier]

Still, in the beginning of 1997 Defacto 2 writes:

But in 1996 that reputation faded and now it's non-existent. Where did they go wrong? I think Fate made it's self too public, especially with #fatefiles a channel where any Joe, Dick or Harry could come in and download 0-1 day software for nothing. Of course now days with no major groups supporting IRC couriers anymore so these channels offer significantly less software which usually arrives a lot slower. But because of #fatefiles a lot of people with no clue applied to join Fate, and Fate accepted them with open arms.

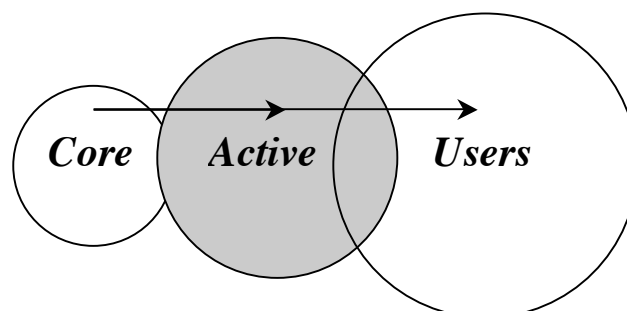
With the transition to the internet, IRC became a much-used technology. Internet Relay Chat is basically a chat-system that can be customized to a great degree. Where Usenet resembles a bulletin board, with messages arranged in threads and basically open to all, IRC-channels can be protected in a number of ways and function in real-time so that participants can chat and distribute files through the same system. Most of the warez-channels were by invitation only or otherwise restricted. Some, like the IRC 'presence' of the Inner Circle (a mythical group, whose claims to fame also include having been profiled in Wired), take place on dedicated servers with secret channels. But not so with #fatefiles. Here, breaking with

normal standards of exclusion Fate decided to release prime programs on an open channel, enabling basically anybody to access the products. This breach naturally caused an uproar in the community, and several key members left the group. Although technically an excellent way to distribute warez efficiently, it was immediately deemed an unworthy way to go about 'this thing of ours'. What can we learn from this? The medium might be the message, as McLuhan (1964) stated, but more importantly, the medium changed the rules of engagement within what had been a privileged society of insiders.

But, in Lester's Dictionary you might be a lamer if:

You might be a lamer if you think DOOM 2 is a new ware.
You might be a lamer if you start 4 groups in the span of 6 months.
You might be a lamer if someone in #warez950 tells you they are
Roland of The Wall, and you believe him.
You might be a lamer if you run a courier/release/cracking/coding/ppe group.
You might be a lamer if you run a 1 node 14.4 board.
You might be a lamer if you run a 10 node PD front warez board.
You might be a lamer if you had to change your handle to make yourself look cool.
You might be a lamer if you think FATE is the best couriering group.
You might be a lamer if you hang out in #fatefiles.
You might be a lamer if you are an AOL Pirate out for equal warez.
You might be a lamer if you pay for a netcom account.
You might be a lamer if you have a shareware releasing group.
By Lester [DOD/MALICE/RAZOR/INQ],
reprinted in NWR Issue XXXVIII: March 10th 1999
(emphasis added)

As Warezonian settled onto the internet, fragmentation began. Where the old system had been exclusive and thus easy to police, the new system brought on a more multifaceted perspective. The BBS's of yore were supplanted by limited access FTP-sites (stands for File Transfer Protocol). Access to one of these requires knowledge of its IP-address and a user account, which makes the setup rather similar to the earlier structure. These central sites are sometimes referred to as 'distro'-sites, from 'distribution', and are for the core community only. Then there are the aforementioned IRC-channels, that act both as a forum for discussion and as an additional channel of distribution. These channels are often run over with eager 'newbies' (beginners) and are normally rather chaotic. Usenet is sometimes used in a similar manner, but this seems to be less important nowadays, as it can be closely policed by system administrators (who usually hate warez, both due to its illegality and how it clogs up a system). And then there is the World-Wide Web (www). Leaving the technicalities for a moment, the layout of internet can be said to have created a flow of warez that encompasses three different fields (not to scale):



The core of Warezonian, or Warezonian proper, consists of those actors that would have existed on the BBS scene, and it is this group that I am concentrating on. 'Actives' is my title for those who although they aren't part of the competition as such partake in it through facilitating wider distribution. Users, again, are those that are so far removed from the warez community that they only exist for it by absorbing products, i.e. as uninformed end-users. The original Warezonian, now only in existence through the reminiscences of the Warezonians, consisted almost solely of the core. Although some of the core might have been inactive enough to belong to the 'active' category of the model, we can in the original scenes see a tight-knit community of dedicated and universally approved participants. Put somewhat more succinctly, the core competes and the actives spread the message. As the original scene was restricted enough not to contain a mass of proper end-users, we can track the development of the larger community through the developments in technology. By migrating to the internet, Warezonian made it possible for a cadre of actives to partake in the transactions, as systems such as IRC and Usenet worked as a form of osmotic membrane between the core and such computer users who craved to be a part of this core, if only due to a craving for free software. Some of these actives obviously copied part of the social norms of Warezonian and started a wider network of distribution, i.e. the modern system of 'warez through the web'. In this new 'new Warezonian', we can see a structure where the originally isolated players become part of a larger system. What is central, though, is that there exists a strong power discrepancy between the different fields. As a structure, the core is completely self-sufficient and has no real need for the other fields. The users are completely dependant on both the releasing power of the core **and** the distribution channel of the actives. Importantly, this also holds true for the active, as they are dependent on the core for commodity to circulate and the users as a reason to circulate. We could thus separate the modern layout of the warez transactions as being constituted of two separate but connected systems, one that is self-contained and one that exist through the leakage of the former. The logic of each system is thus not necessarily similar, although it is possible that a degree of imitation will occur due to the definite disparity in the power relation.

Returning to the case of #fatefiles, we can see that this by necessity would blur the lines between the core and the actives, and in extension allow users far too close to the core. As Fate (or fATE) created an open line to the transactions of the core, the necessary barrier between core and end-users crumbled. Any 'lamer' could easily download releases without either having traveled through approved channels, thus lessening the distinctiveness of new (0-day) releases. As the core no longer was sufficiently buffered from its ravenous environment the hard work that was done within the core was instantly turned into commodities. This could be seen as threatening to collapse the internal logic of the core. As membership in the core through Fate no longer could guarantee exclusivity there began a flight from this particular organization. The end of the story is simple; Warezonian corrected the fault in its system (Fate shriveled away and #fatefiles closed). But this might go to show that it is important to conceptualize these different spheres not as a continuum, but as clearly separate fields of action (cf. Gustafsson 2001 and the concept of 'idiergy'). If this is true, it cannot be sufficient to analyze the dispersal of illegal software. Instead, the logic of the fields within which separate instances of transactions are undertaken must be taken into consideration.

Another aspect that hasn't been acknowledged to any greater degree here is the inherent illegality of Warezonian, and the ways in which this has shaped the community. With the early scenes, this was not all that much of a problem. Although both the police and

companies would strike down upon people who blatantly sold illegal software, the underground was not pursued in the same manner. One has to keep in mind that software companies had not yet turned into the supra-national entities they later became, and e.g. Microsoft still had less political power than most independent nations. As computer companies grew in economic and political strength, life in Warezonian became increasingly dangerous. The threat of prosecution and/or semi-legal confiscation of hardware was serious on the old BBS scene, and has only increased. Operators are naturally wary due to this threat, but in many ways this seems to have strengthened the internal coherence of the core. As the environment in which it resides is both politically hostile and technologically flexible Warezonian has developed into a more or less Byzantine edifice of hidden passages, dead-ends and cunning lures. Overall we can say that the reaction to the letter of the law within Warezonian is slightly schizophrenic. Two specific reactions to the illegality of the transactions can be noted. One, participants sometimes revel in the 'outlaw'-imagery such a position entails. This can be observed in the use of group names such as Pirates With Attitude (PWA), Drink Or Die (DOD) and Shock; 'cool' handles for participants such as Arch-Vile, PaleDeth (*sic*) and Dizzident; and a general attitude towards the world as a whole. Easily ignored as mere bluster, not surprising if we keep in mind the general demographic of the community, this can be seen as a way of creating an internal identity for the scene. The other reaction is one of political and legal argumentation, mocking and/or serious.

This FTP is a non-profit system, which allows you to sample files before purchasing it. Once you have seen what the product is like, either purchase the product, or remove it from any and all disks/places of data storage. Also note, that it is ILLEGAL to copy software, and keep the copy, without buying the software. Any uploads transferred to the FTP system, are those that the caller chose to transfer their right and registration to the product to This FTP.

The uploader takes responsibility for the software, as stated above. Since the uploader had transferred the software, and all the rights of the software, to the FTP, he chooses them to be made available as demos, to be distributed to those under the intention of fully purchasing the software, or simply to use as a preview only to be disliked, and therefore removed.

WARNING: If you plan on "pirating" this file and its contents, you may be held accountable, and prosecuted. Remove the files you downloaded NOW from all data storage units, if this is your intention. Pirating refers to the act of keeping computer software that someone else has purchased after you have previewed it, or if you copy the software and distribute it to others.

Also, do not charge money or trade this software to ANYONE!

From the disclaimer of an FTP-site

Is this newsgroup illegal?

Why aren't software companies more concerned with it?

Technically, in North America, most of Europe, and in parts of Asia, this group violates copyright laws. Questions have been raised in courts around the world about licensing agreements, so this is really a gray area. A lot of users do use this newsgroup to EVALUATE software only, and they tend to buy the products they are most satisfied with. As for software companies, they, for the most part, turn a blind eye to this newsgroup, as far a prosecution of individuals goes, because some companies (such as Microsoft) view the transfer of warez as a necessary evil. Internal memos at Microsoft have stated that their company would not be anywhere near as successful as they are today if Windows 3.1 was not the most copied software in history.

From the "Usenet Warez FAQ" by the Inner Circle (1996)

Although disclaimers like these only give the impression of quasi-legality without actually making the activities any more legal, they are surprisingly popular. Warezonians seem quite happy to engage in protracted legal argumentation regarding issues such as reverse engineering and time limits for copyrights⁷. The '24-hour rule' is often referred to, as many argue that it is acceptable to have a copy of a program on ones computer for this period in order to 'test and evaluate'. In fact, Warezonians often refer to this rule as law, although it is questionable at best if this would hold true if rigorously tested in court. In the discourse the letter of the law and opinionated arguments regarding intellectual property are often mixed together in a manner that reads like editorial comments. Being aware of the implications, Warezonians seem to have developed a sense for political lobbying, even though this only takes place within the community. So it might be more correct to term this discourse as moralizing, attempting to justify the actions that define the scene. The continuous suspicion that the outside world displays has in this way created a particular ethics within the community, something that we could assume affects the transactions in general. If a particular set of justifications is used, as in the earlier examples with their emphasis on the evaluative function, these should in all probability affect how both the transactions are viewed and how internal transgressions are judged.

To state that historical, judicial and technological aspects have made Warezonian what it is today might seem blindingly obvious. Rules regarding conduct that were created during the BBS days still live on, the use of technology has had its own impact and larger environmental forces have molded the community in their own particular ways, which shouldn't be surprising. Studying the scene today, we naturally have to keep the social history of the scene in mind, as many things will be almost incomprehensible without this contextual view. But most important, perhaps, is to keep in mind the fact that the scene is about as old as the computer networks are. All aspects of Warezonian are dependent on the technologies of the connected computer. It is both its possibilities and its limitations that define what the scene is. Although much has been written about the computer as a revolution, the possibilities it creates for the kind of activities that are described here have not been sufficiently theorized. As a sub-culture, Warezonian has access to a technological infrastructure that allows a far larger amount of transactions that is usually the case. When we consider the growth of cultures, we normally assume that they have a long period of gestation owing to the amount of interaction needed to create a system of norms. With advances in technology, interactions can be made denser, i.e. the discourse that creates it can take place in a rapid and dispersed fashion while still being accessible to all the members of the emerging culture. It is perhaps this turbo-charging of the sociality that truly defines the community; in addition with the fact that the community has utilized such technological benefits for what relatively speaking is a very long time. During this time, additionally enhanced by the rapid circulation of participants, Warezonian has had the possibility for a socio-genesis all its own.

*<beano> Has the scene lost its goal? the reason it started? you mentioned shadyness
<VYLENT> well..in a way yes...we dont care about the end user as much as we used to
...nowadays, groups fight over stupid little things, it gets pretty funny when its outta hand.
but..in overall we have many more methods to reach the end user , like nice websites, many more
xdcc offer channels, so overall, it becomes pretty awesome. Scene is increasing, cause fast
connections are increasing, but i still would like the entire scene to be free and not money driven
or even trade driven.*

From an interview with 'Vylent' printed in United States Courier Report; Issue 82

III

WAREZ LIFE

AMONG THE WAREZONIANS

I find it unlikely that anyone except for the most clueless newbie would take me for a warez dude. And at least some of the real Warezonians will most probably claim misrepresentation, stating that I've gotten them wrong and call me a lamer or worse. Having studied the Warezonians does not make me one of them, a general assertion that is important to keep in mind when reading any anthropological or similar text. I shall claim, though, that I've learned to understand the working of the scene at least to the extent that I can try to put some of it into perspective. Although I've never cracked, never couriered and never ran a warez site, my training as a social scientist has given me some tools with which to analyze these specific and somewhat odd undertakings. Having originally worked on a project with strong influences from science and technology studies, I have empathized strongly with the way in which Bruno Latour's anthropological work within the Salk Institute is presented in *Laboratory Life* (Latour & Woolgar 1979). In the introductory words from Jonas Salk, the obviously puzzled natural scientist extraordinaire is ambivalent as to what has really been achieved by the study, but welcomes the bumbling anthropologist in the way a tribal chief would; magnanimously and with an amused curiosity. Bruno Latour walks into a biological laboratory and decides (?) to analyze it in the same way as he would have studied a 'primitive' tribe. Watching most closely those phenomena that he is able to make sense of, he studies the literal writing on scraps, reports and articles that are generated within the laboratory and concludes that this in a sense is what is created in the lab, inscriptions that get to become scientific facts at least partly by being too costly to alter. No-one mistakes him for a scientist, as he isn't one. He is a partly participating observer, making his own sense of what he observes. Understand that I do not want to compare this work to that idiosyncratic, already classical and definitively seminal text. I just sympathize with the position of a philosopher stranded deep in hostile territory. And just as no one believes Latour to be a biologist, I'm no Warezonian.

Among the Warezonians I did learn to enjoy certain sublime pleasures. Adding a piece of particularly desirable software to a site, connecting at (what seemed like) the speed of light to a site brimming with software and helping out someone who "desperately needs disks 12-14" of WidgetPro all became meaningful enough for me to give me a sense of well-being, a 'kick', from managing them. Working on amassing information about all this, I started to emulate what I saw taking place around me. The drive among Warezonians to dedicate significant amounts of their lives to the warez dealings became ever more natural to me. Still, a lot of it seemed (and still seems) odd, even when I could intellectually grasp it. As any complex set of transactions, warez has developed systems and functions that cannot immediately be shown to have a causal relation to a specific need. A lot of the time you are forced to merely catalogue and describe these, hoping that this in conjunction with other things will shed light on the phenomenon in general. Much like in the case of Latour's lab technicians, an anthropologist has to keep taking note(s), hoping that a thousand scribbles amount to a pattern. Just as culture can be seen as a pattern emerging from a profusion of separately meaningless occurrences of speech and action, the researcher can hope for little more than the emergence of a partial understanding from a gathering of observations.

To describe my situated knowledge of the warez dealings I feel that I have to step back and discuss the particular oddities you come across within these. Merely presenting single releases seems not to be all that telling. In a sense this might have to do with the inevitable normality that exists in these. We know, far more so than with e.g. a ritual to ensure the fertility of soil, what a program is and what distribution over networks is. So in order to find the unknown we sometimes have to remove ourselves from the bigger picture, and seek the quizzical in the details.

Lists – full of dates, releasers, providers, speed notations, sizes – of a seemingly endless array of software, waiting patiently. Lots of duds, 404s, moved files and traps, too. It takes time to learn to read these lists, learn the codes and the vernacular. Also, it takes time to learn how the net deals with these files, and how one can route around the traps laid out for total newbies. This is the outer rim of the warez world, the web-interface. I know how to work these lists, or at least I think I do. Sometimes I can go on autopilot, reading release forms, scanning for FTPs, downloading files just to check a connection. If it says distro, it never is. You learn to bash pop-ups and to deal with the likes of iD, FireDrive and Xoom. Charlie don't surf. Anyone can surf on the nets. It takes NOTHING. To know what you're doing is different. I love the lists, dealing with them, understanding them. You learn to know when the movement shifts. The first rule of all strategy is movement. Sometimes I loose track, fall out of rhythm. Then it can take me days to find stuff. There was a time when I had more control. Back in '95 bandwidth was a lot rarer. I had fat pipes, through the university. Could shift software as fast as anyone, and a lot faster than most. Never a real player but still had enough connections and speed to gain access to some decent hangouts. Once or twice even to what I think was a distro-site, these mythical Eldorados of the net. Brimming over with every conceivable program, run on serious servers by serious professionals. This is the closest I've ever come to infotopia, real cyberpunk. A taste of an alien economy, like something out of Macleod (1995).

Like arcane signs, the languages of these flows are equal parts silly show and full of information for those who know even a bit. NFOs with stupid braggi gteops who want to put on the airs of the elite. DIZs. And the lists, always the lists. It is easy to get lost here. Those in the scene really don't care if you get it or not. You're supposed to be able to sort it out on your own. If you can't learn to handle encryption, you're not welcome. Lamer, newbie, wannabe. This is not a marketplace, in any normal sense of the world. This is ~~stave~~ or a version of it. You get it or you get out. They don't care. Learning the language is part of it. If you can understand the lingo, ok. You'll still have a lot of work ahead of you. The silly braggadocio in the vernacular mirrors the structure of the scene. Nothing is stable or permanent. What you see is rarely what you get. Instead, you have to play too. And all the time I know that I'm playing in more than one sense of the word. I'm not truly one of them. There is a world of warez I never get to. I only read the rumours, the talk about it all.

Geertz (1973, 1983) advice to present “thick descriptions” is to all appearances easy to follow. You just have to take on the guise of an author (Geertz 1988), steadfastly describing the surroundings as you encounter them. But to write a thick description is far more difficult once

one attempts to actually do one. The details that are supposed to form a big picture and a more complete understanding seem superficial when written into a narration. The big picture seems trivial when invoked in a clarification of a detail. And in between is only the actual being there, the situated knowledge. Among the Warezonians I continuously run into customs and practices that seem both inherently rational and fundamentally absurd, often at the same time. Anthropological knowledge, if this is not a contradiction in terms and an expression of intellectual domination, is in this way slightly schizophrenic. Understanding in a foreign context can feel like a continuous vacillation between spheres of knowledge. In order to describe observed practices “thickly” it might be necessary to first take them out of context, only to insert them back into it slightly later – never standing still for too long. A little like how Feyerabend (1999, p. vii) confessed to choosing words with the criteria that they “sound right, must have the right rhythm, and their meaning must be slightly off center”.

DAILY LIFE IN WAREZONIA

My day begins with booting up my laptop. I might have had some coffee and perused a newspaper, but the warez day begins with the boot-up sequence. Although not connected, I have both Intel and Warezonian inside. There are the things I downloaded last night, the new issue of Netmonkey Weekly Report, some NFOs I leached from a website. Later I will surf around aimlessly, check on who seems to be releasing what, listening for rumors. I will lurk on IRC, hoping that I get hold of some juicy gossip, this just being who I am. Sometimes I wonder if I should be more open towards the people I’m studying. Now I feel like a ghost, merely observing, never really interacting. Were I a real Warezonian I would be planning my day, preparing mentally.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD WAREZ RUNNER?

- 1) Call the home base BBS `_daily_`. Make it the first thing you do (in conjunction with that first, kick-start-the-brain cup of java, of course), or the last thing (Letterman boring? Fire up Qmodem!). That's the only way you can catch the new releases – you know, the ones that are SO new the ZIP comments still damp...
- 2) PRIORITIZE. Some distribution boards will give you a list of subsidiary BBSs that need the new stuff ASAP. After that, throw it up wherever they've got the hard disk space. But get it to the assigned boards FIRST!
- 3) Keep track of your work. Right from the start, I began keeping stats on which boards get what warez – as well as any boards that had it already. (This refers both to couriers for rival groups, when two or more groups release the same program simultaneously, and casual cross-pollinators – what I refer to as “the amateurs.”) Periodically upload your stat reports to home base, just to prove that you're really doing something with all the shit you're leeching in the name of “couriering!” It's one thing to brag about all the boards you're getting the warez to, but when it's down there in black and white (or the ASCII equivalent thereof)... well, you know what they say about the vocal abilities of money, and the ambulatory powers of bullshit.

From “YOU HACK ‘EM, WE HUMPH ‘EM or Why YOU Should Be a Software Courier” by Dixie Flatline (–EMC–/®VD-/UltraTech Courier)

The above is actually a text from the early epoch in warez, the one where BBS's was the main/only way in which warez were seriously distributed. Although it consequently is a bit aged, the basic premise regarding daily life for a Warezonian (in this case, a Warezonian courier) still holds relatively well. Warez is for a participant in the community not something that is done sporadically, but an integrated part of daily life. Even so, to partake in Warezonian on a daily basis is to a great extent a question of continuously mapping it. As it is a truly global community, where the major groups strive to have at least one HQ per part of the world (i.e. North America, Europe, Asia, sometimes Easter Europe/Russia – South America and Africa are not important parts of the warez world as no area without good and broad net connections is.), there is continuous action going on. Serious participants must devote considerable time to keeping up-to-date with what is going on where. As the map of the territories is constantly in motion, and movement must be upheld, daily life can often consist of re-negotiating ones own place in the network. Similarly, the absence of permanence when it comes to centralized locations means that you have to keep tabs on what is currently active and deemed respectable among the central nodes. Affiliations can change rapidly, and if this is not enough, the participant must keep an eye out for competitors in order to know what they have done while you were away. And what they are doing right now.

Sunday morning, seven o'clock, Eastern Standard Time: Mad Hatter gets up, has a glass of Seagram's Ginger Ale and a cigarette, and checks his machine, which has been running automated scripts all night. He looks for errors and then reads his email. He has 30 messages from all over the world – some fan mail; a couple of flames; a few snippets of interesting information; three or four requests – some clear, some PGP-encoded. After a quick espresso and another cigarette, he surveys the contents of a few private FTP sites, filters through a bunch of new files and then reroutes the good stuff to his newsreader. After breakfast with the family, another wave of automated scripts kicks in. The ISDN connection hums into life. A steady stream of bytes – 64Kbps – departs his machine and vanishes into the ether. By the end of the day Mad Hatter, a ringleader of the software piracy group called the Inner Circle, will have poured 300 Mbytes of illegal "warez" onto the Internet.
Wired 3.02 UK (February 1997), p. 44

As in computer-mediated communication generally (see e.g. Mann & Stewart 2000), much of the participants' cognitive ability is diverted to keeping up with a relentless influx of information. Although this does not necessarily lead to information overload, the mundane act of sifting through information flows take up much of the day. For the most dedicated couriers, there may well be twenty sites you have to keep up to speed with, and still have enough time to chat with other members of the community. The Warezonians are quite garrulous as a group. Much of daily warez life is spent chatting. Such talk is rarely structured in any sense, as direct 'meetings' are rarely held, and it often covers direct dealing strategies simultaneously with infantile sexual innuendo. Chatting is much a question about orientation and information gathering, although this is done in an unstructured manner similar to socialization generally. This amorphous small talk consequently forms much of the social organizing of the scene.

To a great extent, these different forms of mediated communication characterize daily life in Warezonian. Much of the day is spent chatting or otherwise interacting with other members and by 'checking things out', scanning for new releases, reading bulletin boards and observing the flows. And then there is the distribution of warez. Whether you are a releaser, and thereby put out warez, or a courier, and thereby move warez from one place to another, you spend a lot of time simply up- or downloading program files. This is of course also a form

of communication, although it lacks the personal immediacy of e.g. chatting. By moving the warez they are performed, you are “contributing to the scene”. All of these activities are mediated by and take place within a technological framework. In some sense, daily life here is life through and with technology. But (and therefore) it is interesting how little technology actually is noticed within the scene. One is of course aware of it, knowledgeable about it and interested in it, but any lengthier observation brings the realization that this technology to a degree has become tacit. The technological shell of Warezonian is transparent to its inhabitants. A trader does not go through a complicated act of technological usages, she simply ‘couriers’, reaches into her HQ and puts a pre onto another server. For the Warezonians, the network is both tangible and present, whereas the technologies of it are almost transcended.

Everyday life on the scene is often remarkably pedestrian, particularly if we keep in mind that this is supposedly one of the worst dangers to one of the most important industries in the new, global economy. As a massive criminal conspiracy it rarely lives up to the promise of intrigue and excitement that should be inherent in such wickedness. High-tech and political to the core, Warezonian on an average day is no more interesting than your usual medium-sized corporation. Despite, or actually because of this mundanity, I shall try to expound somewhat on the more run-of-the-mill aspects of the scene, referring back to my earlier point regarding mundanity and the problem of interestingness.

Technology

The astute reader will probably have noticed the absence of any more specialized analysis or description of technology in the text so far. The reason for my reticence to discuss this is twofold. First, the utilization of technology is far less advanced than you might think. Warezonians are very adept users of technology, particularly computers and networks, but this deftness is to my mind not comparable to e.g. that of research scientists, even when it comes to some of the more adroit hacks. Although there is some technological development that has occurred solely within the community, Warezonians are above all technology *users* or technology *adapters*. A thorough analysis of technologies could result in me bestowing upon the participants more technological knowledge than they actually possess, thereby promoting the fictional view of the computer underground as a haven of malicious super-geniuses. Second, I’m not particularly competent to do one. A detailed analysis of the technologies is beyond my capabilities as a researcher, being a social scientist instead of a network engineer. Nor do I want to mire the reader in a long discussion about technological intricacies that for the participants on the scene are relatively transparent. Despite these misgivings I do recognize the need for some description of the technological underpinnings of Warezonian, mainly due to the fact that this in a way constitutes the modes of production for the society. In addition, the usage of particular technologies can perhaps be descriptive of the ways in which the particularities of Warezonian social life have developed. What is important, nay, imperative to keep in mind, is that the warez scene might give us a perspective on the actual dynamics of these technologies. It might be that the true promise of these are created in these kinds of communities. So my reluctance to analyze this technology is less a case of luddism or technophobia than it is a wish to study this adaptation of exciting new technologies as a lens through which something even **more** exciting can be seen. Simply put I wish to downplay technological details in order to see what technology enables when taken into a context or used to create one.

This said, Warezonian can only be entered through the screen of a computer. Such a computer additionally must be connected to the nets, which enables the user to reach out into

the community. ‘Work’ consists of staring into this screen and manipulating objects through it. Warezonias are created through the participants doing this together, constructing it all as they go along. Knorr Cetina & Bruegger (2000) have in their study of a similar tribe, that of traders on the financial markets, called their corresponding screen an “epistemic object”. Such objects of knowledge are not fixed, for through them something is continuously articulated. The traders that were studied treat the screen both as the market itself and as a tool to create it, and this screen with its plethora of data windows is thus never stable. Instead it is a live thing, something that is both an instrument and the object of investigation. What the trader – whether she deals in financial instruments or illegal software is not interesting here – does, is that she observes numbers and words on a screen and grasps this as something more than raw data, a process of sensemaking (Weick 1995) that creates the sphere of action in her mind, but simultaneously makes the re-creation of this sphere possible through her actions in it. The screen shows a mass of data, and through collective but dispersed action this is made into a meaningful whole. Knorr Cetina & Bruegger go on to call this “postsocial relationships”. Traders attach to the *market*, not to each other. Although everyone knows that the market is a creation of social interactions, it is perceived as an object of its own, mediated totally through the screen. It is possible to exist in a relation to this, in fact existing as a trader depends on it, but this requires that one embed oneself in the technological structure of this object. That which you operate in exists only through the screen, but to engage with it means to give it (and oneself in it) a nature beyond what is present in the screen. There is total transparency, but nothing behind this transparent veil. And this relation can be felt as if it were objectively real.

You are part of the market, you notice every small shift, you notice when the market becomes insecure, you notice when it becomes nervous, you notice the strong demand ... You notice also that the demand is much greater than the supply. All this (amounts to a) feeling (for the market). When you develop this feeling, and not many people have it, the capacity to feel and sense the market, (etc.).

Trader quoted in Knorr Cetina & Bruegger (2000, p. 159)

Such a feeling for what in effect should be an abstraction created in a technological simulacrum (Baudrillard 1994) is interesting. Obviously traders feel that they in effect exist in an almost physical sense within the mediated space, something Turkle (1995) has called “life on the screen”. Such action at a distance questions the strict division between the social and the technological, something that has been extensively discussed in e.g. Latour (1992, 1999), and posits the screen as a social space. Much as Gustafsson (2000) has evoked the image of managers reaching out and ‘zapping’ things unconcerned by their physical absence (like erecting scaffolding on another continent merely through the act of management (cf. Law 2000, on acting on the world through a spreadsheet)), traders reach out into... somewhere... through their screens, accessing and creating the flow of the economy.

<LordVader> well, in EURO you have way more better links... utwente, hut are the main ones, all 100mbits, lets say the average of speeds are 600k/s (for top sites) but in the US, links are pretty much crappy, getting 600k/s is like awesome while trading, and sites are not all 100mbits, mostly 10mbits

<LordVader> EURO: big releases (games) take around 1 min. 2 max.

<LordVader> US: big releases (games) take around 5 min.

<LordVader> and EURO scene sites are much more stable compare to US, most sites last around 1 year, there is only around 3 of them that have lasted many years

As the primary interest here lies on the distribution of warez and not the specifics of how they are created I will not touch on the technology of cracking software. Here my capabilities are even more limited, and a description would not be very readable, as it would have to delve into the use of debuggers, disassemblers and hex editors. Suffice to say that this is of course done on what could be called an industrial scale, and that the know-how of doing this is well developed – the work done by release groups is basically reverse engineering, and can be likened to the actual creation of software. This is not meant as a moral standpoint, but as an observation regarding the production and labor inherent in warez. I shall return to the question of production, and here only want to comment that it exists and that I'll pass the programming technologies of Warezonian by.

What is interesting in Warezonian technology is the way in which the community has adapted to the rapid changes in information technology, and particularly information networks. This *utilization of possibilities* in technological development forms the infrastructure of the scene, whereas the actual development has taken place outside it. How the development of information networks has affected the world (and particularly the world economy) has been the subject of numerous recent books and articles, and a review of these could easily be extended into a full monograph. There is in these a remarkable unity of vision regarding the fact that developed networks have had far-reaching consequences, many of which we are as of yet only partially aware of (see Castells 1998). What is clear is that information technology has changed some things quite drastically. Through the magic of digitalization, information has been freed from the limitations of the purely physical. Any information that has been converted into and therefore exist in digital form can e.g. be duplicated instantaneously and in practically unlimited copies. These copies can be distributed around the world with little to no delay. A program created in Seattle can be present in Stockholm in a manner of minutes, at a negligible cost. When it comes to information products, the economic rules are said to have changed in a radical and fundamental way (Kelly 1999). Any person that has even a modicum of contact with the outside world will be aware of the business implications of this, the so-called 'new economy'. As many of the limitations regarding access to information, the amount of information that can be handled and the cost of distribution have been if not eradicated then significantly lowered, this has 'introduced economies'. In light of this study, what is ironical is how the assumption of an all-conquering market has only strengthened with the introduction of technologies that can bypass that same market. For the Warezonians, technology has enabled them to give away things on a scale that was unthinkable just a few years back. Whereas it would be difficult and hideously expensive to copy the drawings to some *haute couture*, get cloth, cut & sew, and distribute the finished fashion items globally, doing so with information products using the new technology is simple and very cost-efficient. The simplicity of giving thus introduced obviously has some effect.

On to the actual technologies. To some (particularly Warezonians) the description below might seem inane, and people with some knowledge of the technologies of the nets can safely skip by most of it. I have tried to keep the explanations on such a level that even someone who knows relatively little about information networks can understand it, but I feel I must assume some knowledge of computers and the internet.

We shall begin with noting some things about the 'real' Warezonian – as distinguished from warez-related activities on, e.g., the www. Warezonian proper is a proprietary and at least

semi-closed network constructed from a variety of particular solutions when it comes to the actual up-keep of connections. As a network, it is not fully dispersed but dependant on central nodes, i.e. servers/sites, and often remains closed to outsiders. Life in Warezonía, then, circulates around the movement of information between users computers and the aforementioned nodes, similar movement of information between the nodes themselves and communication between the individual participants over the network. The technologies used for this networking can tentatively and broadly be separated into two parts, client-server and distributed. N.B.: Here I shall deal solely with the technologies of the internet, i.e. the Bulletin Board Systems will not be addressed. N.B. 2: As I have stated, the technologies used are often transparent to the users. Due to this I will not present a very technical view of these technologies, but rather a presentation of how particular technologies are used within the community.

Servers

Client-server networks are centralized ones, dependent on the central server to which participants connect in order to share and move information. More to the point, the network consists of FTP(File Transfer Protocol)-sites to which people connect with FTP-clients. There are a wide variety of the latter on the market (all available for free via the more public outlets of Warezonía), and the choice which of these to use rests on the individual user. Many seem to like BulletProof FTP (e.g. Beelzebub, who recommends it in his “Beelzebub’s WareZ Guide”), although I’m partial to CuteFTP. Such programs enable the user, if properly accredited (i.e. has received a user-account), to connect to a server and transfer files either to or from it. As implied by the name, FTP as a network protocol is particularly well adapted to the business of transferring files. This, unsurprisingly, makes it one of the backbones of warez activities. Anyone with a decently equipped computer and a fair connection to the net can basically set up a server. You will need to choose between several brands of server software, daemons, the particular benefits of each being hotly debated by those who run servers, but in addition the rest is a question of hardware. A computer acting as a server will need as much space on its drives that can possibly be arranged, fast hardware and will always need more bandwidth than it currently has. As to this last point we can simply state that with connection speed and throughput (the amount of transfer a server can handle simultaneously) still being the scarcest resource, it is also the most important one.

*Glen has some new bitch site up on some pretty phat hardware... Not the sweet .no link that he promised before though, just a US link, and the boxop hasn't really converted over to... uhh...
cough linux... just yet... so, good luck glen... Site's name is "PWP"!*

*HP... some .no site that was up for 24 hours then shut down due to excessive bandwidth usage...
newbies running sites is never good ;)*

Rumours from NWR; Issue XLIIX, May 27th 1999
(.no means that the site was situated in Norway)

The server software (daemon) will act as a gatekeeper to the resources of the serving computer, assigning resources to users according to the instructions the site operator (siteOP) has given it. Users will be given individual accounts for access, something that enables the siteOP to control and supervise their activities through automatically generated log-files. These accounts can have differing privileges, to the extent that some can have the same power over

the server as the siteOP. Remote access to the server (i.e. not sitting physically by it) is done with one of the above-mentioned clients. Provided with the correct IP-number (address) they contact the server, whereupon account data is requested by it. Having such an account, the client can transmit this data at which point a live connection between the remote computer and the server is achieved. To the extent that it is permitted by the sysOP, files can now be up- and downloaded. A client is thus basically a shell for remote file management, and does not allow for any direct communication between individuals. What it does allow for is the easy sharing of any and all files that resides on the clients computer, and as these can be copied *ad infinitum* it makes sharing of property possible through the actual touch of the proverbial button.

When it comes to daemons, these develop quickly, and a full review is thus not possible. Daemons act as the interface for a server, so it is important identity-wise for a siteOP to choose the 'correct' one. In 1999 the daemon of choice for many was glftpd (<http://www.glftpd.org/>), mainly due to its ease of use and its speed. The older xftpd is sometimes thought to be even faster, but requires a lot of coding by hand and is less aesthetically pleasing. This daemon was a generic program to set up sites with, and was in due time followed by bftpd (coded by bleachbox), which was the first warez-specific daemon. In this, specific functions for the scene were coded into the program itself, functions such as support for groupop, automatic weektop statistics and messaging. It greatly facilitated the move from the BBS's to the current system with FTP's. In addition to these public daemons some groups/sites have developed programs of their own, many with very specific functions.

--eqlftpd--

Run exclusively on EQUALITY-affilled sites, this great daemon does something that few others can: load-distributed processing. One eqlftpd site shares its cpu and HD load seamlessly across 7 different machines. Equality, the group whose members invented the client "pftp" has a winner with eqlftpd. All the bells and whistles of most daemons, but eqlftpd sites invariably all look "sparse", and in need of more art, or better help. This daemon is VERY closely guarded by eql, and its unlikely it will ever become public.

From "Which ftpd is Right for You?" by ndetroit, printed in NWR; Issue XXXVI, February 22nd 1999

All Warezonians can thus be clients, whereas only a few act as servers. Due to the legal problems associated with operating one of these servers, their addresses are closely guarded, and access is usually only given to known members of the warez community. The biggest servers are huge centralized warehouses of illicit programs, and the loss of one is duly mourned. Such a loss is usually the result of either the departure of a sysOP from the scene or one of the feared attacks from law-enforcement officials. In the latter case, this is often due to the site having been compromised by an individual, something that is known as 'narcing' (probably from the term 'narc', which originally stood for an undercover narcotics agent). Being situated in the nets, the address of a site and accounts to it is normally limited to known insiders, although 'known' is somewhat of a misnomer, as individuals rarely know each other outside of the nets.

There used to be maybe 4 courier groups that mattered or got on sites. Now... Hell there is probably 9 that can get accounts on most good sites, and Mr. Joe Schmoie courier just has to say "I can pre this group's releases" and he has an account on the top site in the world, which leads to narcing...

From "Why Couriers Suck" by Lester, printed in NWR; Issue XIX, October 5th 1998

map and onto which only tribesmen are let. As the internet has millions of islands, it is obviously possible to keep up a ring of such secret islands, between which the traders can journey in relative safety.

Transfers

Just as a server needs as much bandwidth as it can possibly get, the individual Warezonian will need a speedy connection to the network in order to function efficiently. As network speeds are continuously increasing, there is no way to firmly state any minimum requirement without risking immediate obsolescence (the text by Dixie Flatline mentions an out of date US Robotics Courier HST modem and the nowadays pathetic speed of 14.4Kbs, whereas the 64 Kbps which the Mad Hatter used will most probably have been upgraded several times by now), but top-of-the-line connections are *de rigueur*. The same goes for the rest of their hardware set-up, but nothing is quite as important as your connection. Naturally, this puts a lot of pressure on the resources of participants. As early as 1990, Thomas & Meyer write:

Fourth, pirates spend a considerable sum on their hobby. Among the most active topics of discussion among pirates are those of the need to endlessly upgrade, the endless purchase of diskettes on which to store programs, and – with the popularity of 9600 baud modems – the advantages of investing between \$600-900 for expanding telecommunications hardware. Because most pirates exchange software across telephone lines, piracy has benefited telephone companies because of the growth of Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs). Our data indicate that an average monthly phone bill of \$200 or more is common, and active pirates easily double that cost.

Although the examples are outdated, the basic observation is still sound. In order to remain an active member, which in its turn is necessary for there to be a network between the servers, you have to spend quite a lot of money on hardware. That the same is not true for software should be obvious, but with the costs of keeping a system updated and a high-speed net connection you can quite easily squander a lot of money. Still, a Warezonian will, somehow, amass a hardware setup that enables her to function efficiently as a link between the different sites. Often this will be self-financed, but sometimes groups will supply their members with equipment. For a courier, this can be translated into directing ones resources into becoming as efficient a relay between servers as possible. As you have to be exceedingly fast as a courier in order to win weektops, the transfer of files between servers has become something of a black art.

```
<Barnabas_> Transferred 4 File(s) Totaling 5,865,779 bytes
                in 11:56 (8.00 k/sec)
<Barnabas_> w00t !
<Ski Tza--> l33t speeds
<Barnabas_> yeah
<Barnabas_> can't wait till I can get faster here at the house
<_board> that t*s ? looks like it's speeded up
<Barnabas_> lol
<Ski Tza--> LOL
<Ski Tza--> nah
<Ski Tza--> if it was T*S send would still be happening
<_board> t*s speed seems ok this week actually
<Ski Tza--> only be on 1st file still
```

<_board> dunno why it was so messed before

*From United States Courier Report, Issue 75 (The discussion is on transfer speeds, and how the site t*s by many was seen as slow. LOL = laughing out loud.)*

On a general level, there is no native technology of Warezonian, i.e. the hardware used is identical with that used for legitimate purposes and much of the software used can be bought at any decent computer store. There are some technologies (programs), though, that have been developed specifically for the use of the community. As the rapid transfer of programs is the domain of the couriers, it is unsurprising that it is among these that much such development has occurred.

Rumor has it that XFROG was kicked from AoD, for leaking AODFTP to RiSC. XFROG later joined risc, who has been DOMINATING ever since they have had the use of the 3l33t util, "AoDfTP"...
NWR; Issue XXXIV, February 9th 1999 (Ironical...)

A courier will usually have a set of software tools and scripts, which help the courier to achieve maximum speed in trading. A specialized FTP-client is one such tool, and by using scripts one can automate what would otherwise be boring manual work, both effectively enhancing the couriers reaction speed. There is also the practice of using 'shells' for trading, something that some old-school traders view with disdain. A good group will have the hardware to offer their couriers a way to transcend the limitations of home-based couriering. Instead, you log onto a computer with a better connection to the net (the account on this is your shell) and trade through that one. The aforementioned tools and scripts can naturally be used in this environment also.⁸

Confusingly, some refer to a courier's home setup as her 'shell' and see trading through another computer as 'proxy'-trading, an inferior form of the couriers' trade. There are even 'forbidden' technologies of transfer, among these the notorious FXP. With this you can from a slow computer transfer files between two FTP-sites without having the file pass through your own computer. By doing so, you transfer at the connection speed of the sites themselves, which normally is far greater than one can achieve from a personal computer.

FXP is not true trading either, as it is simply point and click and all that nice stuff, and is essentially proxy as well. Usually if someone uses fxp, they will branch out to linfxp/pftp/nftp/riscftp, whatever the case may be.
From "The Art of Good Trading" by Lester, printed in NWR;
Issue XXVIII, December 22nd 1998
(Note that this might be an oldfashioned opinion by now.)

We shall return to the question of cheating on the scene later. At this point we can simply state that if establishing a server and upholding it is akin to forming an isolated trading post on an island, the users of the servers work on perfecting their boats to travel as swiftly as possible. This is done both with regards to hardware and software, and although some improvements are banned for what can only be called ritual reasons, the aim is to keep the communications at full speed.

The Warez Network

Drawing together the observations from these two perspectives (sites vs. users), we might be able to say something generally about Warezonian as a technology. Put in the simplest of ways, it consists of sites connected through individuals ferreting files to and fro. Precious little more can honestly be said about the interactions. Whereas complex organizations usually have at least maintained the illusion of an overarching goal, the scene is explicitly a process.

In this sense the network itself is a hybrid, a cyborg. It is not simply technology, nor is it simply a social interaction without a technological component. Sites, which have the most stable technological solutions, are hegemonic entities and to a degree represent the power of the siteOP. Transfers occur through the intentional act of couriers, who exist through their technological shell (pun intended). We could actually see the network as a collective of technologies and human actors who try to connect as seamlessly as possible. The participants are cyborgs, as they can only exist as such in contact with the enabling technology (cf. Wood 1999). Take away my computer, and I can no longer be a part of the scene. Warezonian is playing with networks. The same thing is done in other areas of the computer underground. Hackers play around with the security of the network, phreakers play around with the network of phone systems. What is special about the warez scene in this respect is that it so clearly is playing around with the networks themselves.

The aim of the network seems to be a holographic existence. All software should exist everywhere, preferably at the same time. When a new release comes out, everyone starts to work on copying it onto all the sites of the network as quickly as possible. A permanent race to speed up the network is also evident, as participants continuously recite their pleas for better hardware and connections. And, lest we forget, also *organize* in a manner that is designed to speed up this process. The playing with networks that characterizes Warezonian is a strive towards a perfect network, a total sharing. It could even be seen as an almost religious undertaking, aiming for a coherent belonging over the entire network. The technologies of networking is utilized and taken to their logical extreme, a point where the network blends into itself, where everyone has everything that exists on the network, where user and system become indistinguishable. We can at this point turn the whole discussion regarding technology on its head.

The technologies of online communities are usually seen as relatively simple to delimit. We have interaction and we have that which facilitates interaction. One of these (the latter) is technology, the other a social phenomena. Among the Warezonians, this clear demarcation becomes a bit less clear. Without the technology, that which is social on the warez scene becomes impossible. Being social is synonymous with sharing warez, and this is impossible in any serious way unless there is the technological infrastructure to do so. The specific form of social life cannot be cleanly separated from a specific form of technology. Sociality might in fact be a form of technology for speeding up the network, which is the real purpose of the organizing. Warezonian is then not a community formed around a technology, but a form of social technology designed to enable the networks to achieve their potential...

A Short Note on Other Warez Outlets

I have concentrated on 'proper' Warezonian trading, i.e. trading that occurs on centralized servers/sites and networks where only insiders have access. Still, warez are distributed over a wide array of protocols besides the internal trading on closed servers.

Whereas the network described above is the real interest of this essay, I must remark on the fact that warez come out on other platforms too. The World-Wide Web has become the most important of these, but there is a history of warez on both Usenet and IRC. Whereas trading on the scene is a competition, some Warezonians also devote their time to distributing warez further. Although this is marginal to this study, the inclination to do so is interesting as it is so fundamentally altruistic. The problem with such distribution has historically been that it is burdensome and irritating for a Warezonian to deal with all the 'lamers' that want to get their hands on these donatives.

Usenet is basically a bulletin board transferred onto the internet. It consists of groups (named things like alt.binaries.warez or alt.tv.star-trek), where threaded discussions are undertaken. You can send binaries (programs) to Usenet, piecemeal, but this is not very practical if the activity on the group is high. When release sizes go up, merely to collect all the parts becomes tedious and difficult. For those who have no knowledge of Usenet and its behavior, imagine that you get a program mailed to you in parts. Now imagine that it is not uncommon for one of these to come in 50 or more parts, and some of the parts are sent late or in the wrong order. Further imagine you get 40 programs a week, you have to keep up with your regular mail and your systems administrator cleans out your mailbox when he thinks it has gotten too big. You either spend all your time sorting out your Inbox or you go crazy. This only goes for downloaders ('leeches'), though. The main problem for the warez dudes is that systems administrators habitually close such groups, for obvious reasons. I am unsure what to make of Usenet in the larger scheme of Warezonian, but think that it is safe to say that it isn't critically important. When Wired (3.02 UK) did a profile on the warez scene, hyping Usenet distribution, the scene replied: "you'd think they'd get it right, after that dead-on 'warez' article they did a few years back about the (shocking!) warez scene, and its massive use of the 'usenet' as its main technique for file transfer... *sigh*..." (NWR; Issue XLVII, May 11th 1999)

The same does not hold for the Internet Relay Chat. IRC may very well be the preferred protocol (together with FTP) of the warez community. As should be obvious from its name, it is primarily a protocol for real-time chats, but it is also possible to spread warez through this system. I will treat chatting under a separate heading. IRC-channels, named things like #warez @ undernet (meaning a channel 'warez' at the system 'undernet'), were at one point wildly popular trading spaces for warez, and some groups used it almost exclusively. The advantage of IRC is that it supports the creation of closed or invite-only channels, where individuals can chat and exchange programs. Such exclusivity has a definite appeal among the Warezonians, who are nothing if not cagey and wary of outsiders. Despite the fact that some of the problems of Usenet can be avoided on IRC, it also has some drawbacks. Main among these is that it simply isn't a structure for massive archiving and collecting. Rather, it has filesharing capacities that enable you to post warez simply, or even transmitting them directly. Basically IRC is a 'hang-out', and I do not see it as a critical application for the sharing of warez, although it most definitely is a critical part of Warezonian social life. Mark that this is not something that all Warezonians will agree on. Some view the IRC-scene with reverence.

we have finally reopen our #blizzard2k (efnet) channel for da public...

we finally step back to the roots! As we are a Oday group we have no longer interests to publish our releases on the web. if someone would like to do so... we dont care as long as you dont name it an official blizzard distribution site or something like that!

From Blizzards NFO-file dated August 16th 2000

Warez are also spread via peer-to-peer-networks (like Napster etc.), over the WWW, and through the sale of warez CDs. The latter comes in many flavors, from basically being non-profit favors to direct software piracy. It has little consequence here, and neither has peer-to-peer-networking. Also, note that although Warezonians use FTP, IRC and other systems, these are all ordinary systems used for totally legitimate endeavors. All file transfers on the net utilizes FTP and IRC is just a very big and popular chat-system, where discussions about pets can easily dwarf warez-chat in activity.

Chatting

As a group, Warezonians are very chatty. Even if we were to discount the amount of time normally spent chatting on IRC, which we won't, the tendency to prattle on about any- and everything in newsletters, on webpages and in the ubiquitous NFO-files shows that discussion is an important part of social and cultural life in the community. This should not come as any surprise. Any community will usually be rather loquacious internally, particularly regarding issues that are of importance to it. Likewise, the tendency to gossip and chitchat is probably fundamental to man (cf. Gustafsson 1994 on *homo garrulus*, "chatting man"). What is particular on the warez scene is that as it is a technologically mediated community, you are in a sense not present unless you join the conversation. Seen from a social angle silence is, in fact, fatal. Likewise, as warez trading is a social activity (competing is by logical necessity social), it requires a forum for discourse.

CHARLEY: Hi all readers of Defacto2! I'm Charley now one of the leaders of Rebels... I started out in a really small group called 'oG' as a supplier... that group merged in to CB4 where I later became the president... I have always been in to this computer stuff. I got my first computer when I was 8 and I started up my first BBS when I was 14. hew... that's like a long time ago now... ;)

It's only been something like one and a half years since my ex-boyfriend first showed me the IRC... so I guess I'm still kind of a newbie ;P
Defacto 2; Issue 2, February 1997

Whereas I originally came across warez through the www, being less inclined to participate in chats with strangers, many have entered the warez scene through IRC. As real-time chats on the nets are extraordinarily popular, IRC is always filled with eager people who can easily switch channels and try to get into warez. Many, if not all, serious warez IRC-channels are by invitation only, but those open to the public can still be a good way to find people with similar interest and Warezonians willing to help. I lack sufficient data on entry into the warez scene to state anything with certainty, but anecdotal evidence suggests that many have come in through this kind of personal and informal contacts, where a good friend has e.g. arranged access to a closed IRC-channel.

Hanging on IRC-channels is a common pastime for a Warezonian. As much of e.g. a couriers work has to do with transferring files, this leaves ample time to socialize. Likewise, in order to keep knowledgeable about goings-on, you have to participate in the discussions in the community. With the absence of a fast and reliable centralized news agency, coupled with the short time-perspective of the scene, chatting is the prime conduit for news. It also functions as the agora of the ancient Greek cities, a place where disputes are aired and information is compared. In addition to this you can enjoy a lot of bullshit and inanity, much of which is just

as stupid and vulgar as you could expect. Still, these discussions form much of the weave of the scenes social existence.

```
[22: 37] <Evil_NeD>      20 mirrors for counterstrike and 1 works
[22: 40] <PinkDaisyEvil_NeD xxxxx. xxxx. . edu cstrike/cstrike
[22: 40] <PinkDaisy> try that
[22: 41] <Evil_NeD>      ah thats betta
[22: 41] <Evil_NeD>      80k vs 5k from cdrom.com
[22: 42] <PinkDaisy>     consider yerself lucky bein able to get on cdrom
[22: 42] <Evil_NeD>     impressive how 20 commerical gaming sites cant
                        mirror a single file but a bunch of warez ppl can
                        move iso's around without flinching
```

```
<prs_>      not bad .. waiting to start cracking again
<prs_>      havi ng wi thdrawl s
<Lestah>     omg
<__z->      haha
<prs_>      i scream
<prs_>      bpx me baby during sex
```

Adapted from quotes published in NWR

It is difficult to portray the density and frequency of these chats. Some participants seem to be permanently attached to their terminals and quite a few obviously have their chat clients on at all times they are by their computer. Likewise, it is difficult to state anything more generally regarding the practice of chatting in Warezonian as separated from chatting in general. What is special, probably, is that just as network technologies have made it possible to transfer files at high speeds simply and efficiently, chat technologies over networks have done the same for personal communication. For a Warezonian, chatting through a keyboard is no less direct and intimate than doing so face to face. Of course there are some limitations, mainly speed and requirements of finger dexterity, but anyone that has spent some time on IRC will quickly adapt to these. The benefits, such as the archival nature of a chat (you can 'look back' with total recall) and the possibility to exchange files (via direct client-to-client (DCC) connections), are also important.

Seen from a cultural perspective, IRC is an extremely important vehicle for the dissemination of norms and values. As there is no physical presence to Warezonian, nor any explicit rules or regulatory agencies, the way to learn is through participation. In the 'normal' world such learning through participation is somewhat more straightforward, as you can observe and even subconsciously pick up the correct way to do something. In a mediated world, discourse becomes the only thing that functions as a carrier of meaning. Therefore chats are important. As remarked by Gustafsson (1994), any normal social life is characterized by an almost incessant amount of small talk. Far from overt in how norms are propagated, such small talk consists mainly of mundane observations and only rarely contains any direct and explicit statements concerning norms and values. Still, it contains numerous and repeated discursive acts that carry said norms and values. We incessantly remark upon the world in such a way that our cultural patterns are implicitly present and continuously repeated and reconstructed. E.g. gossip functions as an excellent way to transmit views on morals and ethics.

```
<Bud>      to the RBS FlexGen license generator for FlexLM
```

<Elocin> HAHA
 <Elocin> No offense to RBS
 <Elocin> but FlexGen is somewhat overrated.
 <Elocin> and i already have a cracker writing RISE FlexLM
 Generator in ASM not VB :P
 <Elocin> I dont know if we will make that public tho, thats his
 choice.
 <Bud> Yeh I have one working on it in Delphi
 <Bud> same deal ;))
 <Elocin> so what did globetrotter say?
 <Elocin> they going to file a suit or smth?

From NWR; Issue LX, October 13th 1999

Subtly implied rules and morals are often the main elements of everyday discussion. Participating, even in a silent way, in the ongoing discussions on IRC-channels are in this way a means of embedding oneself into a culture. You can after a while infer what is allowed and forbidden in discussion, and also how the scene reacts to different issues that confront it.

[14:59] <DedMeet> go away hehe
 [14:59] <_Tech_> here comes a big pre too
 [15:00] <DedMeet> from who?
 [15:00] <DedMeet> Ill start packeting this router if you dont tell me.. !
 [15:00] <DedMeet> (-:
 [15:00] <_Tech_> =)
 [15:01] <DedMeet> i wont stop ever either hehe
 [15:01] <RayFord> shit that's sucked
 [15:01] <RayFord> heh
 [15:01] <RayFord> you suck
 [15:01] <DedMeet> i hope your right tech
 [15:01] <DedMeet> I need a big rel
 [15:01] <_Tech_> RayFord it was dedmeet
 [15:01] <DedMeet> what was me?
 [15:02] <RayFord> you suck ded
 [15:02] <EvilElf> lol
 [15:02] <RayFord> i didn't touch you punk
 [15:02] <RayFord> :_)
 [15:03] <DedMeet> u suck too!
 [15:03] <DedMeet> what the hell do i suck for?
 [15:03] <RayFord> what
 [15:03] <RayFord> j/k
 [15:03] <_Tech_> no he;s not
 [15:03] <RayFord> ok im really angry don't you see
 [15:04] * RayFord puts on meen face grrrr!
 [15:04] * _Tech_ hides
 [15:04] <DedMeet> haha
 [15:04] <RayFord> heh
 [15:04] <DedMeet> _TECH_ idea of hiding is jerking off in a corner
 [15:04] <RayFord> hehe
 [15:04] <DedMeet> kinda like me LOL

From United States Courier Report, Issue 88

What will first seem like incomprehensible and arcane will slowly become evermore clear and intelligible. Through chatting, cohesion of vision is created, as it is in this forum that action taken on e.g. the sites goes through the motions of justification and criticism. If for example someone has erased a release from a site, claiming it to be a duplicate of an earlier

release, IRC-channels are one place where the individual can present her case and respond to criticism. Naturally, discussions about actions taken occur even without direct participation of the people in question, so that any sufficiently important issue get treated to a round of moralizations. A silent observer will be able to sit in on these discussions and learn which forms of arguments are used to justify actions, and also form an image concerning the success rate of such explanatory strategies.

```
<Redbone> who stole serial?
<valiant> i don't understand.
<valiant> i mean
<valiant> stolen serial?
<valiant> arent we stealing from the company?
<valiant> and we're not allowed to steal efcom other
<valiant> :~
<valiant> i guess
```

From United States Courier Report, Issue 84

(Note that Redbone is (probably) referring to the 'theft' of an IRC-channel named 'serial', and valiant misunderstands this.)

But chatting is not only important as a means of educating (new) participants. It is the main truly social activity of the scene, and as such highly valued. It is here that Warezonian is in a sense created, as the separate acts of releasing and couriering are given context through an ongoing discussion. It is here the scene discusses what it means to trade warez and it is here the social structure solidifies. As far as organizations are created through speech, IRC is the main area where the warez scene is organized. Moralizing about releases and the ever-present discussion about 'rules' and what constitutes 'proper' warez behavior is sometimes done through manifestos of differing kinds, but it is through IRC-chats that they become part of how the scene constructs its own image. As previously stated, it is an agora, and we could go so far as to saying that your identity on IRC is your identity on the scene. It is here you lay claim to a 'name', i.e. start getting known under a specific handle - which run the gamut from simple (like Lester, Glen and Jess) to 'cool' (Lightning, Neo, Flavor) and simply strange (Darkhosis, Extabrain, Drunkkid). Comparing it to similar processes in a factory, the actual trading in warez might well be seen as the production in the plant, but IRC is similar to the all-important action going on in the coffee-rooms.

```
<*****> ( ***** ) -->TITAN-PRE<-- QuickTest.v1.1.DontMoveIt-TITAN -
(theprof@VLN, 0 files at 0.00MB)
<snip> dir gets made EVERYWHERE
<DVADER> ok
<DVADER> that was real gay name for test heh...
<Spiritu> all right
<|spanom|> bah
<Spiritu> HEHE :)
<innuendo> lol
<|spanom|> looked real
<DVADER> QuickTest is a real program
<TheProf> oh comon that was TEST all over it
<DVADER> Astra. QuickTest.v5.0-HERITAGE
<|spanom|> bah
<Spiritu> .: NEW: . /1210/QuickTest.v1.1.DontMoveIt-TITAN -
(dvader@RTS: Russian Tennis Stars)
<Spiritu> HEHEHEHEH
<DVADER> I only read the first word and grp name :)
<Spiritu> bah you are not the only one
```

```

<Spi ri tua> anthrax@AOD puts Qui ckTest. v1. 1. DontMoveI t-Ti TAN i n
1210
<Spi ri tua> ki lIermal from AOD make Qui ckTest. v1. 1. DontMoveI t-
Ti TAN
<LagOut> heh
<LagOut> -1210- Qui ckTest. v1. 1. DontMoveI t-Ti TAN-->(by: dvader
<*****> ( ***** ) .: NEW: . /1210/DUH. SHE. SAID. DONT. MOVE. IT-COMMONSENSE
- (coop@MSN: .: <{(-+MSN/PGC+-)}>: .)
<LagOut> :P

```

From United States Courier Report, Issue 84

You could write a monograph on warez chatting alone. I have discussed it only briefly here, and although I shall return to it later in a different context, I've decided not to go into it in depth. The reason for this is that I have primarily been interested in the traffic in actual releases. Although the chats are important in structuring the scene, there exists a basic structure of Warezonian that is my prime concern, and I discuss the discursive practices in the chats only to the extent that they have direct bearing on how releases are produced and distributed.

Warezonian Politics

Being the highly competitive community that it is, we should not be surprised to find that Warezonian exhibits a lot of behavior that can best be described as political. The groupings that dominate the warez landscape are not static entities, and as their standing among their peers depends on their current productivity, there is a continuous movement in the group affiliations of participants. Also, groups have affiliations with other specialized groups, and these relations can change rapidly. Showing a strong tendency towards cooperation as well as competition, the great game is often political to the core. And not always gentlemanly.

```

<metaray> I'm not anti-scene, I never was.. my early time in the scene, I was
a LOWLY courier, I kissed ass to get PRES/get on sites/I was the
biggest ass kisser ;) I basically just stopped kissing peoples
asses =] but the reason they think im anti-scene is because it all
started with some idiot no talent moron named koyote, he was leader
of risciso at the time.
<metaray> I founded a channel called #releases and he was opt in it, at the
time, we didn't hate each other ;) but back then.. I was NOT
security conscious...
<metaray> koyote/risc members deleted my drive, to this day I don't know
what/how (backorifice and all these other gay windows trojans
weren't out then :P) but it was most likely some stupid trojan that
I ran, cuz like most people I trusted didn't ever think of
security.

```

To begin with, a certain political astuteness is required from participants taking their first steps upwards in the warez hierarchy. Just to enter the scene takes some clout, as the usual entry strategy is either through affiliation (having a friend vouch for you) or through supplying resources. In the latter case, you buy your way into a group by proving that you have something they require. In both cases, which group you go with is important, as this will label you in the future. If you e.g. start out in Amnesia, you will be remembered as 'Daidalos - former AMN' even if you change groups. This does not have to mean anything in particular, but having a history of being in certain kinds of groups will mark you (N.B.: Amnesia is a fine group, I have nothing against AMN...). Once you are a certified member of the scene, you will probably still

be rather low in the hierarchy and will not have the resources and contacts other people do. You will have to network heavily (IRC-chats and the like) and try to play political mini-games, getting people to like you. Rising in the hierarchies (although these hierarchies are more or less implicit, there are few direct positions of power) is largely synonymous with extending ones network.

Note that the ones who are most affected by this are the couriers. Release groups have their own problems, but as they provide in such a definite way to the scene, and are less dependent on help from scene-internal people, they are also less susceptible to political ploys. The same goes for siteOPs, to a degree. Both siteOPs and release groups provide a scarce resource, warez and space, and therefore have a natural power base. This does not make them immune to the politics of the scene, but buffers them somewhat as people will rarely interfere directly with the mission-critical systems of the scene. Couriers, who provide a service rather than a product, are more vulnerable. They are additionally structurally hyper-redundant, i.e. for there to be a couriering scene there always has to be more courier-power available than is needed. This makes politics a necessary part of such an activity, as merely technical means cannot indefinitely preserve an edge. At the very least a courier must keep on good terms with least the release groups.

To continue, the competition between the groups often takes forms that are not particularly noble. In order to annoy or hinder an opponent, groups or individuals in groups can go to great lengths to cause him or her harm. This can be done in several ways. Some Warezonians are adept at hacking, and attacking the site-accounts of competing groups occurs, as does directed attacks against individual users. Deletion of accounts and releases is a milder version of this. Sites affiliated with a competing group can become targets for sabotage and more or less subtle entreaties concerning switching allegiances can occur. As the siteOPs wield much power, they often get drawn into these disputes, and are expected to be able to act as arbitrators. Denying access to a central site, particularly for couriers, is one of the most powerful weapons in the siteOPs arsenal. In effect, without an account you do not exist in that particular part of Warezonian. Therefore a rival can sometimes work hard to hinder access for a courier. Still, this is not seen as good form, and does in fact amount to an act of war.

When I first joined Amnesia, it was a great team, with many good couriers, and nice organisation... But after a couple of weeks I found out that some people were very immature and I got in some fights with them etc. and the atmosphere in the group was very bad, and especially between me and some couriers in the group. And what really pissed me off was their way to treat a guy in the group with a really good site, that got treated bad because he didn't do as amnesia always told him to (ie. delete RISC accounts, fuck with RISC). Some guys in Amnesia were icmp'ing his site, "banning" his site, that means they told everyone to stop upload to his site etc. And Amnesia's reputation got even worse, when a guy in the group named Trite were stealing BFTPD and used it on sites, without permission from the owner. Some siteops were even thinking of deleting every guy in Amnesia on their sites, and those were not bad sites, that, and the shit with Trite, and the treatment of a member in the group, and that ZeroT and Master One left the group made me start thinking about future in Amnesia, made me start thinking about my future in amnesia. ← that's the right one and the day after ZeroT and Master One had left the group, HYP left the group, and 10 mins after him I also left the group. That's basically it ;)

Savager interviewed in Defacto 2; Issue 3, April 1997

Here we see a case where political ties (affiliations) are used in order to force an individual to harm a competing group. When this does not work, direct attacks are undertaken. Groups can, as seen above, also have internal political struggles, and these often concern the usage of specific methods, i.e. policy issues. In this case, these struggles became infected enough to make people leave the group. In other similar cases, this could have led to the group splitting into two or disbanding altogether. Especially among courier groups there is no inherent stability, as groups rarely are formed around any particular ideology or philosophy concerning trading. Thus, there is little to keep them together in case conflicts emerge. With release groups this is somewhat different, as they usually have a more coherent identity and purpose. Sites can be shut down if a siteOP tires of constant bickering, but as a site often is a one-man-show, this is more of a personal issue. Courier groups, on the other hand, rarely exhibit an infrastructure that would be impossible to recreate somewhere else. Due to this, they are more prone to infighting.

-----[Dimension Division]-----

This week Dimension couriers officially split up, and ended for good. Only history will be able to determine where Dimension ranks among the best groups of time, but it's a safe bet that Dimension has its place there somewhere...
As most people already know, the group split into 2 factions, Mrpumpkin, reforming ViCE, and Caserd/Lester, reforming AMNESiA...
Here's what went down...

Jaydee comes into #yield, the Dimension channel (hah, now you all know!), and basically starts cutting down a couple of dms...less reputed currys...Some would say it was done in a spiteful way, some would say it was humorous, some just wouldn't give 2 shits...
Basically Jaydee called Kruzin a big fat cheater, which would have been really insulting, if it wasn't so true... Mrpumpkin mentioned something to that effect, and all hell broke loose. Bizzzybone, and Kruzin get mad at Jaydee... (who, after all, was only joking around), and banned him. Mrpumpkin unbanned him. They banned, etc, etc, etc...

Mrpumpkin quits dms, citing the fact that no one respects him. Things moved quickly... and one thing led to another (like most of my dates!)... mrpumpkin, in a fit of (anger...?) starts up ViCE, and takes most of the younger dms members with him...
DMS is in turmoil. The seniors spring into action... Caserd quits the group, and reforms AMNESiA. Lester takes a leadership position with him. The rest of the oldschoolers soon follow, and AMNESiA (two?) is born...

S0000... now it comes down to AMN vs ViCE, ViCE vs RiSC (remember bandido?!), AMN vs RiSC (remember the hate?!), AMN vs DEV (thx, jd!), ViCE vs AOD (hey, those are some boxes!) and so on, and so on...

Should be interesting times ahead...

To ViCE: mrpumpkin, weeze, citizen, blitz, skimp, plush, and evel, among others...

To AMNESiA: caserd, lester, gee_money, ndetroit, xavier, bizzzybone, mgd, darkfred, bud, warlord, and stix, among others...

Let the games begin!

Article from NWR; Issue L, June 8th 1999

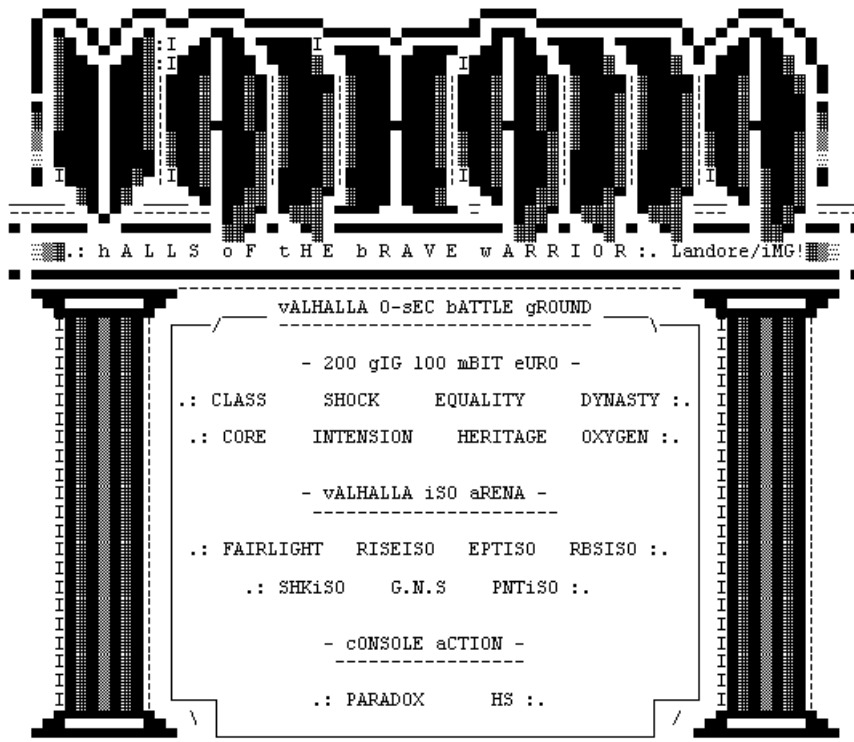
We should also note that group-affiliations are inherently tribal. A group is something to which you belong, not just a practical instance of organizing. There are long-standing feuds between groups, for often murky reasons. Groups are also quick to create mythologies around themselves and their relation to the greater scene. Despite this, all groups are basically loose federations of individuals, and their relation to the group can be very fleeting. This might seem like a paradox, but although groups show evidence of a tribal mindset, there is no distinct stigma to changing groups. Taking a courier group as our example, a good courier stuck in a group with limited supply from release groups and insufficient infrastructure may very well leave his group and join a more suitable one instead. Likewise, sites can change their allegiances to the groups, sometimes frequently. Overall, there is much movement within the political landscape of the scene.

- B* is now a ORiON HQ.
- M* is now a ZENITH HQ.
- V is now a LND HQ.
- D*Z has dropped JGT.
- T*S is now longer a CROSSFiRE HQ.
- armour left MOONSHiNE and joined RiSC.
- cannon left AOD and joined MOONSHiNE.
- mrwizard has joined MOONSHiNE.

Scene News from Courier Weektop Scorecard (CWS);
Issue 132, December 30th 2000
(Sites' names are anonymized,
a policy usually adhered to in this and similar journals)

Not only do groups compete about supremacy, they compete about resources in the form of skilled individuals. Particularly usual is that an up-and-coming group will attempt to lure away key personnel from other groups. Due to the fact that in this rather specialized setting talent might be the most limited resource, groups battle fiercely for the control of such. Some groups have developed a clannish culture, emphasizing loyalty and internal solidarity, whereas others are openly opportunistic. The luring away of talent from other groups is rarely done in a particularly circumspect way, and often involves quite blatant bribery. Groups can be very open about offering material aid, hardware and even money to those who wish to switch sides. Particularly among those who have recently entered Warezonian there can be a great degree of 'grouphopping', as opportunism drives those without long histories and strong ties to a particular group or particular individuals to look for the best 'deals'. Particularly the older members on the scene view grouphopping with some distaste, but most recognize the lure of speedy shellboxes and better hardware. This is one issue over which people in the scene can moralize at length.

Sites are not necessarily freed from having to forge alliances, either. For the bigger sites, those from which e.g. top courier-statistics are culled, this comes automatically. The main decisions for such a sites is simply whether one wants to feel magnanimous towards those who wish to use the site as a HQ or otherwise affiliate oneself.



Valhalla is, as you can see from this capture from its NFO, an example of a well connected site. Several major groups are affiliates, and it proudly shows off all of them. It is also well set, 200 Gb of storage and 100 megabit lines to the net. We can assume that several lesser groups would like to have it as a HQ or be otherwise affiliated, but are not allowed in. This position also means that Valhalla will almost certainly have the best releases immediately (if not slightly faster, note the 0-sec bragging), and that it in the case of a dispute will have allies in the affiliated groups. Smaller sites without this political clout will receive releases later, be more open to abuse and get less support (lacking affiliates to give such). A site that wishes to improve its standing will thus often align themselves politically and try to be on good terms with groups. In some cases this can lead to siteOPs of smaller sites breaking with etiquette and partaking in a group's vendettas in order to better their own standing. Similarly sites can kick out affiliates from breaking with decorum on the scene.

If we survey this political landscape we can liken it to an almost medieval arrangement (an allegory that the more dramatically inclined Warezonians may find appealing). On one hand we have siteOPs akin to feudal lords with their 'fortresses', closely guarding access and affiliations. On the other we have the clergy of the releasers, whose power comes both from control of resources and from affiliations outside of the scene. And in the middle we have the couriers as roving armies with varying degrees of loyalty, continuously navigating the shifting power structure of the scene. There are power-games going on internally in groups, between friendly groups, between rival groups, between groups and sites (and vice versa), between groups and individuals, and between individuals and sites. Most, if not all, are about the control of resources. The most contested of these resources, and the root to most disputes, are access, status and talent, out of which the latter two are permanently scarce. Access to sites is scarce for the individual Warezonian, and e.g. siteOPs can use this as a power base, but the limitations on status and talent are inherent in the system. As Warezonian strives towards ever-higher efficiencies, it will always require increasingly talented participants. Until such a situation that all warez instantaneously are copied over the entire network there will always be a need and desire for a good trader in the groups. With status the limitation is even more

structural. For there to be a winner in a competition there has to be losers. The decision as to who will belong to which category must always be made and will always have a political side to it.

GOOD GUYS AND LEECHES

As the society in question stands, it would be easy to dismiss it as simply an extended group of friends exchanging games between them, a structure that can probably be found in any sufficiently large high school. If the members of this community knew each other (which they to a great extent don't, at least not beyond their screen personae), this might very well be the case. But the Warezonians are far too dispersed, too many (although it is difficult to assess with any precision how many there actually are) and far too mired in internal controversy to continue with the activities were it all to boil down to friendships. The explanation as to why this structure exists and how it is sustained must therefore be developed further. Leaving the formation and subsequent growth of a community unanalyzed for at least the moment I shall now turn to the social cohesion necessary for the continuing existence of the scene.

In his classic article, *The Strength of Weak Ties* (1973), Granovetter chastised theories about networks as being either implicitly or explicitly founded on notions of strong ties between the participants. Instead, he argues, it is the weak ties that exist between people who coexist but do not necessarily interact in a network that creates large networks and communities. Strong ties, such as close friendships, are according to this model good for explaining interaction on a micro level, but are not sufficient to explain the workings of community. Weak ties, again, function as a kind of cohesive structure for community, enabling relations to take place between groups. This is probably consistent with how we view social life in our everyday surroundings, where a modicum of sociality is upheld towards most other social actors. We do not *require* strong ties to the girl at the counter of the local supermarket, but we uphold a certain behavior in order to keep with the larger community of the neighborhood. Another word for these weak ties would then be sociality, the force of belonging to a social structure and keeping it alive/stable. The reason I've brought this up is that the model presented by Granovetter is useful in that it does not require any ideas of intentional action to explain the growth of networks. Instead, weak ties are here seen as something that grows organically out of strong ties, so that dyadic relationships by necessity facilitate further relationships. In addition, these weak ties 'in-between' strong ties are cohesive in that they tie together increasingly interdependent social networks. We do not need to assume any intentions or warm feelings between any specific actors in order to constitute social behavior, rather the opposite. Sociality can in this light be viewed as *emergent*. If I know Mr. A, and I am on good terms with Ms. B, there is considerable support for the view that there exists a social link between Mr. A and Ms. B (who we assume are previously unknown to each other), and that this "weak tie" will have some bearing on how they view and behave towards each other. A sociality emerges between them. Add enough actors, and such weak ties will be more important than the strong ties of friendship in analyzing community.

Another way to state the same thing is to talk of social behavior in terms of norms and values (cf. von Wright 1967, Gustafsson 1988). As the core constituents of a culture, the ways in which a culture has developed a set of norms and values for itself communicates the culture in a holistic fashion. We can see norms and values as the agglomeration of a community's discussion regarding the good and the just, i.e. as the non-intentionally formed essence of a community's narration of itself and its place in the world. Beginning from a structural

component of any social behavior, namely the value of relationships and the norm to create and uphold these, the further analysis of norms and values will tell us about the structuring functions of a community. The link to the question of weak ties lays in the fact that adherence to norms and values of a social network will in all probability identify the actor as part of this community, regardless of whether she belongs to it *a priori*. If correct behavior can be demonstrated, the need for personal introductions doesn't exist as long as such an introduction is not a norm in itself. This has bearing on the case in question, as personal knowledge, i.e. a strong tie, is not viewed as a necessary part of belonging, whereas decorum is. Belonging to the narrative, i.e. acting in a way that corresponds to how actors are 'told' in this narrative, is synonymous with belonging to the community. In virtual communities, the normal way to enter the community is to 'lurk', a term which here as in the outside world refers to the practice of lying out of the way and observing. But whereas such behavior might be frowned upon in meatspace, in cyberspace it is seen as a necessary education for a newbie, in order for her to pick up the language and modes of conduct (compare the earlier discussion regarding chatting). With no real need for physical privacy, the virtual communities often expect you to undergo a period in such a virtual purgatory so as to keep neonates from interfering needlessly with the proceedings. This is of course similar to the way in which a new member of an organization is expected to undergo rites of initiation, and further how apprentices learn through observing their masters, i.e. lurking functions as a mode of socialization. In the virtual setting this becomes somewhat more pronounced, as the physical component of presence is absent. Instead, the neonate exists as a 'scepter', silent and unseen, merely sucking up the ambience of the culture. Although this has some bearing as to the negotiation of identity in cyberspace, we shall not dwell on this issue. What is methodologically interesting, though, is that this is very much in line with accepted practices for anthropological observation, e.g. 'shadowing', thus blurring the boundaries of research and lived practice further. In communities such as Warezonian, then, there exists a norm for learning norms and values through initial non-participation. Instead of immediately forming strong ties with individuals in the community, finding people who share your interests and so forth, beginners are supposed to understand the weak links - the shared sets of viewing the world. Partly, this can be viewed as an introduction to the ethics of a particular setting.

Returning to Warezonian, the norms by which this community function should thus be explored in order to grasp what the hell people are doing there. As Warezonian seems to function in a fairly efficient manner, the norms that principally guide the actions within it could be assumed to be straightforward enough so that they can be shared but still capable of generating complex behavior. We shall thus begin with analyzing some of the clearly normative rules that organize action within this loose network. Now, the term 'loose' as descriptive for this network is not to be read as a sociological term, but as a techno-structural one. Warezonians spend an almost unnatural amount of time in "connected mode", but rarely have any personal knowledge about the people they interact with in the wider network. Within the specialized groups (release, courier, cracking) there are close friendships that can extend out into the world outside of the nets, but on the scene personal contacts are rare. A snippet from an NFO can illuminate:

But above all of this, we are friendly. Something of a rarity these days in the scene. We often have group meetings in PERSON. We are FRIENDS as well as members. Join us now, before others get in before you!

From Myth's NFO-file dated September 30th 2000

Most relationships in the community are constructed in technological interaction, by way of mediation and intermediary technology. Even central participants can be virtually unknown by the other members. But this does not bring with it any real alienation, as all members are intermediated. Instead it brings forward another kind of formation. Whereas personal knowledge of an actor constitutes some stability of identity for the interacting parties, the structural 'looseness' of the scene means that this must be re-constructed continuously by the position inhabited in the network, both technologically and in a manner we'll tentatively call ethical. Adherence to norms is through this made a more explicit way of 'being somebody'.

If we go on to make some observations regarding norm structure in Warezonian, a division might be appropriate. On one hand we have norms that I shall call implicit, norms that are not voiced or otherwise made explicit and that might not be consciously known by the participant. On the other hand we have those norms that are 'named', norms that through different mechanisms are made explicit to participants. The implicit norms are in a manner of speaking my creations, my categorizations of observed behavior. Although this might be criticized as inventing an ontology that isn't present, I would like to argue that the norms I refer to here are implied in how the scene functions and that they function as a bridge to further analysis. Alternative explanations are, as always, possible - I just do not believe them to be fruitful at this juncture. Neither shall I, at this point, address the differences between norms and values, beyond stating that they of course are strongly interrelated. The norms discussed are, of course, values within the community. Adherence to a norm is valued, and exceeding normative minimums is a value unto itself.

Implicit norms

Any social structure has by necessity one implicit norm, the norm of continuing participation. If members of the community do not participate in the structure, they are not part of it. This might sound like a truism, and partly is one, but still contains a seed for observing what constitutes participation. As has been argued in research on deviant behavior, the specifics of isolation can be important to understand the inclusion/exclusion-division (cf. Elias & Scotson 1965, Foucault 1973, 1978). Inversely, specifics of what counts as participation can be analyzed for clues as to the formation and maintenance of social networks. In this particular case the rule regarding participation can be stated as one of **sharing** and **movement**. To be a warez dude you have to be part of the circulation of programs/warez. Whether this is done as a releaser, i.e. sharing your programs, or as a courier, moving the programs, is less important. What is central is that all exist as a part of the distribution of warez, in some form. There are those that function as a kind of elder statesmen, but this 'leisure class' is relatively small, and often participates even though it is not required of them. We could even go so far as to claim that the circulation of warez is the social structure, and the actors merely assume some position in this structure. The norm of **sharing** is perhaps the most telling. In Warezonian you always share what you have to those that are part of the network. This does of course not extend into infinity, but the idea of having a piece of software and not sharing this to your immediate others on the same level of the network, your kin, is unthinkable. We should not view this as a form of total selflessness. With sharing I here refer to the initial act of giving away/releasing everything that you have. A Warezonian does not necessarily heed requests for help when somebody in the community needs a particular piece of software, although he very well may. What he necessarily does, however, is sharing all his belongings (of the warez variety) on the scene, at certain points in time. These two dissimilar kinds of sharing can be said to

belong to different norm structures. There is no *implicit* norm to share warez with any particular individual, although there are some explicit norms to do so. What is implied in membership in Warezonian is that you are part of the networked sharing *on the whole*. Not to do so is to disassociate yourself from the community. The other implicit norm, **movement**, refers to the continuous strive for a total coverage, i.e. that all new releases are to be had at all relevant sites as quickly as possible. Stasis is frowned upon, and an uninterrupted influx of new warez is assumed as the normal state of affairs. This is closely related to the norm of sharing, but also refers to the circulation of that which is shared, the *process* of sharing rather than the structurally anchored *act* of sharing. Although everybody cannot be the fountain from which gifts spring, the progenitors of warez, everybody can do her/his part in seeing that the progeny moves. Partaking in circulation is thus done either in a direct or in a mediating sense, and the implicit norms simply constitute the guiding principles of circulation.

Explicit norms

In addition or extension of this, there are explicit norms of what constitutes *the good* and *the just* in Warezonian. Such norms are of course legion, but we shall only touch upon the most pertinent for my immediate purpose: **speed** and **functionality**. Furthermore we could talk about norms regarding **primacy** or **origin**, which are constructions based upon the reception of a release on the scene. These norms state what it means to successfully participate in and contribute to the community, and form the basis for the “agonistic playing” (Asplund 1987, p. 55-57) that I shall argue is the definitional characteristic of the warez scene. If the implicit norms state what it means to participate, the explicit norms state how qualitative differences in participating can be determined. Speed and functionality are here seen as the prime norms/values of releases mainly as these are the dimension in which warez are talked about. Tentative proof of their centrality to the scene can also be found in the vernacular adopted to portray them. Finally, we have the norm of **giving**. This last norm is perhaps the most important one, but as it will be returned to at length later it will here only be cursorily reviewed.

Speed

Striving to be very quick, preferably instantaneous, in one's dealings is a strong forcing rule for a warez dude and ideologically very important in Warezonian. We could say that speed is viewed with an almost religious reverence, which combined with a winner-takes-all mentality has made anything other than instant gratification suspect. Both when it comes to releasing and couriering the only act that really counts is being the first to have managed to deliver. In cracking (i.e. the creation of patches that register shareware) some overlap can be accepted, owing to the wider variety of ways in which aims can be achieved and the lesser status attached to each individual release, but in warez releasing only the first (functional, see below) release counts as being true/real, and all subsequent releasing of the same program are deemed invalid. In couriering it is only the first instance of delivering a release to a site that counts towards the status of the courier and his group. This can be seen most clearly in the term **0-day**, confusingly enough being simultaneously the highest accolade for a release and an assumed minimum level of performance. A warez release is 0-day if it comes out into the network on the same day as the legitimate version is released in the shops, or (which is sometimes the case) is released *before* it can be found through legitimate channels. A proof of the efficiency of the scene can be found in the fact that most major software releases seem to

come out in Warezonian as 0-day. Sometimes one even refers to “0-minute” or “0-sec(ond)” releases, although this seems to be rather rare. Although 0-day stands for instantaneous releasing, the term has percolated to the dispersal of warez to the web (‘amateur’ Warezonian), where it functions more as a marketing slogan and just refers to new releases.

Owing to the degree of competitiveness in Warezonian, any group will attempt to release 0-day if at all possible. Sometimes, with a particularly troublesome crack (the crack of the Sentinel SuperPro-dongle for Autodesk 3D Studio Max, which was supposed to take millennia, took “just under seven days” (Wired 3.02 UK)), this will not be possible, as can also be the case with very specialized software. Still, 0-day releasing is in a sense considered *de rigueur*. Failure to release within 24 hours of any popular official release usually means that someone else will have released the software instead, practically making it the maximum timeframe in which you can release a warez version. This is at least the way in which releases are discussed on the scene, with 0-day being as much a badge of honor as proof of a functioning community. Of course, this leads to a rather short attention span when it comes to releases, and the time perspective with which Warezonians work is a short-term one. We should note that speed is more important in games releasing than it is in applications, and also that speed-to-market (*sic*) is more important with highly anticipated programs/games than it is with more average fare. Consequently, a major Microsoft application will most probably be released as a 0-day, ditto a sequel to Half-Life or a similarly popular game, whereas a minor graphics program can be delayed until someone gets around to it (which usually isn’t long), and truly marginal software may or may not be released (although most is). Still, 0-day is the norm for ‘good’ releasing, and is usually aimed for.

Speed is not only the norm when it comes to releasing and circulating, but also when it comes to the network itself. Unsurprisingly, the speed of your connection to the ‘net is a matter of great pride to a Warezonian, and derogatory comments about a person’s connection speed is shorthand for pronouncing him inept or worse. As rapid action is impossible without fast access to the network, the norm is that the network should be kept ‘up to speed’. This is not something that a Warezonian will reflect upon, but it can be of some interest to observe how he will gladly allocate resources to keeping his connection speed at a decent level. For a newcomer, this will often be a requirement for access, or in the case of extremely good connections, make access possible. Groups are continuously on the lookout for improved network connections, and one of the easiest ways to gain access might be through being able to supply necessary hardware, as groups both tend to brag with the amount of sites/nodes they have and need such hardware to further improve the dissemination of their warez.

*<Redbone> I started running a site called Clandestine about 7 years ago. T-1 100 gig back then was bad ass. But speeds got slow on a T-1 so I shut down the site now I just let a variance use it for their dump and my porn dump as well. <g>
CWS; Issue 130, December 16th 2000*

In these ways speed is seen as an indisputable good on the scene, and much is made of the relative differences in speed between groups, countries and the circulation in general. A somewhat amusing example hereof can be found in a remark from Ippgi’s semi-official history of the scene, where the earlier slowness of the scene is almost incredulously remarked upon (emphasis added): “This [involvement in HPVAC] made the scene very fragmented and slow, it would take **weeks** for PC releases to be spread continentally in North America.” Succinctly put: on the scene, fast is good.

Functionality

According to an opinionated text written by Beowulf, a veteran on the warez scene (“I personally have been cracking games and utilities now for more than 10 years, of which the last 7 have been directly scene related.”) a valid warez release is defined by it being “playable”. By this is meant that in the ripped format it should still contain all the functions that define the original product. With modern programs being increasingly large (sometimes referred to as ‘bloatware’), it is rarely the case that a program is released in its entirety as a warez version (Note that I am talking about what is known as the ‘Rip scene’. In the ‘ISO scene’, which is smaller but growing, you do in fact always release full programs as CD images.). Instead, non-essential parts are removed and some parts will be compressed. These can include files pertaining to music, movies and/or graphics, or more central functions such as multiplayer niceties. When it comes to applications it is often things such as clip-art libraries and extensive help-files that are removed. As a group strives to get a release out as quickly as possible, the process of removing such extraneous material can at times lead to mistakes. When too much has been removed, or the ripping has been handled ineptly in some other manner, the release is said to be ‘*raped*’. This means different things to different people, but often means that some of the enjoyment from e.g. playing the game has been diluted by lack of sound or sub-standard graphics (owing to a bad rip). If this happens on a scale so as to make a game completely unplayable, the release is considered a ‘*nuke*’, and is consequently removed (nuked) from all servers. The term thus refers to both lack of functionality and the penalty incurred by releasing such material. In less grave cases the release only lacks some functionality, and it is up to discussion whether or not this is any breach of decorum. With applications, the norm is that all functions must be present, save obvious add-ons such as the aforementioned clip-art libraries. Help files may be removed if they are truly gargantuan, as can be the case with certain high-end programs. Other than this, removal of any part of the program is usually remarked upon caustically. With games the question is a bit more complicated. Although there is some consensus regarding the proper way to remove speech and introductory movies (which usually adds greatly to a games size), the proper way to handle e.g. in-game graphics is subject to heated debate. There are a number of different ways to compress and otherwise manipulate these, none of which is universally accepted. A normal way to handle problems is to release versions with all but the accepted omissions, and then release add-ins for the ‘missing’ parts. Such add-ins are then viewed as less worthy when it comes to the question of status among releasers, as mere additions to the real warez.

If a raped version is released, the releasing party is expected either to come up with a patch, which rectifies the problem, or re-release the program. This ‘saving face’ is to be done immediately, preferably (even necessarily) within 48 hours of the release. Otherwise, other groups may release their own, working versions with impunity. When this happens, the original releaser is dishonored, to the extent that fierce battles have been fought over the question whether a particular release was faulty or not. Symbolically, releasing a non-working version states that the group itself is either dysfunctional or technologically inept. A group will vehemently deny both these charges, even when the proof speaks against it. Even when forced to admit their mistake, a group will normally downplay their role in the matter.

Well LND had to do SOMETHING to dispel the rumors that they were going to croak... so they did a few PTC apps. Is anyone else annoyed by Datecodes though? Oh well. What I'll focus on here is L-Edit Pro. Now LND released this app, and fucked it up. The next day we saw Scum

release a working copy, and LND release a fixed copy as well. So who should get credit? Well yes LND screwed up. And personally I favor Scum. However, there was a time where the scene had a grace period for groups to fix their own mistakes, and it's something which, while not a great issue in this case, keeps things organized for endusers. It prevents several copies from going out, some perhaps not working fully, and confusing potential downloaders. Saves me hearing "whose copy should I get" too ;) So I'll give this one to LND. Minus points for the screwup though.
NWR; Issue LXIX, December 14th 1999 (emphasis added)

In the absence of any truly powerful central regulatory institution, the exact interpretation of norms is a matter of continuous renegotiation. The same goes for the confusion of releasing alphas, betas, Release Candidates *et cetera*. As software companies will go through several instances of a program before releasing the final version, and Warezonians have little or no problem in obtaining such versions, there is a lot of releasing that doesn't fully meet the norm of 'final' functionality. An alpha is a very early, often only partially functional and almost always unstable version of a program. Only testers internal to the company or co-operating companies normally use them. A beta is the next step, and will often behave much like the final version, but is usually less stable and may be significantly altered. A release candidate (abbreviated RC, often followed by a number stating the iteration of these candidates) is 'under review' for release. Final means final.

For those of you wondering about ER/Studio because they saw Demon's release – the Demon rel was a horrible job, it was RC1, said beta ALL over it (I counted about 4 mentions of beta before the install was finished) so I don't know what those guys were thinking. Plus file date and size discrepincies... shall I go on? Shock's is 100% final.
[...]

I'll touch on the source code issue. A lot of people have mixed feelings about it. Most developers in the scene (and outside) are against releasing source code, for obvious reasons. Aside from the open source community, few developers want anything to do with it. That said, I'm of the opinion that IF a company is SELLING their source code, as some tend to do, then it's fair game for a warez release. I have no idea if that's the case with TZipTV however. If it's not being sold, however, I don't see a need for it – let developers package their product as they see fit, I'm much happier stealing what they officially offer...
NWR; Issue LXXVIII, March 29th 2000

How functionality is valued, or more precisely, how non-functionality is abhorred, can be viewed through the perspective of Warezonian as inexorably networked. Just as warez releases are expected to be fully functional, the structure of the scene itself is closely observed for weaknesses. Failure to keep a site functional is seen as the mark of a newbie, as was seen in an earlier quote. Failure to fully upload a new release is likewise embarrassing. Even the behavior of individuals often belongs to this category, as rule breaking frequently is discussed not as morally wrong but as *dysfunctional*. A main concern is that the scene should function, but this does not seem to mean that any specific goal besides efficiency is aimed for. The most common reference is that things are done 'for the good of the scene', and words such as 'fun' and 'the people' are used to explain participation.

DEFACTO: How would you describe the current situation in the utility scene, who are the most stable and popular groups?

DNG: *Well, I think the utils scene is doing quite well right now. In my opinion, DOD is #1. They put out good stuff that works, and that is the way to do it. PWA is probably the most popular group as far as utils go. Then you have some strong groups like LND and Corp doing their things. So I am quite happy with the way things are going, as almost all utils that are produced are being released.*
Defacto 2; Issue III, April 1997

The last sentence of this quote can be read in two different ways. One, it can be read as the statement of an insanely greedy individual that for some reason actually wants to own “all utils [utilities/applications, as separate from games] that are produced” – egoism. Or, which seems more logical, that it for this individual simply is a matter of pride that the scene should function in this way – a behavior we could call altruism-like, or think of as a type of institutional egoism. Still, simply stated, it is releasing as its own reason. Although:

<pro> *btw, A little note to anyone who has anything to do with the scene, don't ever forget who all this is for, the end user, and they could care less about our egos ;)*
CWS; Issue 131, December 23rd 2000

Although functionality with regards to the releases themselves isn't something that couriers have to bother about much, the functionality of the network is important to them. Slow connections will be viewed with distaste, and bugs in a daemon (server problems) will be remarked upon in a frank and often abusive way. At issue here can be things such as being cut off while transferring files and problems accessing the server/servers. The assumption among couriers is normally that all should do their best to keep the network up to speed. Failure to do so is interpreted as either malicious or incompetent.

Primacy/Origin

What matters in Warezonian is delivering a functional version of a commercially released program to a pre-defined location, and being the first to do so. This is the origin of the warez circulation, the act that constitutes warez as a process. In the cases when there are two fully functional versions released simultaneously, the first one that has been uploaded to a trustworthy site is deemed to be the valid one, while the other is counted as a ‘*dupe*’. Dupes (duplicates) get erased from servers, but whereas getting erased (symbolically) for being non-functional is shameful, similar erasure for duplication of effort is less so. Naturally this is not something that a Warezonian wishes for himself, but being second is not so much dishonorable as it is a sign of defeat. Still, even this can be contested in cases where a group has released a dupe significantly after the original release. Unless it is absolutely clear that this has been an honest mistake, it will appear as if the group has tried to bolster their standing on the scene by trying to cheat it (the scene). Such behavior is normally viewed as conceited and selfish, not to speak of bad form. In cases where one doesn't think that this has been done due to maliciousness on the groups' part, it is still viewed as unprofessional.

This weeks activity from Corp was a result of a lot of enthusiasm – a bit too much at times. Three releases of the above won't gain points here as they're all nukes (only two actually got nuked from what I see). Incredible sloppiness on the part of Beck in releasing QuickCAD Millenium, a dupe of LND from a few months back. Credit to Beck, he owned up on it, no excuses. More sloppy work in Vorton Financial Tools 1.0 – this is actually v2.0, and a dupe of Shock from a few days back. Finally, DesignCAD LT 2000 isn't really valid – the Pro version

gives users 2D/3D capabilities, and was released quite a while ago, where as the LT version gives only the 2D capabilities found in the Pro edition – so why bother with it?
NWR; Issue XLIX, June 3rd 1999 (emphasis added)

As releasing a dupe is so clearly ignoble, releasing individuals have to stay current with the releases of other groups, and also have knowledge of release histories pertaining to their programs. Failure to do so can lead to the situation described above, having to admit sloppiness and see all ones' work be for naught. Not admitting to it carries a stigma for a group, and as the only currency in Warezonian is that of status, such blatant disregard for propriety can easily lead to central members leaving. Likewise, continuing and unremorseful duping is an easy way to get kicked out of a group.

Groups gain their names by having them carried by releases. Being known on the scene is directly related to the amount and the quality of releases that you have. Also, even if you have a good release history, this helps little in day-by-day-recognition. Instead, it takes a steady stream of releases to truly place a group on the scene. What a group will aim for is that there constantly are top, fresh releases (with the groups name conveniently appended to the title) out on those sites people keep an eye on. In this way, the 'brand' of the group is kept alive. In a manner similar to that of how Richard Dawkins (1989) claimed that human individuals are merely vessels for a 'selfish gene', the group's identities can be viewed as something that uses the singular releases as a convenient way to propagate the name. On the scene, programs are habitually referred to as "Class's release of Theocracy" or "Shock's release of Photoshop". The programs themselves are thus only part of what is released, as the origin of them is an important part of their legacy. Much as a beloved object can have a long history attached to it, a release is something that communicates something about its releaser. This is the prime reason why there can be dramatic races as to who gets the distinction of having released an awaited program. In special cases, these races can become ugly, with groups releasing, e.g., a late release candidate claiming it to be final.

*– Well, well, well... If i do recall, last week, i said that OFFICE 2000 by CORE would not be final, and in fact PWA would come up with the final... Boys and girls, trust me, if PWA hasn't released it, Bill Gates calls the factory, pulls the fucking gold master, and releases a new RC...
PWA's insider is one fat mofo.
NWR; Issue XLI, March 30th 1999*

Racing is important for a very simple reason. Most programs on the scene are not used to any greater extent. When it comes to a few key applications, MSOffice and Photoshop as well as a few universally awaited games being prime examples, these will not only be propagated on the sites but also downloaded and used by almost all participants and countless outsiders. The status from having won the release race for such a product is naturally far greater than from releasing a little known and little used application. Also, the element of competition adds some flavor. Although the competition is endless when it comes to the everyday releasing of quality programs *en masse*, the glory of releasing a known and awaited product enhances this. You not only get to beat your competitor with rather anonymous quantitative measures (number of releases), but actually get to give away something they wanted to give and do this in the most public manner – as everyone is watching.

There is also an opposite strategy. Some groups, as have been remarked earlier, avoid racing for the top releases and instead specialize. They try to "own" a specific niche of releasing. Although this is often due to external constraints, such as supply and what other groups do *not*

release, a release group will often try to find a specific type of program that becomes 'theirs', so as to make the group the origin not of mere releases but an entire type of programs. My previous example of Radium, who everyone on the scene **knew** to be the originators of the best audio applications, fits into this scheme. Still others might go for a high-end strategy, releasing only the most sought-after programs, in effect becoming a racing group. This kind of stratification has led to the development of whole sub-scenes, such as add-in-releasing and PDA-releasing. Even the increasingly popular activity of ISO-releasing, i.e. the releasing of entire CDs (that the end-users must burn at home) instead of ripping, can be viewed as a version of this. Couriers do not specialize (although it can sometimes look like they do, particularly if their relations with a release group is so close they seemingly take on their line of releasing), as they compete about the amount of program they can get to sites. Primacy is here more of a micro-process. SiteOPs want to have releases first, simply so that theirs is the site others get the releases from, again establishing a hierarchy of origin.

In whatever way, Warezonians try to be originators. It is important to be the source of a particular release, the one who has managed to bring it to the scene. As status is gathered by managing to achieve just this, over and over again, origin and primacy are strongly interconnected. To be first in the hierarchy is to be first in the network. And vice versa. Warezonian is a meritocracy based on primacy, and the game of proving primacy is never-ending.

Giving

The absence of money, or more precisely the absence of price, is tantamount with the warez scene. A warez release can only be given, it cannot be sold and still be a warez release. No Warezonian would dare ask for financial remuneration for such contributions to the scene, and all programs that are in distribution are seen as freely accessible. A release can have no price, although it can have value. The work done within the circulation of warez is thus seen as a gift to the scene, as a contribution towards a greater good. Some groups are adamant in the belief that all ways of making money through warez endeavors are morally wrong, even to the extent that they proudly publicize their personal economic losses from participating in the game. On the whole, reference to economic gain from participation is seen as uncouth at the very least. There are payments, a person getting hardware or even money in exchange for some particularly sought after property (suppliers can sometimes get paid and a group will sometimes bribe a person to join), but these are always special cases.

This norm is of course closely related to the implicit one of **sharing**. The reason I've brought it up in this new form here is the way in which instances of warez enforce this norm, as can be seen in e.g. sentiments voiced in NFO-files:

Info: Just another group putting out free games for the scene, enjoy it while you can.

Support the companies if you like the game!

From the NFO-file of Demented Dimensions, dated May 8th 2000

(emphasis added)

ALWAYS REMEMBER: We do this just for fun! And we are against commercialisation! In fact we buy all our own games, as we love games, and we are not joking!

If you like this game, buy it, we did!

From the NFO-file of Myth, dated September 30th 2000

(Altered: Changed from all caps to sentence case for reasons of legibility. Note that the same quote was used earlier. This text recurs in several NFOs, not solely Myths.)

While releasing warez for free is the norm, groups make the selfless nature of doing so very explicit, as becomes clear in the quotations above. A possible interpretation is that the norm of donation is not strong enough to survive without continuous reinforcement, and that a constant discussion and restatement regarding the moral value of releasing for “the good of the scene” is necessary in order to bolster this. Another interpretation is that the groups are afraid of even the slightest doubt as to their selflessness and are thus forced to reaffirm this *ad infinitum*. A third interpretation would be that neither is the case, and that statements regarding the ongoing generosity are simply the kind of statements that one ritually repeats within this culture. I am most drawn to this third explanation, if only for the reason that it does not posit unclear psychological forces as an explanatory model.

It is difficult to over-emphasize how important the ethos of not accepting payment for warez is, particularly for the self-image of the participants. Warezonians are actually rather adept at formulating this ethos, and often engage in long polemics about both the moral implications of the warez dealings and the necessity of keeping the scene free, both in a general sense and in ‘free from profiteers’. Seeing themselves as unfairly harassed by the authorities, the fact that they work without pay is a badge of honor and has become something of a mantra:

2. What is warez all about?

Warez is essentially all about free. Keeping the warez free is the core concept of “Warez”. Its about comrades, friends, and family “hooking” each other up with free stuff. It’s about helping people that are less fortunate than us. It’s about helping those who are in need. It’s about the end user. It’s about many things. It provides you a way to make friends, have a good time, break a few rules, and live a better life.

From “IRC Warez for newbies” by the_bogey

Still, Warezonians are not naïfs. They are very much aware of economical issues with regards to their undertakings. They know very well that the warez they trade in are economic objects, and the prices attached to these. And although most in the inner circles of warez seem to have strong ethical views on the necessity to keep profiteering at bay, they know that this will take place, in some form. Also, there seems to be at least an implicit acceptance of small-time profiteering from outsiders. It is *greed* that is abhorred, not a pragmatic view towards ones own economy. Greed makes the scene vulnerable, and the prime issue, always, is for the Warezonians to keep the scene alive.

Boys and gals... what he [Kevin Mitnick, infamous hacker] did is NOTHING compared to what your average scene person does in a WEEK... ...\$100 worth of source code???
HAHAHAHA.. that’s practically fucking WEBWARE... how many times has RiSE released a big fat \$20,000 app?... heh... now... consider... thats \$20,000 x a thousand shitty sites. If you had a hand in supplying/ripping/cracking/packing/preing/couriering that util, then you are partially liable.

[...]

Profit

*Hmmm... Well, i guess the busts this week pretty much said it all: if you are making a profit on the scene, you’re gonna go down. That’s not to say that if you *aren’t* profiting then you are SAFE... It just seems that the way things are for now, you are gonna be caught sooner if you are*

making money of the scene... That includes selling CD's, VCD's, access to sites, CC's, HW, and all the other shit out there... last i checked, it wasn't illegal to sell t-shirts... (but that may change... <g>)
Be careful.

Now... we all know that the scene can't be \$\$\$ free... the competition in the games scene is such that... ..well... anyways... Better to be lean and mean, and not pocketing the excess, right guys?

From "Protect Yourself" by ndetroit, printed in NWR; Issue LIII, July 15th 1999

The norm of giving is not a vow of chastity in financial matters. Groups may well pay suppliers for their contributions, and groups often distribute hardware to their members in order to keep them competitive. Some groups are rumored to have sold their backlist of releases to companies who later release pirate versions of e.g. games. The problem lies in the connections the scene by necessity has to the outside world, the world of markets. Even though Warezonians function on strict principles of giving and sharing within the community, these outside pressures can affect the participants' behavior generally. Still, within the warez scene, giving is the rule, and very few deviations are allowed.

Being Good

Being a warez dude is to participate in the movement of warez in a manner that is speedy and efficient and wholly without a profit-motive, and doing this in a way that adheres to the internal social norms. To be good is simply speaking to be a productive member of the community. Internally, Warezonians are judged by what they bring to the community, which has to do both with how they contribute in a material sense and how they behave themselves. Although the normative structure of Warezonian is in a sense unabashedly materialistic, with the continuing propagation of warez seen as the *sine qua non* of the community, this does not mean that the scene lacks in sociality. Beyond the norms presented here there exists something I would call ***a feel for the game***. It is not enough merely to adhere to the norms; you must also have an understanding of the scene as a community. This is frequently alluded to by Warezonians, the existence of a feeling for the scene that motivates the participants. The motivation to participate supposedly isn't, or at least shouldn't be, egoistic. Instead, one refers to terms such as 'loyalty' and 'fun'. Warezonian is a community of games, and being good at a game is not simply a question of mastering it in a technological sense. Being good at a game also includes grasping it in context, at least implicitly understanding what the rules are for, participating in the "deep play" (Geertz 1973, p. 433).

<markster> *How do you feel about scene past and present?*

<garr> *unfortunatly i think i missed the hey day of the scene. from listening to others talk i think i would have had a much deeper respect for the scene. not that i dont respect the current scene, but it seems to be all about stats now. i think for a scene to survive feelings have to run deeper than weekly gratification.*

<markster> *What are some good tips for traders just starting?*

<garr> *mentally prepare to learn the meaning of dedication if you wish to do well. give others the respect you hope to earn. and loyalty is more than just a word. give back to the scene what it gave you. if we want to gain true strength we have to pass on to the newbies the knowledge that*

we collectively gather. and mostly have some fuqn fun.

From an interview with 'garr' printed in United States Courier Report; Issue 88

To "have some fuqn fun" - in his *Quest for Excitement*, Norbert Elias (with Eric Dunning, 1986) studied the development of sport and games and came to the conclusion that this presented a classic example of a 'civilizing process'. He maintains that rules and norms in e.g. games develop organically through a continuing social process, where certain patterns of behavior become entrenched and turn into the 'real' reasons to engage in a particular activity. As an example he brings out the exceedingly violent games of boxing and pancration in ancient Greece, showing that these made far more sense to the Greeks than we at present can imagine, and communicated virtues we no longer recognize or comprehend differently. We have difficulty seeing how gouging an opponent's eye out is a show of heroism, but to the ancient Spartans this was probably obvious to such a degree that it wasn't even directly explicated. This means that merely analyzing the rules themselves does not tell us how the game functions *in context*. The game of warez can be described as I have done it, but this description lacks the vital context in which it exists. To the participants, the game of warez is *meaningful*; it is not merely behavior within a specified normative structure.

We all have our place in the scene. Ours isn't to just try and be one of the top dogs... But rather the middle man between the end user and the top groups...

Still Respecting All - Wad Crew

From the NFO-file of WAD, dated October 6th 2000

Warezonnia, or the *scene*, is an arena for social and moral sentiments just as any culture. Participants view it as something to be valued, something from which to draw meaning and through which acts can be imbued with meaning. The norms that I have presented are merely the structure for such a culture. Within the game these form the rules, but the understanding for the scene is something that grows out of participation. Knowing what is good, in an ethical sense, is logically impossible if we wish to reduce this knowledge to a set of propositions (cf. Wittgenstein 1922). To play a game is not simply to learn its rules; it is an *engagement* with the rules. Warez within the scene are not mere objects, they are part of a symbolic structure which must be engaged with in order to comprehend it. This, as much as anything, is what makes it qualitatively different from software piracy.

<VYLENT> Since i am on both sides of the table, lets see. I love the couriering department, its pretty much where you meet alot of siteops, a lot of traders, and make a lot of new friends , as i have for the past couple years...however, the one week trading scene has its advantages, you are introducing new people to a world they never imagined. Releasing Scene, is probably one of the most fun things in the scene. I mean, you are battling other groups to release first, trying to follow rules, created by some people, and pretty much being happy with the fact that you have done so much for an end user.

From an interview with 'Vylent' printed in United States Courier Report; Issue 82

I will now turn to some more theoretical accounts of how this particular game can be understood, and specifically to how I believe it can be understood as a form of economy.

IV

ECONOMY

*Two economists are walking down the street.
One sees a dollar lying on the sidewalk, and says so.
“Obviously not,” says the other. “If there were, someone would have picked it up!”*

EXCHANGES SUI GENERIS

Interaction in Warezonian could be described, and maybe even should be described, as a series of exchanges. If we discount chatting for the moment, the typical way in which interaction takes place is through taking part in the exchange of files – a simple give and take of digital goods. Still, such a description does have the downside of seeming positively asocial. Exchange, as we usually perceive it, is not the way in which a healthy social life is attained. But the exchanges we discuss must be understood somewhat differently from the idea of market exchange, which strive for equilibrium and where reciprocity is total and immediate (and usually involves money). Rather, the warez exchanges are at best temporally detached, insofar as the fact that their reciprocity cannot be immediately viewed in the act. Instead, exchanges are distanced, and transferred through the process. This is of course most visible in the sites themselves. These are exchanges even in the material sense, as the bourses of the world are materializations of the money markets, and the transfer of files to and from them marks activity (in a basic sense) on the scene. All Warezonians are in some way parts of/in these exchanges. But does this constitute an economy? And can we say that these take place in a society?

In his *The Philosophy of Money* Georg Simmel (1900/1978) reframes the question of exchanges, and by doing so resolutely places it as the general form of social interaction. Society and exchange for him co-exist in a fashion that makes it impossible to uphold the idea of society were exchanges to be totally and wholly interrupted. Yes, for Simmel exchange “constitutes the elemental form of life in society, whose biological and psychological content it shapes” (Moscovici 1993, p. 275). Instead of viewing exchange as a particular (and slightly seedy) form of interaction, Simmel posits exchange as the generalized form of interactions, as the phenomenon that makes it possible for groupings of individuals to transcend their fragmentation and constitute social bonds. Yet, he remarks, we often assume that exchange is merely something that takes place in what we call *economy* and similarly that this economy is some kind of special version of social life, only partly connected with society as a whole. Simmel, in his fragmented and decidedly idiosyncratic way, paints a different picture. He becomes, in a way, a *fin de siècle* analyst of a modernity that had not yet fully materialized, a modernity in which economy once again overflows into the general society. As remarked by Habermas (1996), Simmel is the inspiration behind such analyses of modernity as presented by Walter Benjamin and George Lukács, where mundane economic behavior truly becomes *super-social*, i.e. the material process structures all other interactions. At the same time he enhances Durkheim’s critique of e.g. Spencer, refining the former’s metaphysics by bringing in the material presence of the exchange.

The fact of economic exchange confers upon the value of things something super-individual. It detaches them from dissolution in the mere subjectivity of the agents, and causes them to determine each other reciprocally, since each exerts its economic function in the other. The practically effective value is conferred upon the object, not merely by its own desirability, but by

the desirability of another object. Not merely the relationship to the receptive subjects characterizes this value, but also the fact that it arrives at this relationship only at the price of a sacrifice; while from the opposite point of view this sacrifice appears as a good to be enjoyed, and the object in question, on the contrary, as a sacrifice. Hence the objects acquire a reciprocity of counterweight, which makes value appear in a quite special manner as an objective quality indwelling in themselves.

From "A Chapter in the Philosophy of Value", Simmel (1900)

Now, it would be easy to read Simmel and particularly Lukács as pessimists who see in exchange the domination of economy over the human spirit. The frequent use of the word 'sacrifice' in Simmel's analysis of exchange serves to strengthen this tendency. But in his writings, Simmel constantly returns to the fact that exchange *cannot* be treated merely through the perspectives given unto us by economics. Instead, "exchange is a sociological phenomenon *sui generis*" (Simmel quoted in Moscovici 1993, p. 276). Economic exchanges are forms of more general exchange, and we take part in buying and selling *in order to establish social relations*. Sociality is exchange, and the acts of the market economy can be seen as a particular mechanics for communication and establishing reciprocities. Reading the quotation above in this light, it is no longer the commodification of society that is discussed but the social values of commodities (cf. Appadurai 1986). The invocation of sacrifice serves to show the pre-modern underpinning of such exchange, and should I my reading thus not be conferred unto the models of utility.

Sacrifice can be understood in two different ways. In economics sacrifice exists within man, it is the conscious choice of denying oneself something. In its other form, its religious and social form, it resides as reciprocity between actors. I sacrifice to an idol in order to uphold a specific hierarchical structure. I sacrifice in order for the tribe to benefit. I sacrifice in order to continue a circle of reciprocities. In none of these can the sacrifice be found solely within the actor, but only as a part of a structure of exchanges. I do not merely sacrifice, I sacrifice *for*. In this way, sacrifice can be seen as something outside of the atomistic individualism of economics, something that is in line with the transcending nature of exchange in the constitution of society as Simmel describes it. But what sacrifice does is that it creates objectively existing values for this society, and it is this that for him creates the economy of money. If we take this line of argumentation a bit further, we can in *The Philosophy of Money* also find the assertion that the fact that individuals agree to the sacrifice (whichever form this takes) makes exchange fundamentally economic, even when this is not the economy of economics. Here, the introduction of money into this enables the economic to take on a purely abstract form, with the monetary acting as a symbolic passage into the universal world of economy. Money and economy becomes shorthand for society, but a very efficient and totalizing shorthand that often hides that which it signifies.

Now, such an argument hinges on the necessity to represent and reify the values of a society through the medium of money. In the society he studied and lived in, the one we still live in, this makes a lot of sense. In modernity, money (and thus the market) has become the end result of social life. In his study of Simmel, Moscovici finds an intimate and unbreakable connection between the development of the modern monetary order and the rationalization of society brought on by the modern project: "money, without exception, tends to rid society of a hotchpotch of customs" (Moscovici 1993, p. 306, cf. Latour 1992). When the value of everything can be decided through transposing the question into a cost-benefit-analysis, the point of a complex social web of ritual and traditions becomes moot. This also serves to

heighten the cultural importance of rationality, as all questions now can be formulated through an economic model. Society becomes intellectualized and manageable – with the constitution of economy as an abstract sphere of pure and universal rationalities. But this is contingent on the introduction of money, and as omnipresent as money seems to be, it is not a phenomenon *a priori*.

DOING ECONOMY

Can we think of Warezonian as an economy? The question is complex, but as an introduction we can view the list below (numbers added). It shows the ‘legit’ releases of one Warezonian working day, releases that have been taken into consideration in the rankings of the newsletter *Frontline – the warez champions league*, dated October 17th 1999. It shows just one day of warez action, October 8th 1999. On this day, 102 programs (plus the new edition of NWR) are released into the scene, according to this report. It is not a special day, and it could even be described as somewhat bland, as many of the programs are markedly middle-of-the-road. Stuff such as the 602Pro suites (#2-5), The German version of Adobe PageMaker 6.5 Plus (#9) and Creatures Adventures (#19), a children’s game. Some good audio-programs (#34, #81). Some specialized programs, such as Therapist Helper 5.01 (#91). And a lot of junk (e.g. #8, #15, #23, #46, #62, #78, #95), keymakers (a breed of crack that generates valid registration codes), add-ons and trainers (a ‘cheat’ patch for a game). Still, 102 programs is a lot of software, and releasing this much (on a single day!) is no mean feat.

1.	10-08-1999	pcy32903. zip	1	109	KB	t	32Bi t. Ftp. 9. 10. 03. Keymaker. Onl y-PROPHECY
2.	10-08-1999	mfd6021a. zip	4	4574	KB	f	602Pro. Lan. Sui te. v2000. 0. 0. 60-MFD
3.	10-08-1999	mfd602s1. zip	9	12093	KB	l	602Pro. PC. Sui te. v99a. 03-MFD
4.	10-08-1999	mfd602o1. zip	5	6765	KB	l	602Pro. Personal . Offi ce. Server. v3. 32c. 1. 1013-MFD
5.	10-08-1999	mfd602k1. zip	6	7665	KB	l	602Pro. Pl us. Pack. 99. v1999a-MFD
6.	10-08-1999	tno-a32h. zip	1	71	KB	c	AceExpert. v3. 02h. Wi n9xNT. Keygen. Onl y-TNO
7.	10-08-1999	cvae25a. zip	1	1611	KB	c	Acorn. Email . v2. 5a. Regged-COVE
8.	10-08-1999	exdsbl dr. zip	1	1285	KB	t	Acti ve. Screensaver. Bui l der. v1. 1. Cracked-Exodus
9.	10-08-1999	cpm65p01. zip	33	94342	KB	c	Adobe_PageMaker_v6. 5_Pl us_GERMAN-CPN
10.	10-08-1999	intac101. zip	2	2647	KB	t	Anderson. Commander. v1. 0. 1. Wi n9xNT-i NTUTI LS
11.	10-08-1999	scaraf01. zip	14	38742	KB	t	ARCADE. FRENZY-SCAR
12.	10-08-1999	pcyaa27a. zip	6	7821	KB	t	Aucti on. Assi stant. v2. 2. 7-PROPHECY
13.	10-08-1999	cl sbhtrn. zip	1	33	KB	l	B-Hunter_AI l _Mi ssi ons_Cheat-CLS
14.	10-08-1999	ecl -bd10. zip	1	61	KB	t	Behri nger. DSP1000. Wi n9xNT. Keygen. Onl y-ECLI PSE
15.	10-08-1999	trcmp99a. zip	6	7422	KB	l	C-Mol d. Project. Engineer. 99. 7-TRPS
16.	10-08-1999	kaccps20. zip	1	154	KB	c	Canopus. v2. 0. Retail l . Wi n9xNT-KAC
17.	10-08-1999	pcycn22a. zip	7	19930	KB	c	Ci sco. Network. Y2K. Scanner. v2. 2. 2. Incl . Keymaker-PROPHECY
18.	10-08-1999	pdmc3trn. zip	1	153	KB	c	Corum_I l l _Pl us_4_Trai ner-PARADI GM
19.	10-08-1999	cl scra01. zip	38	108385	KB	c	Creatures_Adventures-CLS
20.	10-08-1999	orncc241. zip	2	1846	KB	l	Crowd. Control . v2. 4. Wi n9xNT-ORI ON
21.	10-08-1999	dmncrt3. zip	1	1506	KB	l	CRT. v3. b7. Cracked-DMN
22.	10-08-1999	ornct101. zip	1	505	KB	t	Ctri s. 2000. v1. 01. Wi n9xNT-ORI ON
23.	10-08-1999	b-dyri 26. zip	1	752	KB	c	Dai sy. Reversi . v2. 6. cracked-BLI ZZARD
24.	10-08-1999	dsi _dgl1. zip	1	1578	KB	l	Deep. Green. Reversi . V4. 1. 1. incl . keygen-DSI
25.	10-08-1999	g-dfcg10. zip	1	379	KB	l	DFCGEN. v1. 00. German. Cracked-GWA
26.	10-08-1999	ornrd326a. zip	1	1425	KB	t	Dial og32. v6. 04a. Wi n9xNT-ORI ON
27.	10-08-1999	tr-drd11. zip	1	198	KB	t	Dr. DOC. v1. 10-TRPS
28.	10-08-1999	rs-u1501. zip	27	75663	KB	c	EDS. CORPORATI ON. UNI GRAPHI CS. V15. 03. UPDATE. FI NAL-RI SE
29.	10-08-1999	bpxel 118. zip	1	2984	KB	t	Every. Li nk. for. You. 99. v1. 18. incl . Keygen-BPX
30.	10-08-1999	rbse223a. zip	4	11352	KB	t	Excsoft_Documentor_v2. 2. 3-RBS
31.	10-08-1999	pdm-e501. zip	11	139972	KB	t	Extreme_500-PARADI GM
32.	10-08-1999	pdm-e5ma. zip	9	25429	KB	c	Extreme_500_Movi e_Addon-PARADI GM
33.	10-08-1999	df-excdd. zip	1	3197	KB	l	Ez. Cdda. Extractor. v3. 6. Seri al -dF
34.	10-08-1999	ra-fi n2k1. zip	3	10855	KB	l	Fi nal e. 2000. worki ng-Radi um
35.	10-08-1999	ecl fb408. zip	1	1422	KB	t	Fi shByte. v4. 08. Wi n9xNT. Incl . Keygen-ECLI PSE
36.	10-08-1999	rsfsg21a. zip	3	3585	KB	t	FlexGen. Versi on. 2000. 1-RBS
37.	10-08-1999	kacgch22. zip	1	2234	KB	c	Gate. Control . Home. Edi ti on. v2. 2. Wi n9xNT. Regged-KAC
38.	10-08-1999	bl h-hw01. zip	36	103034	KB	t	Hattri ck_Wi ns_GERMAN-BACKLASH
39.	10-08-1999	lkbkch39. zip	1	2489	KB	l	HGS-KASSENBUCH. v. 3. 9. German. regged-LAMERBOYZ99
40.	10-08-1999	mfdl fp4a. zip	3	4037	KB	l	Impact. Fax. Pro. v4. 00-MFD
41.	10-08-1999	toshd12a. zip	15	42044	KB	c	Imsi Soft. Stanl ey. Home. Desi gn. v1. 2-TOS
42.	10-08-1999	lxtl129a. zip	7	9840	KB	t	Intervi deo. Wi nDVD. v1. 2. 93-LAXI TY
43.	10-08-1999	pcynb24a. zip	5	6944	KB	t	IP. Network. Browser. v2. 4. 8. Incl udi ng. Keymaker-PROPHECY
44.	10-08-1999	scj go21a. zip	5	7094	KB	6	JGOTRI S. v2. 0. 1. Wi N9XNT-SCAR
45.	10-08-1999	dodj tool . zip	1	975	KB	c	Jtool s_v1. 2_Wi n9x-DOD
46.	10-08-1999	df-ki d20. zip	1	225	KB	l	Ki ds. Browser. v2. 0. Patch. Onl y-dF
47.	10-08-1999	mfdti g01. zip	7	9748	KB	l	Ki pl i ngers. Tami ng. The. Paper. Ti ger. v1. 2-MFD
48.	10-08-1999	ecl -l o11. zip	1	1265	KB	t	Loopy. v1. 1. Wi n9xNT. Incl . Keygen-ECLI PSE
49.	10-08-1999	mfdl o601. zip	11	14978	KB	l	Lotus. Organi zer. v6. 0-MFD
50.	10-08-1999	pncmd171. zip	5	6510	KB	c	MD. Sol i ds. v1. 7-PNC
51.	10-08-1999	g-mi cd31. zip	1	1388	KB	t	MI . CD-Regi ster. v3. 1. German. Regged-GWA

52.	10-08-1999	nscml101.zip	1	43	KB	t	Mouse.Lock.v1.01-NSC
53.	10-08-1999	htmp3rkg.zip	1	179	KB	l	MP3.REACH.v1.0.Wi n9xNT.KEYGEN.ONLY-HERI TAGE
54.	10-08-1999	htgmp1r1.zip	1	275	KB	l	MP3.REACH.v1.0.Wi n9xNT.REPACKED-HERI TAGE
55.	10-08-1999	g-nnp41r.zip	1	375	KB	t	NameNormPROFI.v4.1.Regged-GWA
56.	10-08-1999	yxntp46a.zip	1	1262	KB	t	Note.Tab.Pro.v4.6a.Wi n9X.Wi nNT-YuX
57.	10-08-1999	kacntl46.zip	1	1216	KB	c	NoteTab.Li ght.v4.6.Retai l.Wi n9xNT-KAC
58.	10-08-1999	g-nutz10.zip	1	56	KB	t	Nutzungszei t.v1.0.German.Cracked-GWA
59.	10-08-1999	nwr-60.zip	1	27	KB	l	Nwr60
60.	10-08-1999	kacp1299.zip	1	1034	KB	t	PACT.12Ghosts.V99.9.Regged.Wi n9xNT-KAC
61.	10-08-1999	kac4pg99.zip	1	575	KB	t	PACT.4PowerGhosts.v99.9.Regged.Wi n9xNT-KAC
62.	10-08-1999	nscpnkc3.zip	1	468	KB	l	Pi nk.Cal andar.v3.0-NSC
63.	10-08-1999	shki pv2a.zip	6	8169	KB	l	Progress.I PQoS.v2.0.54-SHOCK
64.	10-08-1999	ornp9d1.zip	2	2481	KB	l	ProKon.v9.4d.Wi n9xNT-ORI ON
65.	10-08-1999	mfdrdi d1.zip	1	599	KB	l	Rai nbow.Di amond.I ntrusi on.Detector.v1.0-MFD
66.	10-08-1999	ramdi sk9806.zip	1	2460	KB	t	RamDi sk98.v0.6-C0Ke2000
67.	10-08-1999	rbsrj13a.zip	3	7126	KB	t	Read_Japanese_v1.3-RBS
68.	10-08-1999	pncrqt21.zip	3	3675	KB	c	Request.Tracker.v2.0-PNC
69.	10-08-1999	exdmai1m.zip	1	1852	KB	c	Ri stra.Mai l.Moni tor.v1.6.0.Wi n9xNT-ExoduS
70.	10-08-1999	scbyct01.zip	31	87846	KB	f	Scooby_Doo_The_Mystery_Of_The_Fun_Park_Phantom_Cut_Scene_Addon-i ND
71.	10-08-1999	scbyoi o1.zip	13	37092	KB	l	Scooby_Doo_The_Mystery_Of_The_Fun_Park_Phantom_I ntro_Outro_Addon-i ND
72.	10-08-1999	kacse160.zip	1	640	KB	c	ScopeEdi t.v1.60.Retai l.Wi n9xNT-KAC
73.	10-08-1999	dnssf21.zip	4	10476	KB	t	SEAFI GHT_2_GERMAN-DYNASTY
74.	10-08-1999	dmnscrcr3.zip	1	1850	KB	t	SecureCRT.v3.b7.Cracked-DMN
75.	10-08-1999	cl sshmp1.zip	1	671	KB	t	Shadowman_Patch_1_Cracked-CLS
76.	10-08-1999	g-sfttp13.zip	1	895	KB	t	Si teFTP.v1.3.Regged-GWA
77.	10-08-1999	tno-sf13.zip	1	65	KB	t	Si teFTP.v1.3.Wi n9xNT.Keygen.Onl y-TNO
78.	10-08-1999	cl ssc2-1.zip	5	13716	KB	t	Snowmobi l e_Raci ng_Champi onshi p_2000-CLS
79.	10-08-1999	pncscd31.zip	3	2938	KB	c	SoftCD.v3.0-PNC
80.	10-08-1999	ecl srr20.zip	1	146	KB	l	Soneti cs.Radi o.Ri pper.v2.0.Wi n9xNT.I ncl .Keygen-ECLi PSE
81.	10-08-1999	ra-aci d2a.zip	2	5669	KB	l	Soni c.Foundry.ACI D.pro.v2.0.60-Radi um
82.	10-08-1999	dsi -si21.zip	1	797	KB	l	Source.I nsi de.2.10.0048-DSi
83.	10-08-1999	ornsc101.zip	1	1040	KB	l	Speaki ng.Cl ock.Deluxe.v1.01.Wi n9xNT-ORI ON
84.	10-08-1999	ecl -sj41.zip	1	57	KB	l	Super.JPG.v4.1.Wi n9xNT.Keygen.Onl y-ECLi PSE
85.	10-08-1999	dsi -sj41.zip	1	1309	KB	l	SuperJPG.v.4.1.regged.Wi n9xNT-DSi
86.	10-08-1999	rbs-ss01.zip	4	9276	KB	t	Synpl i ci ty.Synpl i fy.V5.2.2.LI CENSED-RBS
87.	10-08-1999	krc-tank.zip	1	30	KB	t	Tankti cs_Fi x_For_CLS_Rel -KTC
88.	10-08-1999	tksch01.zip	3	3143	KB	t	TechSchedul er.v.2.75-Cracker-Weapon
89.	10-08-1999	cr-ts275.zip	1	103	KB	t	TechSchedul er.v2.75.Wi n9xNT.Keymaker.Onl y-CORE
90.	10-08-1999	ecl tt183.zip	1	3477	KB	t	TestTrack.v1.8.3.Wi n9xNT.I ncl .Keygen-ECLi PSE
91.	10-08-1999	zhrth501.zip	4	5504	KB	l	Therapi st.Hel per.v5.01-Zerohour
92.	10-08-1999	orntnb32.zip	1	1181	KB	l	Time.N.Bi l l .32.v3.2.Wi n9xNT-ORI ON
93.	10-08-1999	inttge21.zip	8	20500	KB	c	Touch.n.Go.Enterpri se.Edi ti on.v2.32.Wi n9xNT-i NTUTI LS
94.	10-08-1999	cr-twp24.zip	1	115	KB	t	TWi nExpl orer.Pl usI mage.99.v2.4.Wi n9xNT.Keymaker.Onl y-CORE
95.	10-08-1999	ornul271.zip	2	1549	KB	l	Uni versal .Lottery.System.v2.7.Wi n9xNT-ORI ON
96.	10-08-1999	ornuml1.zip	2	1549	KB	l	Uni versal .Mortgage.and.Loans.v2.7.Wi n9xNT-ORI ON
97.	10-08-1999	ecl vm263.zip	1	2181	KB	t	Vi sual .Mi nd.v2.63.Wi n9xNT.I ncl .Keygen-ECLi PSE
98.	10-08-1999	ecl vt161.zip	1	259	KB	t	Voci trai ner.v1.6.1e.Wi n9xNT.I ncl .Keygen-ECLi PSE
99.	10-08-1999	mfdwch23.zip	1	1022	KB	c	Wal l Changer.v2.3.0.4.Regged-MFD
100.	10-08-1999	mi swx196.zip	1	605	KB	l	WeatherXpress.v1.9.6.REGGED-Mi SSI ON
101.	10-08-1999	ornnw31.zip	2	1860	KB	t	WebWorks.v3.504.Wi n9xNT-ORI ON
102.	10-08-1999	exdwbetr.zip	1	2274	KB	t	WI DO.Bi l dbe trachter.v1.0.Wi n9xNT.German-ExoduS
103.	10-08-1999	tno-wc20.zip	1	85	KB	c	Worl dCl i ent.v2.0.Wi n9xNT.Keygen.Onl y-TNO

This is of course releases from the scene in its entirety, with participating groups from all over the globe. If we look at individual groups, then e.g. Class (abbreviated CLS in the list) released ‘only’ two games, plus a patch, a fix and a cheat, *this particular day*. In applications during the year 1999, the fine if somewhat unexciting group Shock – their own leader ranked them fifth for the year (NWR Issue LXX, January 4th 2000) – released a shocking 387 programs (according to data from NWR, and counting cracks), i.e. more than one a day for the entire year. For the major release categories (games, applications and nowadays ISOs), there are *at least* five groups in each that produces on this level. Usually there are more and the levels are surpassed. Core, a group that cracks shareware etc., released “6811 [...] NON-NUKED CRACKS IN 1151 DAYS” and their member ‘Srx’ alone notched 1740 releases in this time. In March 2000 the group released 100 keymakers, 11 serial numbers and 28 patches – 140 cracks in all (all data from Core’s NFO dated March 31st 2000). Recall a quote from the last chapter: “So I am quite happy with the way things are going, as almost all utils that are produced are being released.” The amount of programs that are released as warez is astounding, and by far exceeds what I believe most people realize is being released officially. We can without exaggeration claim that Warezoniamirrors the global software industry to a very high degree, with the amount of programs released and distributed closely following corresponding figures in the official world. The only thing missing is prices and sales-figures.

Nobody questions that there are a lot of information commodities circulated in and through Warezoniam, but what is unclear is how we can understand it as economic behavior.

Still, in my further analysis of Warezonian, I will mainly view it as precisely that. It shows particular forms of production, distribution and consumption, and these are arranged in a system we can call economic. But by this I do not mean that I exclude certain areas of Warezonian life from my analysis, rather that my perspective on it will be distinctly geared towards the ways in which behavior within the warez community can be described as economic. In other words, I do not wish to reduce Warezonian to anything. It is often thought that an appeal to economy is a way of doing just that, reducing things down to their basest forms. And the public discourse concerning software piracy (see <http://www.bsa.org/> and the National Research Council report “The Digital Dilemma”), this is precisely what is done. One concentrates on trying to establish the exact amount of money that is lost due to the machinations of ‘pirates’, who are not discriminated between in any way and in the arguments of the Business Software Alliance are even explicitly denied differences. All operations which stand at odds with the industry’s view of correct behavior is portrayed as merely parasitic, placing the ‘economy’ solidly within the realm of the industry. Discussing economy within Warezonian must therefore in part be a discussion of what we can mean by this term.

Now, ‘economy’ is one of those words that seem to mean almost exactly everything you wish it to mean. It could be seen as a prime example of what Ian Hacking (1999) has called ‘elevator words’, concepts that really aren’t objects, but ways to talk about objects in the world. Existing on a higher level, such words (Hacking’s examples are facts, truth, reality and knowledge) are invoked when the analysis of mundane states is attempted, so they ‘lift’ the everyday up into the world of abstractions. They also have the curious characteristic of almost always being circularly defined (see below). Studied in its normal use as a word it is closely connected with an ethic (cf. Weber 1904-5), and to state that something is ‘economic’ is often synonymous with stating it to be the correct way to go about something. Conceptually, economy is also closely related to the modernist virtues of rationality and calculability, even to the extent that economy could be identified the domineering disciplinary structure of modernism and western society at large (cf. Foucault 1973, 1990, p. 143-184).

economy *n.* (*pl.* -ies)

1 **a** the wealth and resources of a community, esp. in terms of the production and consumption of goods and services. **b** a particular kind of this (a capitalist economy). **c** the administration or condition of an economy.

2 **a** the careful management of (esp. financial) resources; frugality. **b** (often in *pl.*) an instance of this (made many economies).

3 sparing or careful use (economy of language).

From *The Concise Oxford Dictionary, ninth edition*

Although one should be hesitant to read too much into the purported meanings of words, and although the use of dictionary entries for a word or concept is an aggressively overused rhetoric device in academic texts, the above might still say something about how we view economy. Whereas the first entry here reads rather neutrally, the second immediately and without hesitation brings in an ethical dimension to the question of handling of resources. 1c and 2a would be identical, were it not for the introduction of the word “careful” and the implicitly logical extension of this, “frugality”. This immediate way in which saving and care is viewed as vital for an understanding of economy is interesting. It permanently places economy within a sphere of the cost-benefit-analysis, the modern sphere of direct causalities and irrevocable dependencies, and further makes economy a question of control. Economy begins when we have something to control, accumulated matter, and is synonymous with planned

exchange and striving towards balance. To 'do economy' then is to control things, part from them in a controlled manner and closely manage the acquiring of the same. The software industry clearly does this. They establish prices and calculate costs. Then the Warezonians come, snatch the product (or buy it) and simply give it away, squander it. They are not careful with the commodity, at least not in the common economical sense. Neither are they frugal, but rather the exact opposite. They are in a sense hyper-uneconomical, aggressively anti-economic actors. But is this inversion of the market a move away from economy or the establishment of another equally consistent economic order?

Moreover, there is the problem of intention – the 'why?' of economy. Normally, this is seen as inherently obvious. The reason to engage in economic behavior is to satisfy material needs, to improve ones material well-being. In modern societies this is mediated through money, which signifies this material well-being totally. The reason for control is that such improvement does not happen automatically in a situation where everyone has the same goal, and people thus have to engage intellectually with the structure within which material interests are negotiated. If this is not done, e.g. you don't understand how much you should pay for something, you 'lose' in the transactions. The other parties 'win', as they have been in greater control, intellectually superior. In many ways this resembles a game of chess, where both parties try to gain a material advance, and the intellectually superior party is supposed to win, barring misfortune. But this still does not tell us anything about the reason to enter the game, as this is usually assumed to be natural and evident to all. You enter the game to ensure or strive for personal benefit. This methodological individualism springing from fundamentally egoistic motives is the 'real' reason of economy, at least among those who subscribe to such a view. From this assumption we can then formulate moral statements, such as what it is to be 'rational' and what is meant by 'careful'. Applied to Warezonian, much of the behavior therein seems to go against this. On the surface, at least, their ways seem highly inefficient in maximizing the utility of the individual participant. Not only do they give more than they get, they also habitually strive to give away things with the highest possible utility, effectively ensuring that they will lose on the transaction. The races to be the first to release the most used and highly valued programs (operative systems, mass-market utilities, the best games) are in direct opposition to a view of maximizing behavior, as the 'losers' are those who 'gain' the use of the program. Initially, at least, the postulates of neoclassic microeconomics (seen here as the 'standard' or most common way to view economy) seem insufficient to explain the workings of Warezonian. At least when viewed superficially, it lacks prices, 'care' and any straightforward rationality of individual maximization, and in any case initially needs to be studied as something different than a version of market economy.

Turning to economic anthropology for help, Maurice Godelier has extensively (e.g. 1972, 1977) discussed the problem of analyzing such economic orders that do not fit into the conventional models, his particular interest being the analysis of pre-capitalist societies. He begins his essay on the objects and methods in economic anthropology (Godelier 1972) by arguing that the demarcation of a field such as 'economy' without it becoming either a tautology or a paradox is impossible. Any such limiting of the subject field will either incorporate exogenous elements or exclude matters that are central to understanding it. The latter of these two is seen as preferable (in order to have an 'economy' to talk about at all), and Godelier consequently argues for analyses of economy that can simultaneously view these as separated from other elements of social life and a part of a greater whole – thus both divorced from and part of other social structures. Whereas modern capitalist society has privileged the economy as an autonomous sphere, Godelier follows Dalton (1961) stating that a sensitive

cultural analysis of an economy by necessity must view it as a sphere of its own *and* show its connection to other aspects in society. A description of an economy must entail an analysis of its structures for production, distribution and consumption, but in addition to this we should, if we want to understand it, present the rationality that orders these structures. In some societies this might be kinship (see Lévi-Strauss 1949, Meillassoux 1981), so that you never produce for ‘someone’ but always for someone in a structure of kinship, which subsequently orders distribution and consumption. On the Trobriand Islands (Sahlins 1969) there is the practice of *urigubu*, through which half of all yams that a man grows will be donated to the husband of his sister (or similar person in the matrilinear structure), a practice that is practical insofar as it strengthens important bonds and additionally functions as an averaging mechanism for crop usage. Within this particular social setting, where boys will move to their maternal uncles when married, this arrangement is inherently rational. Merely following the paths of how bushels of yams are carried around the countryside will say nothing about the internal relevance of such distribution, though. Still, these exchanges function in a manner that allows for us to view them as distinct, as the production, distribution and subsequent consumption of goods. It is social because it is economical and economical because it is social, and must be viewed in this ambiguous way.

In a footnote in *Stone Age Economics* Marshall Sahlins (1972, p. 185-186) states that for his immediate purpose he is not interested in how a particular individual uses what little she has to achieve a goal chosen among alternatives and that he will conceive of economy as “*a component of culture rather than a kind of human action*”. Furthermore, he refers to the appropriateness of a “housewife’s perspective” in studying economy. In the following footnote (*ibid.*, p. 187) he defines economy as “the process of (materially) provisioning society”, and goes on to remark that this definition is helpful since it does not necessarily refer to any individual provisioning. Instead, many exchanges may be strictly worthless as ways of bringing anything material to an individual, but they can still be very efficient ways of provisioning society: “they maintain social relations, the structure of society, even if they do not to the least advantage the stock of consumables”. These remarks could well serve as the defining statements for the way in which ‘economy’ is conceived on these pages.

The Kula – A Circular Economy

Studying alternative economic orders, i.e. structures that pose a challenge to the hegemony of the market as the ‘true’ form of economy, you will very quickly come across the two most studied and discussed versions of such orders: the *kula* and the *potlatch*. Of these we shall now turn to the first. A classic example of economic behavior among ‘primitive societies’, it serves well as an introduction to structured, non-monetary exchange. In addition, it is interesting insofar as the study of it was the first real instance of economic anthropology, and in a sense marked the beginning of modern anthropology altogether. Based on extensive fieldwork among the people of the Trobriand Islands in Melanesia, Bronislaw Malinowski published a series of books and articles on the different aspects of their culture. Of these, two books are particularly well known, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) and *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927). It is in the earlier of the two in which the *kula* is expounded upon, and the description of this circulation of valuables in the Trobriand Islands still holds a central place within economic anthropology.

The analysis begins with an observation that stands at odds with the then generally held belief that ‘primitive’ societies lack economies. Although such societies may exhibit some barter,

even some trade, they were not seen as developed enough to have mastered the art of economic exchange. As they lacked financial institutions, their economic behavior was assumed to be of a non-developed kind, which (assumedly) in time could grow into a real system of exchanges, i.e. a market economy. But what Malinowski observed on e.g. the island of Kiriwina was that there was a continuous and omnipresent exchange of goods, and that these exchanges were extensive both in their geographical dispersal and with regards to the amount of time and resources the islanders put into them. Within the islands there existed advanced and deeply embedded forms of interaction, where exchange and kinship relations were intertwined so as to make them indivisible, but it was the far more dramatic exchanges between the islands that became the focus of Malinowski's early study. He noticed that there existed a traditional system of exchanges that covered the islands as a whole, one where valuables circulated in a 'kula ring' spanning several hundred miles (see figure). In this, two specific articles circulate in opposite directions, creating both a trade route and a distinct cultural pattern, one that encompasses all the members of the societies that take part. The first object, which circulated clockwise (seen from our perspective through a map of the islands), was the *soulava*. These were shell necklaces, considered to be male and worn by women, which were constructed by stringing together disks of shells with red mother-of-pearl. The opposite object, the *mwali*, were armbands constructed through breaking off and polishing rings from large shells. *Mwali* were seen as female, worn by men and circulated counterclockwise. Together they are referred to as the *vaygu'a* and the exchange of these within the kula ring constituted an economy unto itself where an intricate structure of rules and conventions ordered their movement.

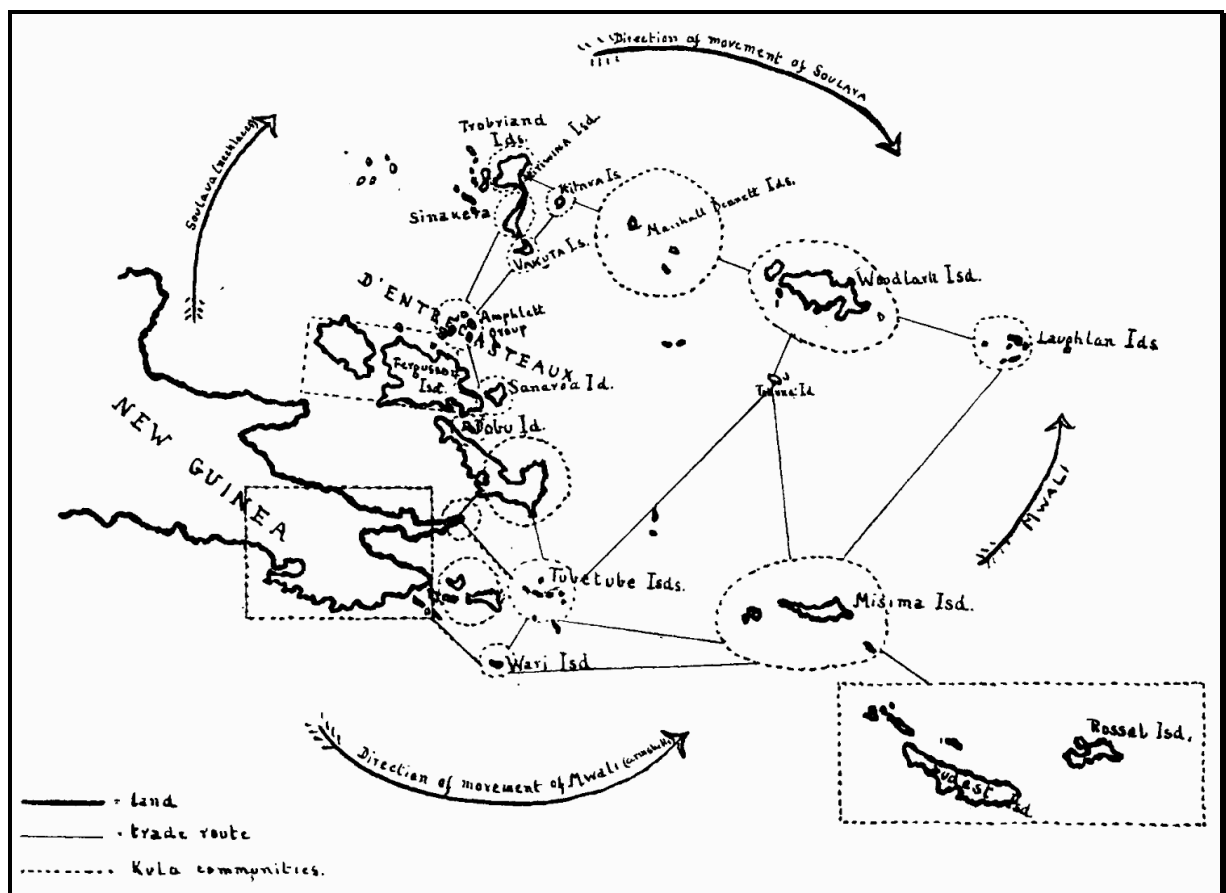


Figure 1: The kula as illustrated by Malinowski

In the kula, the possession of one of the *vaygu'a*-objects is a matter of great pride and satisfaction. The present custodian of an object will often gather people around him and tell the

tale of the object, complete with lists of previous custodians. Still, these objects must continuously be kept in motion and given away to the next member in the kula ring. As the objects travel in opposite directions, a participant will have a partner or partners to whom all mwali are subsequently given and from whom soulava will be received. Likewise he will have an opposite partner or partners, to whom soulava goes and mwali is received. These relations are often enduring and life-long, although new participants can enter from time to time. In some areas, the kula is reserved for tribal chiefs, but this exclusivity isn't total. What is total is the way in which the kula is conducted, as a highly ritualized way of giving gifts. Although it is true that mwali are exchanged for soulava, this exchange is not conducted in a way that would enable us to liken it with trade. Instead it is structured as giving.

Superficially viewed, the vaygu'a-objects are mere trinkets of extremely limited economic value. But the kula system in which these circulate can be seen as the most important institution on the islands, and to a great extent a person's social standing is determined to his position in this system. The travels entailed in these exchanges marked a significant exertion and usage of tribal resources, and to a great degree this exertion was only compounded upon, with participants working hard to create e.g. special ceremonial boats with which to travel. The travels that were undertaken in order to give the objects away could furthermore be very perilous, but were undertaken with diligence and a pronounced enthusiasm. And what is more, all this activity was in order to get and give objects that participants very well could have manufactured themselves, at a fraction of the cost in time and resources (the shells are not particularly rare, and the objects are not hard to create). Despite the 'uneconomic' nature of this, the institution is by both Malinowski and Mauss (and later scholars) seen as both central and functional to the inter- and intra-tribal economies. Mauss, who devotes much of the beginning of his *The Gift* to a description of the kula, sees in this a pure example of the "total social phenomenon" of the gift as it exists in archaic societies. But what Malinowski tries to do, something that gives his analysis a particularly political bent, is to show that far from being a childish and irrational custom of childish and irrational natives, the kula is in fact an inherently **functional** institution, even an **efficient** one. The perspective of classical economics is for him ethnocentric and arrogant as it trivializes all such economic behavior that doesn't fit into the market system of exchange. He writes in the conclusion of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*:

At one or two places in the previous chapters, a somewhat detailed digression was made in order to criticise... the conception of a rational being who wants nothing but to satisfy his simplest needs and does it according to the economic principle of least effort... Now I hope that... the meaning of the Kula will consist in being instrumental to dispell such crude, rationalistic conceptions of primitive mankind, and to induce both the speculator and the observer to deepen the analysis of economic facts.

When a participant in the kula has possession of one of the objects, he will for a time hold on to it and his status will be higher due to this. As tales about the objects are in continuous motion, and he has received the object from one of his trading-partners, his possession of the object in question will be well known to those that interact with him. After a while these will, within the boundaries for propriety both with regards to the time it has been in his possession and to the rules of kula exchange, engage with him in order to keep the gift circulating. They may give smaller gifts to make him bound by reciprocity, or otherwise attempt to influence him. As there may be several partners to whom he can give the vaygu'a-object, he will choose between these and after a while prepare his boats and voyage to a trade-partner.

Here, he will give the object to him, as is befitting the ritual. This is done in a fashion that intentionally downplays the value of what is given:

The act of giving itself assumes very solemn forms: the thing received is disclaimed and mistrusted; it is only taken up for a moment, after it has been cast at one's feet. The giver affects an exaggerated modesty: having solemnly brought on his present, to the sound of a seashell, he excuses himself for giving only the last of what remains to him, and throws down the object to be given at the feet of his rival and partner.
Mauss 1924/1990, p. 22-23

To conduct oneself honorably, you cannot show any greediness or trading behavior in the kula. Although there is continuous talk about what one wishes to gain (*sic*) or what someone else has received in the kula, to do this in an open manner would be inappropriate. As the objects are never traded directly, which is further exemplified in the custom of not even giving them hand-to-hand but by throwing them to the ground instead, there is none of the direct and explicit computability we are accustomed to present in trade. Trading, which exists in parallel but strictly distinct, is called *gimwali* and is markedly 'economic'. Here, you haggle over prices and try to negotiate maximizing outcomes. To engage in this is fully normal, and not associated with any moral stigma; it is merely a normal trading situation. But if the boundaries between these two institutions are breeched, condemnation will ensue. If a kula is conducted in a sloppy way, too quickly or without proper keeping with etiquette – or if a participant tries too overtly to negotiate better terms for himself in the exchange – it is said that it is conducted “as if it were *gimwali*” (Malinowski 1922, p. 97), something that is unfitting honorable men. One of the most important aspects of the kula is that it must portray and represent the generosity, freedom and unselfishness of the participants, as well as their power in being able to forgo valuables. This power can be viewed in many ways, but what such a ritual shows is that the participants can communicate their independence of material restraints, i.e. their affluence. As the kula is viewed as clearly set apart from barter, no-one can require the giving back of *vaygu'a*-objects, although this is ritually stipulated. Neither can any power as to the counter-gift be enforced, as this would break with the decorum of nobility in these interactions.

Despite the apparent disregard shown towards the actual kula exchange, the tribes are exceptionally desirous for these objects. The entire tribe shares the satisfaction of being in possession of one of these, particularly the ones with the most esteemed history. Circulating over the entire area of the Trobriand Islands, the histories many of the most valued *vaygu'a*-objects have are lengthy, and to own such an object is in a way to place yourself and your tribe into the history of the islands, and greatly adds to your social stature, even to the degree that such temporary custody can ensure you a place in history. But as already has been made clear such possession is never long-term, and Malinowski remarks that a man that partakes never holds on to an object for more than a year or two, and even this is seen as somewhat extreme. Instead, there is the social obligation to keep the kula forever circulating. Here the kula breaks with what is normally thought to be proper economic behavior. Classical economics would postulate that a person would hold onto an object he desires for as long as this is possible or until a better deal comes along. Social pressure would seem insufficient to make a person part with an object that so clearly manifests power and that is so obviously sought-after, particularly when we keep in mind that no overt pressure can be brought to bear upon a reticent giver. In addition, as the objects never 'end up' anywhere, there is no real possibility to explain their circulation through a means-to-an-end rationality. The continuing nature of the kula obviously needs an explanation. As remarked above, Malinowski abhorred the usual explanation that

natives kept up with rituals simply because they were ignorant and didn't know any better. Instead, he steadfastly believed that customs such as the kula were inherently sensible, and that they fulfilled important functions in the societies where they had developed. In the case of the kula, he maintained that it performed basic economic and social functions. Briefly stated, it served as a carrier for intertribal communication generally, and it also functioned as a structure for barter. Although gimwali was kept strictly apart from the kula, it could so to speak ride on the infrastructure that the kula provided. As Mauss (1924/1990, p. 27) remarks:

[T]he exchange of the vaygu'a themselves during the kula forms the framework for a whole series of other exchanges, extremely diverse in scope, ranging from bargaining to remuneration, from solicitation to pure politeness, from out-and-out hospitality to reticence and reserve. [...] [E]xcept for the uvalaku, large-scale solemn expeditions that are purely ceremonial and competitive, all the kula provide the occasion for gimwali, which are commonplace exchanges, not necessarily occurring between partners.

Explaining the kula thus, we encounter the problem that seems to be a constant traveling-companion of anthropology. What Malinowski and Mauss have done by analyzing the functionalities of the kula is not necessarily that they have explained it, but rather that they have made it comprehensible to themselves. They assume that there exists a universal rationality that can be found through diligent anthropological work, and are in fact explaining kula not for their readers back in London and Paris but to the *participants* of the kula. Malinowski's functionalism and political agenda made it necessary to introduce a Western form of rationality into the kula, so as to challenge the view of 'natives' as irrational and childish. Take away this political necessity, and what remains? Still, Mauss analysis is not functionalist, at least not in any readily apparent sense. Instead, it can be read as a celebration of the holistic and structurally stable-dynamic/dynamic-stable order of social interaction. As Mauss explicated it the gift in gift-economies was a "total social phenomenon". This concept requires attention. For although it seems simple, even naïve, it establishes a very strict logical structure to the kula. In the analysis, we are not allowed any shortcuts for explaining away the gift as standing in for something else. Instead, we are presented with an infinitely complex web of meanings, norms, behaviors and rituals, which encompass all the dimensions of social life as a whole. The gift involves economic, social, moral, legal, aesthetic, religious, political and ideological spheres, and many more besides. Where Malinowski goes to show that the kula serves one or two important functions in the societies of the Trobriand Islands, Mauss shows that this is a simplification (although it may be a necessary such), as the gift has created social structures just as complex as those in the West. Where money for Simmel (1900/1978) was the abstract language into which social customs could be collapsed, Mauss viewed the institution of the kula as a variation of such a 'language'. Although there exists a distinct qualitative difference between the vaygu'a and money – "vaygu'a are not unimportant things, mere pieces of money" (Mauss 1924/1990, p. 24) – they are similar in the sense of being ordering principles. All that is dear to a society can be found through observing these gift-behaviors, and as it was in archaic societies he found them, Mauss quickly came to the conclusion that this formed the basis of social interaction – a basis from which later forms grew. We can see a similarity in how Simmel views the rationalization of modernity through the medium of money and how Mauss views the pre-rationalized development of evermore complex reciprocities, namely that they share a perspective (if not field of study) in their analysis of how market economies and bourgeois capitalism has evolved. For both, the object of study (gift/money) functions as a social bond, a materialization of

general exchange, and although the dimensions of e.g. religion and aesthetics might be more visible in the gifts discussed by Mauss, these differences can be surprisingly superficial.

For Mauss (and Malinowski) the kula is an economy almost by definition. It is a system by which the material resources of the community are communicated and distributed – a culturally embedded structure for the movement of goods and valuables over an extended society, even when comparatively few objects travel through the kula ring itself. This lack of material throughput has of course led some theorists to the conclusion that the ritual stands in for something else. Posited in structuralist terms, it is a signifier but not in itself the signified. In line with this, one has in it seen the upkeep of intertribal relations, a super-structure of barter (only not necessarily in a Marxist sense) and similar structures that one assumes are the implicit ‘meaning’ of the tradition. This is somewhat problematic. Such an assumption is unfortunate not only because it introduces logics that are not necessarily present, but also through implying that traditions have ‘deeper’ meanings than is known by the participants, and thus reinforcing the image of the irrational native whose undertakings must be explained by an inherently more rational social scientist. Still, as Mauss theorized, it is impossible to study ‘merely’ the kula, as it has connections to all aspects of social life on these islands. The ring or circle that is the kula organizes social life totally, establishing the circle of Trobriand economy. It is not an economy with distinct goals (such as maximized production or equal distribution of wealth), but a process of continuously re-established social relations – a circular gift economy.

GIFT ECONOMIES

For Mauss, the general point of exchanging gifts lies in the social bonds and the enhanced solidarity that is the result of such exchanges. The gifts themselves are trivial in this respect, and can be any number of things, none of which have to have any ‘real’ economic value. What is important is that gifts are never ‘free’, but part of a system of reciprocities, so that any gift is related to the counter-acts of other participants in this system. There is a ‘law of the gift’ that Mauss lays down, a set of principles that function as obligations. Curiously enough, these principles are brought to bear on a specific set of customs, namely those “among Polynesian clans” (Mauss 1924/1990, p. 13), and there is little in the way of argumentation as to why these principles should be held as universal. Despite this, and he is not shy to point this out, they implicitly sketch a general theory of gift-exchange, this “complex” of reciprocal presents and “total services”. The three themes are: the obligation to *give*, the obligation to *receive*, and the obligation to *reciprocate*. From these, and from sometimes rather sketchy ethnographic accounts, Mauss develops an all-encompassing and seminal theory that all accounts of gift-exchange in social life inevitably build on. Such a theory has not gone without criticism (see e.g. Gashé 1972/1997, Bourdieu 1990, Laidlaw 2000), but is still viewed with considerable admiration (e.g. Hyde 1979, Schrift 1997, and cf. Schwartz 1967). The simplicity of his use of a simple set of concepts in order to describe societies generally could be seen as a result of the grand positivist tradition from which he springs (being Durkheim’s nephew and all), where a cursory and sweeping analysis is combined with a strict rigor when it comes to fashioning explanatory premises. It does fall within the scientist tradition to create such a rudimentary model and assume that all exchanges of this type can be analyzed through this, but as should be readily apparent, such a view unfairly belittles Mauss actual work.

All these institutions reveal the same kind of social and psychological pattern. Food, women, children, possessions, charms, land, labour, services, religious offices, rank—everything is stuff to be given away and repaid. In perpetual interchange of what we may call spiritual matter,

*comprising men and things, these elements pass and repass between clans and individuals, ranks,
sexes and generations.*
Mauss (1924/1950, p. 11-12)

It is clear that Mauss intended for his view of the gift as a system of obligations to be a total description, and that he through this participated in the project of making sociology (broadly defined) a science. The essay he wrote, *The Gift*, is even in his own words an 'indication' of such a project, specifically with regards to the origins of morality and economy. It is a sketch, an outline, and its importance can be seen as twofold. Mary Douglas (in her introduction to the edition of 1990) remarks that it serves as point zero for modern fieldwork: "It quickly became axiomatic that a field report would be below standard unless a complete account could be given of all transfers, that is, of all dues, gifts, fines, inheritances and successions, tributes, fees and payments" (p. xii). It established the study of societies as a study of *dynamics*, of *processes*. It took modern anthropology as it was introduced by Malinowski and made it into a social science (we should also bear in mind that it served as an inspiration for structuralism, particularly the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss). But more than being an early primer in methodology, it introduced *economies* as a valid area of research for social scientists (which Mary Douglas also notes), and led to a variety of different analyses of the ways in which exchanges structure social life.

The Gift is a study of archaic societies, communities where the abstractions we associate with economy have yet to form or have yet to become the sole legitimate language of exchange. Economic interactions are tied up in the exchanged objects, even to the extent that these objects are sometimes viewed as containing part of participants' souls. In conjunction, all exchanges are part of something larger than the exchange itself, so that the intermingling of individuals in objects is coupled with an intermingling of these objects with society. When Mauss states that there can be no free gifts, he is in effect saying that there can be no meaningless gifts, no exchanges that are not part of a greater structure. In the kula, the distinct exchanges of the *vaygu'a* cannot be understood if we do not observe the structure of which they are a part. Were there to be no continuing circularity of gift-exchange, the act of giving *mwali* to a neighbor would be meaningless, at least from this perspective. All gifts belong to some structure, and it is this structure that can be named 'economy'. The study of economy should (at least this is one interpretation hereof) be a study of the structures in which an exchange is meaningful. Why is this important? Because this is the diametrical opposite of how economics usually approaches the question of economy, and consequently how the 'econowannabies' (to use a term from Deirdre McCloskey) have used economics in order to attempt an understanding of economy. What economics does is that it attempts to view economy through its effects and through this find the reasons for exchanges⁹, often in the psychological makeup of the actors. The problem, and one that implicitly figures in Mauss writing, is that such a view assumes that reason and rationality are things 'out there', instead of embedded in the social structure. The usual apologia is that economic rationality is embedded into social structures, and that it sometimes takes forms that belie this inherent rationality (cf. Malinowski's functionalism). Mauss turns this on its head. By stating that gift-exchange is the original and primal form the set of behaviors we later began referring to as 'economic', the rationality of market exchange appears as a latter-day abstract formalization. Instead, what is embedded are the exchanges themselves and the process of re-affirming social bonds.

Panoff (1970) has remarked that much of the difficulties in reading *The Gift* seem to stem from the limited way in which it has been read, as a study on exchanges in general in

archaic societies. Instead, he argues, it is in fact a study of “one particular form of exchange in all societies including our own.” (ibid., p. 60) This would entail us to see past some of Mauss’s theoretical vagueness and eccentricities in interpretation of second-hand ethnographic data, and instead focus on the way in which Mauss employed a cross-cultural perspective in order to highlight specific behaviors in *all* societies, including our own. What he did was that he created a testable model of gift-exchange, one that in its simplicity serves as a tremendously effective stepping stone for further inquiries into exchange behavior. Still, this model has its difficulties. On one hand, it presents us with the tripartite structure (give-receive-reciprocate) that purportedly underlies all gift-exchange, in any society. On the other, the foundation of Mauss’s theory of the gift is the notion of *totality*, the way in which the gift is present in all aspects of social life, *in the studied communities*. A reading that is readily apparent would be that Mauss from the totality present in e.g. the kula was able to discern the underlying structure of gift-exchange as present in all societies. Such a reading is very much in line with how Lévi-Strauss came to present Mauss as a precursor to structuralism in general. Panoff’s criticism is that this in fact perverts the key notion of totality. In his view, far from being a special case, ‘totality’ is descriptive of any economic system. Referring to the enduringly popular concept of ‘embeddedness’ – which he sees as little more than a reformulation of Mauss’s notion – Panoff notes that the effect of the institutional environment on Western economy was already stated as fact by some economists (he refers to “F. List, G. Schmoller and K. Bücher”, unfortunately without providing references) before Polanyi et al. (1957) introduced the idea that “primitive economies are ‘embedded’ in social relations” (Panoff 1970, p. 64). That Mauss is read as a treatise on archaic societies and nothing more – with possible *extrapolations* to contemporary societies – is in Panoff’s view decidedly wrong. Following this, *The Gift* could be viewed as a theory about economy *in general*. This reading is not uncommon, but presents us with new problems.

When Mauss describes the gift, he is describing the origin of economy. This is the simplest way in which I am able to put my reading (which, alas, is far from original). The question of such origins can be viewed from two slightly different perspectives. On one hand there is the debate that has raged within economic anthropology regarding what is parochially known as ‘primitive societies’. This debate has dealt with questions such as “Can there be a primitive economy?” and “How can we understand ‘money’ within primitive societies?” Its scope has been limited, as implied by Panoff, to studying only ‘the Other’, limiting the query to safe subjects and archaic customs. Although anthropology has gone on to say much of interest regarding economic behavior in earlier epochs of human life, such studies have often been limited to the local context that is under scrutiny. On the other hand, the idea of gift-exchange as the origin of economy can be read in another, more general sense – as a critique of political economy. Sketching out an argument we can in the development of economics see two differing views on the origins from which modern economy has sprung, a polarization that could be illustrated by contrasting Adam Smith and Karl Marx. The former seems to have viewed economy as something that was born when first two people (both with an “innate propensity to truck, barter and exchange”) met and decided to interact, with private ownership being the state from which all other states are begotten. Immediately as agents meet, the ‘invisible hand’ is introduced, and the notion of *utility* is invoked as through divine intervention. For Smith, the origin of economy seems to lie in a metaphysical marketplace formed whenever two agents meet. Opposed to this is the more utopian view of e.g. Marx:

As the Industrial Revolution was well on its way, a new theory criticizing capitalism took form from Karl Marx’ work that showed the market economy as an exploitative force rather than

benefiting most human beings. Lost in his evolutionary analysis were the 'primitive' societies, whose systems (or lack there of) of organization and economy were thought to be the repository of morally sanctioned reciprocal behavior that maintained egalitarian rather than hierarchical relationships.

Kushnier (2000)

Latter economic models are for Marx(ists) essentially perversions of this, and although history in Marx's view is one of almost omnipresent perversions (of this type) the origin still is a state where dominance of the few has yet to assert itself. What Mauss presents functions as a critique of both these views. Exchanges of gifts, in the cases he discusses, are not cases of simple sharing. Instead they exhibit rigid rules, ideas of interest and reciprocity, morality and even hidden agendas. They are interested actions, belonging to a system that is infinitely more complex than the utopian notion of 'pure' sharing. But at the same time, this does not turn gift-exchange into mere disguised barter. Nor is the notion of private ownership useful in such a system, where goods are continuously circulating due to the mentioned obligations. No, for Mauss the origin of economy lies in "total services".

The system that we propose to call the system of 'total services', from clan to clan – the system in which individuals and groups exchange everything with one another – constitutes the most ancient system of economy and law that we can find or of which we can conceive. It forms the base from which the morality of the exchange-through-gift has flowed.

[...]

Thus, from one extreme of human evolution to the other, there are no two kinds of wisdom. Therefore let us adopt as the principle of our life what has always been a principle of action and will always be so: to emerge from self, to give, freely and obligatory. We run no risk of disappointment. A fine Maori proverb runs:

Ko Maru kai atu
Ko maru kai mai
ka ngohe ngohe.

'Give as much as you take, all shall be very well.'

Mauss 1924/1990, p. 70-71

By analyzing archaic societies, Mauss finds "a principle of action" he sees as the basis of all that has followed. If money for Simmel is the medium and abstraction of modern society, it is clear for Mauss what it is a medium *for* and abstraction *of*. Somewhere along the way the morality of the gift was lost, but we can trace back barter and market exchange to their original forms, the total social phenomenon of the primitive gift. By stating this, Mauss battles a very specific and explicitly named foe, utilitarianism, and the way in which this ideology tried to establish the notion of a 'natural' economy. Most the assumptions in this perspective are wrong, he says, for if we look at history, there has never existed anything that even resembles such a 'natural' economy (ibid., p. 5 and *passim*). He notes that even the idea of individual economic agents might be a late construction, for originally it is groups and clans who conduct exchange, with individual exchange being largely absent in systems of law and economy. Instead, exchanges as they were originally conducted between the clans were not merely material but included all kinds of sociality and politeness, making the notion of utility insufficient at best. Furthermore, all this was part of something much larger than the short-term strives imagined by utilitarianism, namely enduring relations between the parties. It is, in fact, impossible to extract

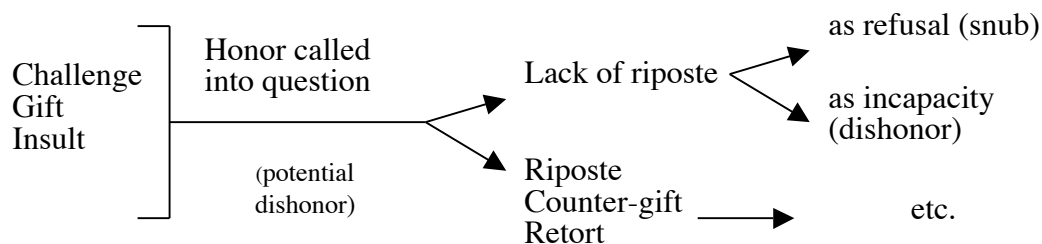
the economic from such long-term social relations, for in this view of origins value is inseparable from its social context. The very notion of the ‘quick buck’ or similar short-term utility maximization is foreign to such economies. That is not to say that one doesn’t understand how such endeavors function or that one does not partake in them, as we can see in the gimwali, but they are *marginal* elements in the greater cycle of economy. Whereas we often view ‘the deal’, two independent operators quickly assembling a beneficial transaction, as the elementary aspect of the economic, economies such as these view the long-term polite relation as the same rudimentary unit.

This last point deserves some consideration. Superficially, the way in which such rudimentary units is viewed seems to be merely a choice between one economic system or another as the primary structure from which others have developed. But if we compare these two views, we can see that the difference between these two extends to a fundamental ontological question regarding economy and the social. And, even more surprisingly, the position of utilitarianism starts to look like the one of Marx. At issue is the following: In most analyses of economic behavior, the assumption has been that we are discussing the ways in which individuals handle their goods. With Adam Smith, the question was what a man will do with his property and the answer was “to truck, barter and exchange”. Although Marx says relatively little about the origin of economy (the text on “original accumulation” in *Capital* basically starts from the 15th century), his analysis is also rooted in the interaction of individuals (see e.g. Marx 1867/1967 (vol. 1), p. 167-198). Marx does introduce the *classes* as macro-actors, but still treats these as constructs, affected by the acts of individuals and the development of technology. The basic unit of analysis, the unit from which larger wholes can be inferred, is for both camps the economic behavior of individuals. More than this, it is the single meeting of individuals that is used as an example, making the foundation of economic theory (both flavors) both static and atomistic.

Enter Mauss. By postulating “total services” as a base, the basic unit of economy becomes the contract between groups, i.e. complex social interaction over time (see Carrier 1991). The anti-reductionism inherent in this is important. Disassociating himself from the idea of atomistic individualism (explicit in Smith, implicit and repressed in Marx), he comes to a conclusion where the primordial chaos of economy (or in the case of utopians, the stasis) no longer exists. Economy comes to the world *as a whole*. To paraphrase Johan Huizinga, it arises in and as sociality. Also, it is tied to notions of recurrence and prolonged interaction. Exchange is not something that merely ‘takes place’; it is always part of something larger and more durable (cf. Callon & Latour 1981). Although Marxist analyses of the economy do take the social context into account, the difference lies in the fact that gift-exchange *cannot be understood in isolation*, i.e. the analysis must always take into account the continuing flow of giving, receiving and reciprocating in order to be meaningful. Another way to put this is that a theory of gift-relations radicalizes volume 2 of the *Capital*, *The Process of Circulation of Capital* (1867/1976, cf. Lash & Urry 1994) and discounts a possibility of ever finding a less complex form than the ‘processes of circulation’ themselves.

Leaving the question of origins, the gift relation is interesting by force of being a structure of continuity, deferred response and politesse – and how this makes it very different from relations based on the maximization of utility. In a way that is incomprehensible to a theory dealing solely with commodities, the gift is a continuous negotiation between parties. In the kula, the actual transfers are almost disdained, and we could say that they mainly serve as focal points for the general process of interaction. Specifically it is the notion of *reciprocity* that differentiates this kind of process from the ‘deal’, and it is thus viewed with much interest, both

in anthropology and in economic theory. But as Bourdieu (1990) points out in *The Logic of Practice*, reciprocity is not a simple or mechanical act in the gift-exchanges. There is always the possibility for unreciprocated gifts, and this makes the gift-relation far more dynamic than is implied by Mauss. His theory is staunchly structural, dealing with obligations. Bourdieu remarks that there are a number of situations where the obligation to receive can be nullified and where the obligation to reciprocate can be used in an agonistic manner. This would imply that a theory of the gift must be appended with some model regarding such ‘anomalies’. He has suggested such a model, based on the temporal displacement of the counter-gift and the ties gift-exchange has with honor in a social structure. His “very simple diagram” illustrates this (Bourdieu 1990, p. 100):



We can now use this model in order to briefly analyze our two main cases, the kula and the warez scene. By plugging in actions in the scheme, we get in the kula the following: You own an mwali, and give it to one of your kula partners. You do this in an indifferent manner, so as to show that you’re a person of honor, one who can give away without caring. This puts your partner’s honor into question. S/he must answer, either by giving you soulava in return or by snubbing you and ignoring your show of honor (either by refusing to accept or refusing to repay). If s/he does neither, s/he is dishonored. Or: You release a game, a good game, into the scene. You have proven to be someone who can provide. All others are potentially dishonored. They can either slander you (crying ‘dupe!’ or ‘nuke!’) or prove themselves worthy by retorting with their own releases. If you remain silent for any longer period you haven’t replied to the ongoing challenge of the scene – the dishonor of being a lamer. And so it goes, in both cases.

Bourdieu’s model enhances the structure postulated by Mauss and could be a way to analyze how gift-economies function as emergent structures. He describes his view regarding such a model in one of his trademark sentences:

*This generative model which reduces exchange to a series of successive choices performed on the basis of a small number of principles with the aid of a simple combinatory formula, and which makes it possible to give a very economical account of an infinity of particular cases of exchanges phenomenally as different as exchanges of gifts, words or challenges, reproduces, in its own order, the functioning of **habitus** and the logic of practice that proceeds through series of irreversible choices, made under pressure and often involving heavy stakes (sometimes life itself, as in the exchanges of honour or in magic) in response to other choices obeying the same logic.*

Bourdieu 1990, p. 101

Such a general model also serves to make gift economies comprehensible, i.e. we can through such a model realize that gift-exchange can (and will) generate complicated structures of behavior. Zeroing in on economy, the cycle of gift and counter-gift can create orders with the same degree of stability (and perhaps even more so) than the market. We can even claim that commodity exchange can be fitted into the same model without losing any essential qualities.

The cycles of performance and response are the same. Still, Gell (1992, p. 143) has declared gift-exchange to occupy a space *between* ‘sharing’ and ‘swapping’, acquiring some of the benefits of both. The difference is that while gifts act as “social cement” (being Durkheim’s phrase), money makes the relations into abstractions. Compounding the views of Simmel and Mauss, exchange is the basis of social life. Compounding the views of Mauss and Bourdieu, the gift exchange can be viewed as the basis of economy as organized sociality.

ON GIFTS AND THE DIGITAL

In the beginning is the gift. It binds everything together: sacrifice, duty, debt, war and peace, status and prestige. The gift presents itself at once as symbolic form and material substratum of social synthesis. It constitutes an exchange which irrevocably unifies economics, power and morality, cult and culture.
Berking 1999, p.32

But what is a gift? The question might be trite and perhaps even counter-productive, as the argument presented above is that a gift never exists outside of its structure, i.e. a gift is something that cannot exist without that in which it becomes a gift. Likewise, such a question makes us think in terms of an object ‘out there’, an object which can be logically defined. In the beginning of *The Blue Book*, Wittgenstein (1958) tries to make the case that positing questions in this way only serves to mystify the concept. If we try to *explain* the gift we turn it into something far more complicated than it is to us in day-to-day life. All the facts we need are out in the open, says Wittgenstein; it is only our own confusion that is at stake in searching for deeper meanings to words. Still, despite these reservations, some remarks as to what is inherent in a gift (as tentatively separated from a gift-exchange) could be illuminating, particularly if we wish to analyze that which is given in connection to the act of giving. Such a separation is not always important, as we see in the kula, but when it comes to the exchange of software we could imagine that the characteristics of these as objects could have some significance.

Carrier (1991, p. 122) defines a gift (within a system of gifts) as an inalienable object or service that is obligatorily transferred between agents that are related and mutually obligated. The characteristic of being inalienable is the first thing we should remark on. A gift is not something that could be either sold or given. It cannot be transferred in the same manner as a commodity. **A sweater given to me by my friend is not merely a piece of clothing, it is sweater-given-to-me-by-n.** It is inalienable insofar as it is always a gift and permanently tied to its giver. We can of course forget such ties, but thereby the object changes into a mere thing, not-a-gift. For important gifts, such as those in the kula, these ties are endlessly retold and a necessary part of an object’s value.¹⁰ They are obligatorily transferred, as they always exist within a system of gifts, as ‘repayment’ of an earlier gift. A gift also exists between two people that are related both prior to the gift and after it. Whereas participants in a commodity transaction need only to know of the place (physical or virtual) where such an exchange can take place, and thus needn’t even know each other during the transaction, the parties of a gift-exchange must share (in) a history and implicitly share a future. The obligations inherent in this have been expounded upon above.

Do gifts then have to be things? Obviously not. Although gifts frequently come in the shape of things, both in the kula and on Christmas, material form is not a distinguishing characteristic for gifts. Services may very well be rendered as gifts, as can information and digital commodities (which of course is the case in the warez exchanges discussed). For some years, I

have even given the gift of nothing, i.e. I actively forget to congratulate my father on his birthday – an omission meant to cheer him up. A gift is what exists between people, what symbolizes their ties to each other. They act as instruments of sociality, focal points for a feeling of interrelatedness. In a sense, gifts as “symbolic form and material substratum of social synthesis” (see quote above) are the visible but least important aspect of the exchange. Whereas again commodities are exchanged because of the material aspects of what is exchanged, and the relation itself is merely the means to an end. The gift attempts to keep and extend relations, while the commodity tries to make relations unnecessary. Taken to its logical extreme the market economy tries to do away with participants (as in people meeting) altogether, and instead dreams of an economy with “a 24/7 global marketplace of true fluid markets, real dynamic pricing, and kick-ass shopbots” (Wired 8.03, p. 211). Something approximating this can already be found in that most ‘perfect market’, the global hyper-economy in financial instruments, where billions fluctuate back and forth in a mediated space of pure money – with brokers attempting to become the market itself. Remember that the previously mentioned Knorr Cetina & Bruegger (2000, p. 151-157) call the brokers’ relations “postsocial”, and that this relation is in fact to “the market as an object of attachment” (see Baudrillard (1993, 1994) for further analysis of the markets as simulation). In gift relations this anonymity and strive to reduce individuation is wholly foreign. This is also one reason why Mauss goes to such lengths to argue that a gift always comes bundled with part of the givers spirit (the ‘hau’ of the Maori). The notion of inalienability is present here, as each gift is intermingled with the giver. What is given is not central, as becomes clear in this central passage of *The Gift*, where Tamati Ranaipiri (a Maori) speaks:

I shall tell you about hau. Hau is not the wind. Not at all. Suppose you have some particular object, taonga, and you give it to me; you give it to me without a price. We do not bargain over it. Now I give this thing to a third person who after a time decides to give me something in repayment for it (utu), and he makes me a present of something (taonga). Now this taonga I received from him is the spirit (hau) of the taonga I received from you and which I passed on to him. The taonga which I receive on account of the taonga that came from you, I must return to you. It would not be right on my part to keep these taonga whether they were desirable or not. I must give them to you since they are the hau of the taonga which you gave me. If I were to keep this second taonga for myself I might become ill or even die. Such is hau, the hau of personal property, the hau of the taonga, the hau of the forest. Enough on that subject.
 Mauss 1924/1950, p. 8-9

The question becomes whether that which is inalienable is the gift as an object or if it is the *act of giving* which confers inalienability. For Mauss the answer was obvious. The spirit of the giver was present in any exchange of gifts, and disrespecting this had dire consequences. Objects could change, but the spirit of giving traveled with these contingent objects in a manner that kept the reciprocity alive. His analysis of the ‘hau’ has been criticized as both unnecessary mystification and ethnographically insensitive (see Sahlins 1972, p. 149-162), but disregarding the particulars of the argument we are left with a view of the gift which is both manageable and escapes reductionism¹¹. When a gift is given, a relation or a tie is (re)constructed. This tie is not anything inherent in that which is given (a trinket, help, a stock-tip), but neither can it be strictly separated from the gift. Archaic societies sometimes seem to have thought that this tie had a direct physical force, it could make you sick or kill you. Nowadays, this force makes us feel shame when we haven’t repaid a dinner with another dinner, in a way also establishing itself as a physical force (think of blushing, palpitations, stomach cramps). And, as if to remind

us of earlier times, several languages have an idiom along the lines of 'die of shame'. In the gift lies a hidden force, and we might very well be advised to remember some of the classical gifts: Pandora's box and the wooden horse of Troy. Ironically enough, and most befittingly, both have served well as metaphors for computer viruses – viruses often thought to spread mainly through the illegal copying of software. The spirit of the gift is what keeps returning, both in the exchanges themselves and any analysis thereof. But, bringing in such a manifestly metaphysical 'force', there is the risk that the explanatory strength of such a force blinds us. The material instance of the gift is easily forgotten as the social bonds are given precedence, a fact which becomes problematic when we try to study differences in gift-giving behavior. Just as the relation cannot be parted from the thing or service given, neither can the latter be summarily ignored. In the studied case, the material instance of the gift is digital, i.e. that which is given is 'mere' digitized information. Being infinitively reproducible, the specifics of the gift could thus have some bearing on the gift relation. Also, the highly individualized account given by Mauss (which is curious, as he emphasizes the original gift as a 'total service' between tribes) can easily make you think that we are dealing solely with the relatively unproblematic notion of *private, individuated goods*. Some aspects of goods in their different guises should therefore be considered.

*Private, Public and Digital Goods*¹²

We rarely have a problem with understanding what a *private good* is. We can disagree as to whether such are morally justified or not, but adults living in contemporary Western society rarely find the concept difficult to grasp. A private good is something belonging to someone, in a manner that distinctly makes it clear that no other party has any direct claims to it. My copy of *The Gift* can serve as an example. I bought it, from a bookseller on the web who was more than happy to part with it in exchange for money charged on my Visa-card. It is mine; it's my book. An mwali is a *temporarily* private good, but cannot remain a private good, as others in the kula ring will (implicitly) lay claim to it. In the case of *The Gift* there is no social pressure to circulate it (some people steadfastly refuse to lend their books even to close friends), whereas in the case of the vaygu'a there is a clear social norm (enforceable by magic) to circulate it after a suitable amount of time has passed.

Compared to this simplified case, a *public good* (sometimes metaphorically referred to as a *commons*) is something that in a sense is owned by no-one in particular, or everyone in general. The usual way in which textbooks on economics describe such goods is by referring to the defense of a country. Armies do not defend some of the people in the country, but instead defend all regardless of their input to the establishing and maintenance of it. This in theory and in optimal cases, as the sad story of e.g. the Balkans or the Horn of Africa has shown so poignantly. A public good is one that is shared; one person 'consuming' it does not take away from others and you cannot efficiently exclude others from using it. A public park is perhaps one of the most clear-cut examples: it is public and open to all as control of usage would be far too costly, and barring crowding it cannot be claimed that one person's usage is at the expense of someone else. The difference to a private good should be obvious: my house is not open to all (I have the keys) and this is because I feel that people running about there all willy-nilly would detract from my pleasure of having a home in the first place. Public goods are good in theory, as they are very efficient – utilitarian even – and in some fundamental sense fair. But as shown in that old bugbear of economics, 'the problem of the commons', they are not without inherent difficulties. To begin with, you would think that people are more interested in utilizing

a public good than they are in supporting it. In (economic) theory, a person will often try to skimp from paying for things that are perceived as public, and become a 'free rider'. Also, public goods are hard to construct, i.e. they require an inordinate amount of organization. Put in other words, it is usually far too costly to set up a public good for anyone to be bothered. Whereas private goods require little effort as an institution, a public good needs to be both constructed at great cost and then constantly re-constructed/policed (to prevent epidemic 'free riding'). We could say that private goods are more efficient as an institution, simply because this system requires less effort to maintain.

Returning to the *vaygu'a*, in a sense these are a hybrid of private and public goods. All participants own them, since they are required to circulate. Still, they are cherished as something privately owned when they are in your hands. Although some argue that it is this ownership that participants strive for (see Weiner 1992), we could describe *vaygu'a* as public in the sense that 'consumption' or custody is not exclusive. Instead, the fact that the objects have been the possession of others is an important part of their value, and the histories of their custodianship are frequently recounted. Were they to exist outside of the *kula* ring they would lose most of their value and charm. They can only be private *goods* as long as they belong to the *public* sphere.

If we take this argument a bit further, Peter Kollock (1999) has shown that *digital goods* also exhibit properties that makes the division between private and public goods less useful. With 'digital good' we refer to goods that can be digitized and thus infinitely copied and distributed at almost no cost. We could also talk about informational goods, goods that consist only of information. A book, the private good of my *The Gift*, can be digitized, leaving us with all the information contained in the book in digital form, usually a file on a computer or some removable media. Although I could not take perfect copies of my book, at least not without inordinate expense, I can copy the information (once digitized) at almost no cost indefinitely. Also, with the advances in computer networks, I can distribute this digital packet efficiently and cheaply to almost anyone. It is only the creation (initial digitization) that carries any cost; a logic that many claim defines the 'information age'. A drug company will normally invest exorbitant amounts in the development of a new medicine, and recoup this through the margins in selling the cheap-to-produce pills. That CD-Rom with Microsoft Office XP you bought for \$295 costs almost nothing to produce, but to develop a program of this magnitude takes deep pockets. In both cases, the producer capitalizes on the efficiencies in informational goods. What Kollock (ibid.) points out is that these efficiencies can be used in a different way. With the low-to-zero cost of delivering over the internet, potentially valuable digital goods (Kollock's prime example is coding and advice regarding coding) can turn into a public good without the high costs that such usually entail. A person can, inputting only her time and know-how (valuable but not explicitly scarce), give away e.g. advice on coding for free in a manner that can potentially benefit the entire participant community. The participants' use of this advice does not come at the expense of others, and we can easily imagine (or observe) communities where one does not police such use. The total value of all such advice within a community can easily outweigh the monetary value of a park, at least if we compare to the price such advice could be sold for on the 'free market'. And, as anyone who has spent any time in cyberspace communities will have observed, such input is abundantly dealt out. Empirical data thus seem to suggest that when the cost of coordination for public goods is very low, the 'free rider' problem also disappears or is ignored - implying that this problem is to an extent psychological and more part of the economist mindset than an actual rule.

When a digital good – advice, a text, a program – is brought to the net it becomes a public good. It **can** be spread as private goods (this is after all what e-commerce is all about), but this entails setting up special controlling functions (payment systems, security etc.), making the public good the more ‘natural’ form for digital information. Note that this is simply at statement regarding costs and efficiencies: Assuming that the digital infrastructure is present, it takes more effort to make something private than public. With material commodities the situation is the reverse. Donating food takes a lot of structure (in part due to the need to share a limited amount), whereas selling food is reasonably simple. With no limitations on sharing, nor on the infrastructure that makes it possible to do so at almost no cost, the digital good becomes an almost ‘perfect’ public good, with little of the assumed inefficiencies of such.

But with a public good is not necessarily meant one totally lacking in ‘custodianship’. In fact, the public nature of many digital goods has increased discussion regarding the notions of ownership and copyright hundredfold in recent years. Much as the robber barons of the Gilded Age saw to it that the museums, parks and libraries they donated had the names of the donors prominently displayed, the creators of digital goods often go to great lengths to ensure that they will not be forgotten or ignored.

Inalienability – Release NFOs

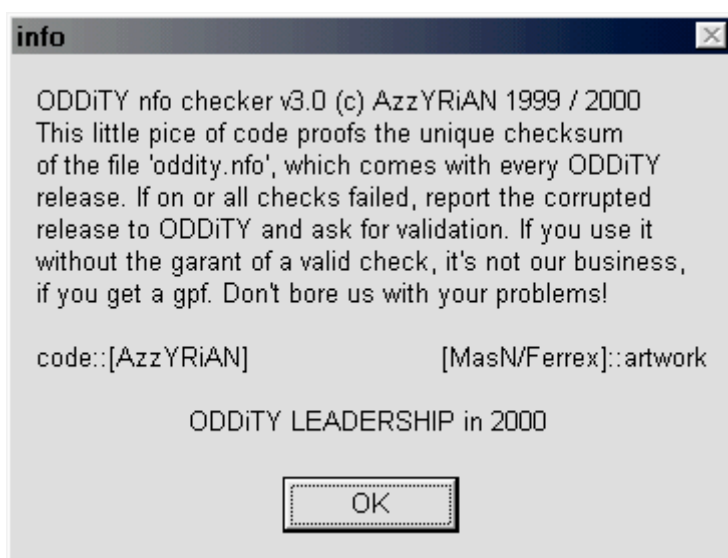


Figure 2: The ODDiTY NFO checker

As a release group puts out a release, it also tags it as its own. Couriers who ‘hump’ a file do the same. The big and important sites that house the first instances of a program (for we are of course continuously talking about copies of copies of copies) also add their marks. Unpacking the archived files that warez are distributed in thus often results in a fair amount of such bundled informational files, as groups and sites add their information to the release during its travel through the network. For instance, my copy of Shock’s release of Adobe Photoshop 6 *Final* came with 13 files that didn’t belong to the program itself. Through these I can ascertain that Shock released it (obviously), Devotion couriered it (not obvious, at least not for an outsider) and that it had in some way passed at least the following sites/groupings: The Wolves House, QuadCon, Near Future, Kane, Firesite and EchoBase. For a Warezonian, much of this will be obvious. An insider will have information regarding the present political affiliations both between releasers and couriers and which sites are connected to which groups. Much of the information contained in these NFOs is thus redundant for insiders – who would

know that The Wolves House at least at this time is WHQ (World HeadQuarters) for Shock, for instance. Still, most releases are stuffed with an assortment of NFOs by the time they reach a more general public.

Above, the informational window from an odd little program describes the function of the ODDiTY NFO checker. This is included in releases from ODDiTY (e.g. Window Blinds Enhanced v2.0, from which I got it), and tests whether the NFO provided is valid. Simply put, it checks for manipulation of the NFO. Change anything in this text file, and the checker will inform you that it fails one or more tests, making it invalid. The 'purity' of the NFO is important to its makers, probably due to the fact that it is rather simple to manipulate a release in a way that can fool the uninitiated into believing that someone else produced it. Ironically, the checker is a kind of copyright protection. Tampering with the product will nullify the warranty, as ODDiTY clearly state. Studying how seriously the community takes these informational files, we can see the way in which releases become distinctive objects, removed from the soulless commodity often assumed to be the material instance of a transaction. As the warez scene is competitive, the Warezonians are not free from the form of copyright infringements they themselves so happily engage in. They are thus forced to create their own counter-measures.

Due to the every day increasing amount of lamers who fake DAMN releases ALL DAMN releases starting from July 1, 2000 are digitally signed.

Download DAMN Release Signature Verificator from <http://www.damn.to> (about 100K only) if you want to be sure that release you got was really made by DAMN.

Don't use any stuff claiming to be made by DAMN if it's released after July 1, 2000 and doesn't pass verification. Using it can be dangerous.

```
----- DAMN RELEASE SIGNATURE START -----
DAMN_NFO_Vi ewer. exe 1 1HAosnj PFi oG3ggAshxvuQELVRMvcwznAPuwl vFuNGYTLm4um5zrxM
li cense. txt 0 UAUc5fGP6/dRd643gg4WaSEuEPk 2d4GZG6xBTnKi oi 00MbXBxyYzB4
hi story. txt 0 XThj JXenY24+6XNpWbJULs8J6sE N1Pn5a+sdWXb+hgUP5uyg4YT9GE
damn. nfo 0 ai eutkaXYogzFTxnbuGc3zS4l Mg 7oWWTTqOD7VNsBGmgj HYAQLCUzQ
----- DAMN RELEASE SIGNATURE END -----
```

From DAMNs NFO-file dated December 19th 2000

Manipulation of an NFO-file is treated as a direct attack on the affected group. As has been pointed out earlier, such files are the main artifacts through which a group's identity is constructed, as it is here that the origin of the release is made explicit. There are two specific types on NFO-files, one used by release groups and one by couriers and sites. The latter are generic, updated only when new information makes this necessary and are essentially flyers or adverts for the group or the site. The type used by release groups is longer, contains information about the release as well as the group and can in addition contain news and a kind of "wanted"-ads. A courier group's NFO will usually be a list of which couriers belong to the specific group, along with some information about the internal hierarchy. It will also contain information about which sites the group uses. The bigger groups will in addition have group news and rules regarding applying for membership. All in all, these NFOs contain much the same information as could be expected from a corporate brochure.

we are a group made up of friends. no egos allowed. we are all equal, and treat each other with respect. we believe in two things, equality for all members and quality in our couriering. that's the bottom line.

*angeld. azra. blackbull. blink. ceric. cokeman. cybergod. djogxz. epd. garflozzy. grim. hb.
hellraider. jackcool. jizzy. jff. konih. mc. mc gusto. pcfil. pixie. psi. sharkie. shockie. snap. srw.
starkey. stray. storm. swa|ch. teklord. torkie. trident. wadood. waitangel. wolfje.*

Adapted from the NFO of Equality, dated January 19th 2000

In a sense, these files could be compared with the notion of *hau*, at least in a metaphoric sense. They form the name of the giver(s), the trace of donation, and you must often at least read the releasers NFO to install the program, e.g. registration keys that are given in the text of the NFO. To repackage a release without the proper NFO is simply not done, at least not by respectable groups/individuals. But as there are participants in the larger world of warez that aren't necessarily as principled as one would wish, the protection scheme presented above has become a logical, although not all that common (yet), device to ensure 'purity'. Such a device could then be seen as a mechanism by which the gift-object (the warez) is even more tightly bundled with the spirit of the gift (the NFO).

But what kind of spirit is this? It is not at all obvious that people in the scene want to force the others to contribute in any particular way. The scene actually seems to engage in a competition where final victory would be synonymous with being the only one who gives, with all others forced into a position of receivers. Seen thus the spirit is at least not one of direct reciprocity, that *hau* which brings illness to those who do not return gifts. Rather, it is a spirit which tries to dominate, to force all users of the gift to paste the name of the giver over their screens. It is the spirit that ties the gift in an inalienable way to the giver that enforces the origin of the gift. NFOs are in some way the continuing presence of the giver, manifested through a fragment of text. By attaching serial numbers, by threatening the user with a gpf (General Protection Fault, the Windows-version of a sudden illness) and by manifesting the identity and power of the giver, the NFO functions as an icon of power, even as a form of fetish. It carries identity, power over the user (by forcing her to behave according to its rules, (N.B.: This is most pronounced in applications releasing.)) and the relation itself. It makes the exchange intimate as opposed to anonymous.

[iNSTALLATION]

Unpack and install.

To register successfully enter:

Name: oDDiTy

Serial: WB-5265dac1

ENJOY THIS oDDiTy RELEASE

if you have any problems running it mail to: (email-address removed by author)

WE DONT SEND ANY MISSING DISKS, SERIALS OR WHATEVER!

TRY TO ACCEPT OR BLEED

From the NFO of oDDiTy, dated September 26th 2000

Here the identity of the releaser is not only made explicit, but incorporated as a necessary part of using the provided software. Although the group could have made it possible to register with a more generic name (like John Doe), oDDiTy obviously wants people to have the group name attached to the program. The additional abuse and warnings can also be seen as a form of establishing power-relations with regards to the end-user, made clear through a pronounced indifference to possible plights. Although a group will be interested in problems

regarding the use of the release (the norm of functionality), help in locating releases or problems that do not stem from faulty releasing will be ignored or worse.

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CARMEN SANDIEGO...

Has been carefully and thoroughly <<CRACKED>> by yours truly. It can be played from hard or floppy disk... your pleasure!

Most functions are controlled with the Cursor pad, space bar, or Enter key. Some other key combinations are:

CTRL-D	Delete a detective's name
CTRL-F	List Hall of Fame
CTRL-I	Joystick/Keyboard toggle (default is KBD)
CTRL-L	List current Rank
CTRL-Q	Quit game & exit to DOS
CTRL-R	End this game & Start a new one
CTRL-S	Toggle Sound off/on (default is ON)

*Happy New Year,
sailorman*

The purportedly (<http://www.defacto2.net/scene-archive/>) first NFO ever, dated December 31st 1986.

As we could see in the first example, oDDiTy required the user to 'register' in their name. In this second example, the NFO shows both who the user has to thank for the chance to try the program and provides information that while not strictly necessary greatly simplifies the playing of the game. In both cases, the NFO functions as an obligatory route to the actual use of the warez, and by doing so clearly state who the giver is. Usage is in a sense hindered, making the NFOs a protection scheme in themselves. But this is not protection against unlawful copying, only protection against the vagaries of memory – a mnemonic security device.

The NFO is in this way what makes the release something else than a commodity, an impersonal digital good. Even though it is a mere fragment of text, it serves as a social bond and makes the release part of a relation. It creates the release as gift. But in order for it to be a gift it still requires something more, namely an order of gifts within which it can take its place.

The Networked Economy of Open-Source Software

The problem now is the same as it was for Mauss when it comes to applying his insights to contemporary, industrial society. Yet this is what he wanted to see done.

Mary Douglas, in her foreword to *The Gift* (1924/1990)

Trying to come to terms with the behavior of the Warezonians I initially tried a series of different approaches, but the one thing that constantly bothered me has been the one that mesmerized me from the very beginning. Doctor Frankenstein's "It's alive!" echoed in my head, but instead I heard that far more enticing sound: "It's free!" And almost immediately Doctor Milton Friedman pipes in: "No such thing as a free lunch. No such thing as a free lunch. No such thing as a free lunch..." completely ignoring the fact that not only was I getting a free lunch, I more or less got my choice of entrées as well. Participating in the Warezonian practices means getting software for free, and lots of it, and although I had to expend some time and

cleverness to get what I wanted out of the system, there was never any direct and explicit demands of reciprocity. You might be implored to assist with something, or provide a site with some material in order to get access, but all these exchanges build on a principle of getting more than you give – an apposite description of an economy even when it in some way describes the opposite of ‘economic behavior’. To recapitulate, in the core of the community you essentially have people competing through massive releasing, i.e. giving away as much of their work as they humanly and technologically can (and working hard to push these limits). What has become glaring obvious was that this is a community built not upon maximizing the profits from exchanges in the usual sense, but upon maximizing totally different efficiencies. So, the notion of a gift economy seems fitting in describing this, albeit with some reservations.

Using gift economies as a concept to describe behavior on the internet has been done to some extent. Although often used in a metaphorical sense, and seldom with any real discussion regarding the theoretical difficulties inherent in the idea of such economies, the way in which computer-mediated communication has stimulated the free exchange of information has resulted in people making the connection to the work of e.g. Mauss. Howard Rheingold, in *The Virtual Community – Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, was seemingly the first to make this connection explicit. Following his lead, several authors have remarked upon the way in which the division between public and private goods might be eroded through the ‘liberating’ force of networks (see Negroponte 1995, Kelly 1999, Raymond 2001). Problematic in many of these texts is the implicit idea that gift economies are somehow the logical extension and progress of market economy, and that the argumentation tends to hinge on describing the monetary benefits accruing from such behavior – analyzing the advantages of gifts through the logic of the market.

Much of this discussion has interestingly enough revolved around the open-source movement, particularly the astounding success of the Linux OS and the more or less successful commercialization of this. In open-source development, the basic source code is given free of charge for anyone to use and improve upon, and ownership of the code is limited to a kind of guardianship regarding which developments get accepted into the ‘official’ source code. This enables the formation of a community of people who collaborate on developing the code, and doing this based on trust and a genuine interest in the project, rather than aiming for financial gain. Again and ironically enough, this has aroused massive interest in the *business* community, who naturally find the idea of enjoying the work of idealists for free as being well in line with their business strategy (i.e. exploitation, “free riders”). Eric Raymond (1998) has in his analysis of the open-source movement made explicit the way in which the ‘hacker’ (here referring to coding enthusiasts more generally) culture behaves as a gift economy. He shows that devoting time and competence to a development project is to a great extent accepted as a gift to the larger community and that prestige in this community is a direct effect of such altruism (cf. Barbrook 1998, Himanen 2001). For some reason this has in the case of the Linux community resulted in people dedicating a remarkable amount of time and resources in order to develop the OS. Besides acknowledgement (and the odd well-paid consultancy gig and/or corporate position), the only reward that can be bestowed upon you by participating in this community is the custodianship of a particular solution, i.e. a limited kind of copyright that only ensures that you will be credited for your work. In the now famous (at least in open-source circles) essay *The Cathedral and the Bazaar* (Raymond 2001 (for the evolving document see also <http://www.tuxedo.org/~esr/writings/cathedral-bazaar/>)), this ethos of being “open to the point of promiscuity” is presented as an inherently more dynamic than and implicitly superior

to ‘normal’ program development, due greatly to the social aspects of such an approach and the creativity which a freer system assumedly bestows upon a project.

One of the critical arguments of the open-source dogma is that the kind of community that open source forms creates a market for “egoboo” (short for ego boosting). Egoboo is in fact supposed to function as a kind of universal currency within the dispersed group, so that:

The “utility function” Linux hackers are maximizing is not classically economic, but is the intangible of their own ego satisfaction and reputation among other hackers. (One may call their motivation “altruistic”, but this ignores the fact that altruism is itself a form of ego satisfaction for the altruist). Voluntary cultures that work this way are not actually uncommon; one other in which I have long participated is science fiction fandom, which unlike hackerdom has long explicitly recognized “egoboo” (ego-boosting, or the enhancement of one’s reputation among other fans) as the basic drive behind volunteer activity.
[...]

We may view Linus’s method as a way to create an efficient market in “egoboo” – to connect the selfishness of individual hackers as firmly as possible to difficult ends that can only be achieved by sustained cooperation.

From Raymonds essay, <http://www.tuxedo.org/~esr/writings/cathedral-bazaar/cathedral-bazaar/x305.html>

Ignoring Raymond’s point concerning altruism, which I believe to be mistaken, this would go some way towards explaining the mechanism by which a gift economy is established. The need to create an identity for oneself in a community takes different forms in different communities, and egoboo is such a form. Potential Linux coders found that the community that grew around Linus Thorvalds’s original work was one where reputation could be instantly achieved through the wonders of modern information technology. This, coupled with the way in which continuous updating and patching made it possible to make a name for oneself rather rapidly (at least compared to the relatively slow going of the kula ring), created the market in egoboo Raymond refers to. When an individual hacker could see his or her name prominently displayed on message boards and even appended to the latest update, a friendly battle was started. For a simplified example of the same one can go to the bulletin boards of websites such as slashdot.org or fuckedcompany.com and observe the race to get ‘firsts’, i.e. to be the first to post on a particular issue and get your name displayed at the very top of a thread. The quest for name recognition might not have been the only motivation for the continuous development of Linux, but as can be inferred even from the very name “Linux”, it has been a powerful factor.

However we want to conceptualize the motivations of the Linux community, one irrefutable fact remains. Today, the Linux OS is always mentioned when operative systems are discussed, and it has been one of the true success-stories of the internet. It is stable and it has proven to be sophisticated enough to pose a serious threat to commercial endeavors. Although Linux has been commercialized to some extent, the development of the system is still mainly conducted by a community of voluntary participants who aren’t paid for their work. In some sense, it proves the possibility of creating value outside of the structures of the market economy.

An Aside on Cyber-Communism

Attempting a full review of texts regarding how the ‘new economy’ will change economic structures would be unfruitful, as far too much has been written and as much of it is

derivative. My example will be taken from one of the more interesting tracts on the internet as a gift economy: *Cyber-Communism – how the Americans are superseding capitalism in cyberspace* by Richard Barbrook, a piece that can be read as a continuation of his *The High-Tech Gift Economy*. Both these have received a lot of interest on the internet, and of these two we shall concentrate on the former. A curious piece, touting Soviet dogma alongside cybergurus, it nevertheless makes the case that the networked economies will take on much of the defining characteristics of gift economies. Although the analysis of such economies is largely absent, and no real engagement with anthropological theory is present in the text, it presents its case with an odd charm. Barbrook begins by analyzing the digital nobility, claiming that the way in which the ‘new economy’ is/was portrayed has great similarities to Stalinist statements regarding the necessary victory of a superior economic system. In addition he finds that the ‘digerati’ view themselves much as an enlightened minority, leading the masses into utopia, reminiscent of how the Party was supposed to be a vanguard on the road towards a workers’ paradise. But, Barbrook remarks (referring to Saint-Simon, Marx and Linux as he goes along), the structures that were created to facilitate the hegemony of a digital overclass and the power of big capital can be utilized in other ways too.

One has only to observe the continuing consolidations within the media industry to conclude that the comparison to totalitarianism might not be as far-fetched as it might initially seem. Much of the economic activity on the internet is in the hands of relatively few actors. What Barbrook claims is that this is not a permanent state, and that the drive towards a less market-centered economy is inevitable. And as the case of Napster has shown, there is something to be said for subversive strategies on the internet, and the question these pose. Barbrook, among others, maintains that these subversions will result in a new kind of economic system, a hybrid that lacks the rigid structure of capital. The flexibility and speed of the new technologies, coupled with the tendency of hackers to reverse-engineer any attempt to hinder this adaptive and appropriative nature, points towards a different notion of ownership and a re-evaluation of commodities. At least, this is the optimistic view – many would (rightly) question whether we should be so dismissive of the potential for re-establishing dominance that global capitalism historically has shown.

Taking the curious properties of digital goods and placing the benefits accruing from these into a system, many of the old stalwarts of economic thinking, such as fixed property rights, become conceptually fuzzy. Much of our thinking regarding property is still tied to the idea of there being a fundamental scarcity to property – if someone is enjoying something, it is by necessity an enjoyment that is denied someone else. As much of what today counts as property can be thought of as fulfilling the preconditions of a public good (were they to be transferred out into the hands of the public, that is), the notion of property is often viewed through the perspective of value and profit. I do not own a thing, I own control of a value. And the right to make a profit of this value is bestowed upon the creator of the same, exclusively. The problem is that this idea is an offshoot of a property notion that harks back to the feudal age, and basically hinges on our goodwill in believing that the creator of a song or piece of code should be reimbursed beyond e.g. a salary. Where medieval minstrels would have been beheaded had they started to claim right to their songs beyond the actual performance of them, there exists a vague notion that musicians and coders today have different rights.

then	now
commodity	gift
enclosure	disclosure

copyright	piracy
fixed	fluid
product	process
proprietary	open source
digital encryption	free download
original recording	latest remix
scarcity	abundance
alienation	friendship
market competition	network communities
e-commerce	cyber-communism

Table 1: Illustrating “the practical benefits of cyber-communism”. (Barbrook 1999)

A division such as the one presented above might best be seen as a kind of utopian moralization, with ‘all good things’ gathered squarely on the side of “now”. The tabulation on the left is a kind of a wish-list for the modern cyber-nomad, a collection of desirable states, with the right side being the ‘square’ side of “not getting it”. If we look beyond this rather trivial polarization (and the cyber-optimism that it is rooted in), the “now” in Barbrook’s table is a rather good description of Warezonian. I could even argue that it makes the case that Warezonian is the epitome of cyber-communism. So although the gist of the argument might be in the thralls of Saint-Simons romantic socialism it serves a purpose in our analysis. The state that seems to be present on the warez scene does at least for some represent a stage that is more developed than classical market economy. But in the essay, the point is not to celebrate piracy, although it is implied in the table above. Rather, Barbrook goes on to find some form of Hegelian movement to such a development, a ‘dialectics’ which will result in an economy that utilizes the best of both worlds:

The Positive	work-as-commodity e-commerce reactionary modernism
The Negation	waste-as-gift potlatch revolutionary anti-modernism
The Negation of the Negation	work-as-gift network communities revolutionary modernism

Table 2: The Dialectics of Cyber-Communism (Barbrook 1999)

Regardless of how you view the rigor of the argument, this goes to show that fanciful as it may seem, there are those who would claim that the technologies of the internet will change the economic landscape in a way that subverts the market economy totally, substituting it with some form of more generalized exchange.

“On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange”

Marshall Sahlins (1972, p. 188) has in an essay entitled *On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange* referred to the existence of two basic types of economic transactions, reciprocity and

centralized movement. Reciprocity here refers to a type of transaction structurally similar to the direct linkages between buyer and seller – and also the ones between a giver and a receiver. This, which Sahlins calls a “between” relation, shows a direct logic of causality in economic behavior – $A \rightleftharpoons B$. The other type, referred to as “pooling” or “redistribution” is by Sahlins (ibid.) presented thus:



Such movement is frequently found in tribal societies, where there are institutions such as religious centers or ‘the elder’ through which redistribution of this kind can take place. Something similar can also be seen in the attempts to introduce communism on a large scale, i.e. Soviet communism, although these experiments have tended to not be all that successful. All contribute to the pool, and the bounty of this pool is then dealt out according to some order – or lack of order. A typical example would be a community of farmers, where at least some of the harvest is deposited in a communal ‘grain house’ from which persons can get grain when the situation so dictates. Such an arrangement might be extremely practical in that it redistributes the harvest more evenly, being thus beneficial for the community as a whole, but also as it acts as a kind of ‘insurance’ for participants, who know that they can count on this system in case they need it. Social security, in its many guises, is in a very real sense the continuation of this. As should also be obvious, the sites in Warezonnia form a structure that closely resembles classical pooling, with the place of the elder and the grain house taken by the siteOP and the server daemons.

But Sahlins claims that on a more general level there is in fact no difference between the two basic types, and that pooling is “a system of reciprocities”. Kollock (1999) has referring to Ekeh (1974) alluded to the broadest version of such a system, namely *generalized exchange*, a term that seems to have been originally coined by Lévi-Strauss (“*échange généralisé*”). This would refer to aspects of sharing where the flow of reciprocities is assumed to take place on the general level of society. His example is helping a motorist, being a good citizen. The assumption is that we engage in helping others more generally because we on some (subconscious?) level want to assure that we in turn will be helped in the case of a similar emergency. Here safety might be perceived as a common goal, and members of society cooperate in order to achieve this tenuous security. Kollock goes on to note that such a behavior is ‘risky’, as people have a strong incentive not to help but still, as Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, rely “on the kindness of strangers”. In the primitive case, where the community consists of a small band of closely related individuals, generalized exchange is norm. The members of a family will usually share food and assistance without any calculation towards reciprocity. Sahlins (1972, p. 193) refers to these kinds of transactions as “[g]eneralized reciprocity, the solidary extreme” and calls such “putatively altruistic”. He notes that we can in such cases often find a one-way flow of help or material assistance, and that this asymmetrical relation can be both ongoing and protracted, as in the case of a parent supporting a child. These relations exist so widely in all societies that they are usually ignored on account of their mundanity. Many thinkers on the origins of social behavior have found this form of total sharing so primal that they have concluded that this specific form of selflessness might form the original state of man. Hirschleifer (1985, p. 58) remarks that even Friedrich Hayek, who usually argues for an almost superhumanly egoistic *homo oeconomicus*, holds that there exists an “innate instinct to pursue common perceived goals” and that the birth of economic behavior hinged on man **overcoming** this.

Sahlins compares this with its polar opposite, *negative reciprocity*, defined as “the attempt of getting something for nothing with impunity”. In anthropology, he remarks, such transactions have been described with terms such as ‘haggling’ and ‘theft’. More generally, we can state that ‘business’, as it is commonly thought of, would also do as a label. The notion of business as the war of all against all, where mutually independent actors try to maximize their utility, makes it a case of negative reciprocity as all try to create a situation where they get a surplus something, i.e. a ‘profit’. Getting a ‘good deal’ is the archetypal example of this. Sometimes we will refer to win-win-situations, but these are often seen as (laudable) exceptions. The extreme example of all this is theft or, in the more organized case, kleptocracy (cf. Microsoft). As generalized reciprocity describes a fundamentally asymmetrical relation, and negative reciprocity is the negation of the same, we in both cases see a material flow that generally flows in only one way. Marx’s analysis of the development of Western economy is based on precisely the observation that this is founded on the notion of a morally justified negative reciprocity, and many do agree with him that the development of a system where surpluses created out of wily barter or trade became accepted is in some way antisocial. Sahlins (1972, p. 191) quotes Popsipil:

A trader always cheats people. For this reason intra-regional trade is rather frowned upon while inter-tribal trade gives to the (Kapauku) businessman prestige as well as profit.

Between the two opposed notions of absolute generosity and profit-minded trickery there exists a field of equilibrium, of *balanced reciprocity*. It is a field of direct exchange, one where prestations are supposed to be matched in such a way that we can discern a clear connection between them. This can mean gift-exchange, the giving of feasts, many forms of barter and certain forms of trade. Anytime we have a social contract that stipulates symmetry in the give and take of exchanges we can talk of balanced reciprocity. What Sahlins finds is that whereas in generalized reciprocity the material flow is organized by social bonds, in balanced reciprocity “social relations hinge on the material flow”. In balanced reciprocity we find the general form of exchange that Mauss saw as the foundation of economy. It encompasses a great variety of economic behavior, and although the more predatory forms of business are excluded, it serves as a description for commerce and industry as well. The point here is that the highly egoistic and rapacious tendencies that we find in the case of negative reciprocity are not the basic ones of economy; rather they are a special case of economic behavior. Even if we hold that e.g. food-sharing within the immediate group/family is not sufficient grounds to discuss an economy, exchanges between individuals/groups originally seems to have taken the form of balanced reciprocity (Mauss 1924/1990).

What interests Sahlins in his essay is how the different forms of reciprocity correspond to kinship distance, i.e. how does our knowing people affect our dealings with them? Generalized reciprocity is of course most usual at the very bosom of the family, in the sphere of close kinfolds. Within the walls of the family unit (however defined) things such as food are usually shared totally, and there is often a clear asymmetry to how members provide and benefit (the ‘breadwinner’-case). This might be extended some, particularly in the case of lineage or close friendships, so that there are cases where an ‘outside’ party is benevolently provided for. Correspondingly, with people we do not know at all and do not have to engage with on a continuous basis we can behave far more self-interestedly. Sahlins exemplifies this with a picture where negative reciprocity correlates directly with distance from the household. He maintains that in different “kinship-residential groupings” the order of reciprocity is necessarily different, illustrating it with a picture of concentric spheres with the household in the narrow center, the

village in a wider sphere and the intertribal sector as the general backdrop. Economic behavior plays out like a linear function (Sahlins 1972, p.198):

Reciprocity accordingly inclines towards balance and chicane in proportion to sectoral distance. In each sector, certain modes of reciprocity are characteristic or dominant: generalized modes are dominant in the narrowest spheres and play out in wider spheres, balanced reciprocity is characteristic of intermediate sectors, chicane of the most peripheral spheres. In brief, a general model of the play of reciprocity may be developed by superimposing the society's sectoral plan upon the reciprocity continuum.

Now, this is probably a very efficient way to describe economic behavior within a 'primitive' culture. Although the linear causality of it all seems a tad simplified (we can pretty easily conclude that there are some instances of cheating even in the household), the general principle regarding the moralities of exchange and reciprocity is reasonable. Both anthropological observation and common sense suggests that the kind of egoism that we usually associate with business practices works best in settings with few or weak affiliations between the parties. In settings with more pronounced ties such deceit is far more difficult. What we should pay attention to is the chronology of these developments. In the literature on egoism and altruism in economy (see e.g. Collard 1978 for a lucid analysis of altruism in classical economics), there is often the implicit assumption that the initial stage from which ethical attitudes develop is a disinterested and neutral one, which would mean that all developments are equally contingent. Sahlins model can be read as an argument stating that there is a clear precedent for both altruism and balanced interactions, but not so for greed. Rather, the latter develops out of meeting the proverbial Other, the not-like-Us. It would seem that as long as we have an ongoing social interaction we cannot *a priori* assume self-seeking behavior (for empirical data I will refer the reader to Sahlins essay, cf. Godelier 1977).

If we now compare the exchange behaviors of Warezonnia with the three models of reciprocity in Sahlins (1972), we can say some things about the state of this particular economy. It seems inappropriate to refer to negative reciprocities. There is little to no strive to actively get something for nothing. Although there probably are those who benefit in such a manner ('leeches'), it goes against the scene's principles of action. Generalized reciprocity can at times seem a better description, as there definitively are participants who establish one-way flows and actively try to establish disequilibria ('owning'). On a higher level of abstraction, the balanced reciprocity looks like a fitting description, as there is a continuing flow of releases back and forth with no clear 'winner' in sight, particularly if we use the standard definition of economic victory, i.e. maximizing surplus/profit. What is clear is that there exists a continuum of relations mimicking what Sahlins hypothesized about kinship distance, with the core being aggressive in their strive to give as much as possible, the wider sphere actively trading files back and forth, and the 'outside' of the scene participating only in order to get programs without paying for them. The difference lies in the fact that where anthropologists have observed tribes and villages, the new information technology has in a very real sense created a 'global village'. Distance, which in anthropology usually is closely tied to geographical distance, is a moot point on the internet. Closeness is instead tied to cultural variable, the participants sharing common views on matters, such as the fun involved in competing.

V

PLAY

Absolute free will can only be imagined as purposeless, roughly like a child's game or an artist's creative play impulse.

Play is beyond all rationality and ethics.
Friedrich Nietzsche

HOMO LUDENS

Where does all this leave us? It might seem that our initial discussion regarding the Warezonians has taken an odd turn. Anthropologists still find the kula ring interesting (see Mosko 2000), but why should we? Does it not simply say something about the odd forms that culture can take? Although it is clear that Warezonian exhibits similarities with gift economies such as the kula, the examples discussed so far serve only to describe it as a social form, and does not *explain* it very well. The fact that the giving of gifts can be an efficient way to uphold a community should be clear, but the question of what it is that drives this community needs to be examined closer. What is lacking this far from our descriptive analysis of Warezonian is an analysis of motives. In the last chapter we tentatively discounted the intentional accumulation of software as the primary motive for participation, simply because the participants at least appear to maximize expenditure rather than the correlated accretion. Even if we were to assume that amassing software was the primary motive – and as the last chapter did greatly focus on the possibilities of efficiency in gift-exchange such an interpretation might seem feasible – the evidence still points towards a more multi-faceted explanation. This search for motives should not be seen as a retreat back to the intentional actions of individuals as an explanatory factor, though. I do not wish to present motives as belonging to an individual in an uncommitted manner, as the motives that drive an economy by necessity are attached to the cultural form of such an economy (cf. Godelier 1977, Callon 1998). But if we assume that there exists some form of rationality to the exchanges on the warez scene, and it is obvious that this rationality cannot in a straightforward manner be reduced to the simple maximization of a utility function, the governing principles (if any) of such rationality should be addressed. Claes Gustafsson (1994) has in the regrettably untranslated *Produktion av allvar*¹³ (“The Production of Seriousness”) outlined a theory of such an analysis, repositioning rationality as an aspect of economic behavior. He argues that rationality actually is far more of a construct than an innate property in the human mind, and that people in different settings will develop greatly divergent rationalities, many of which will be contradictory if compared. Although Western economic rationality has become so dominant that the epithets ‘Western’ and ‘economic’ are often summarily dropped, many other possibilities co-exist. Furthermore, rationality might in itself be a construction after the fact, the way in which we describe our actions in order to make our behavior seem internally consistent (Gustafsson 1994, p. 56-68 and *passim*). Rationality can be viewed as consistency, i.e. that you barring special circumstances do things in more or less the same manner. But as anthropology long has shown, consistency does not necessarily mean translatability into the rationality of the observer. In order to grasp how consistency is created and ordered, we need to understand or at the very least describe the principles that drive it. Often these are ethical in nature, based on what we find to be the right thing to do. We might find that the basic principle is the fundamental need to keep the gods happy. Or, as in the case

of Weber and his analysis of capitalism, the primary need to work and stockpile. Although an observer from a culture that finds it natural to stockpile will have enormous difficulties understanding the exertions people will go through to keep a golden idol nourished, it doesn't follow that *either one* of these individuals can lay claim to a more original form of rationality.

<Bud> At the time Scum moved into the field, LND was dominating CAD/CAM titles, to a certain degree anyways, and seemed extremely sure of themselves. Aside from the odd release by SGE, and a decent showing by RiSE, SCUM was the first real competition that LND received. With the retirement of SGE, and the slowing then retirement of RiSE, PWA gained some CAD/CAM power and managed to get some titles (such as Cimatron IT 10) out, making it a player in the field.

<Bud> So at any given time there's been three main groups competing over a fairly small niche market...

<Bud> With the recent idleness of LND, and the loss of several PWA members to SCUM, do you feel SCUM has a real opportunity to dominate the CAD/CAM field?

<Poison> up to a certain level i do think we can be dominant in that way yes, a recent proof of that was today since we released 7 apps all \$40-50k titles in that area. tho... were not a 100% cad/cam group... since we like to release apps in different areas aswell, which u can see from other recent releases. basically aslong as it is quality, and we like it, we will give it a go if time available :>

*From an interview with 'Poison' of SCUM,
printed in NWR; Issue LXI, October 12th 1999*

Rationality and seriousness are, as Gustafsson rightly points out, not quite synonyms but still interwoven enough in most minds that they are usually thought of as being such. Where rationality should justly refer to any consequent and consistent way of behaving, and thus be a term that can be applied to any set of behaviors, seriousness is a *moral* statement regarding what is valued in a society. A society will regard behavior that corresponds to their view of seriousness as rational, but can also view behavior as *frivolous* but not necessarily *irrational*. We will say that someone is behaving irrationally when we can discern no logic to their behavior, but we can say that someone is just being frivolous without doubting her mental faculties. In ordinary language (which, following Wittgenstein (1953), should be our main focus), though, these two are often used interchangeably. To be *serious* is to behave 'correctly', i.e. to behave in a way that is both rational (a minimum requirement) and that shows adherence to the norms of the community. Take the example of theft. It can be very rational to steal, e.g. in cases of starvation. To state that theft is a serious endeavor requires something besides a rationale. We can say that someone is serious about a life of crime, but by this we mean that he/she has taken to it in a way that we can conceptualize through our system of norms - a life of crime as a variation on a career in high finance, for example. Here, being serious about crime has nothing to do with the legal aspect of it. Instead, it is a way to state that one observes the Protestant norm of toil and development. To work hard at being a criminal is serious, to dabble in it is not. A similar case can be made with regards to sport and art - serious when engaged in by professionals, frivolous as a hobby. The problem then is that almost no-one will openly admit to being frivolous about anything. People are by and large very creative in their ways of creating rationales for behaving in particular ways. The extreme version of this could be the tendency to explain e.g. play by pointing to things like 'the value of learning' and 'development through playing', thereby creating a lovely oxymoron - serious play (cf. LaPlante & Seidner 1999, Ruskoff 1999). In the vein of Wittgenstein we can remark that phenomena that have an ambiguous nature often fools us into thinking that they in fact hide some more basic, more

understandable notion. Simply put, we often lack the ability to accept things for what they are, particularly if they don't **mean** anything.

Observation of animals and people ... indicates that much time and energy is taken up by brief, self-contained, often repetitive act which are their own reason, ... autonomously motivated, and not ... small contributions to some remote, critically important aim.

H. W. Nissen, quoted in Scitovsky 1992, p. 17

The mystery of frivolity lies in its power to escape rational explanation. Huizinga (1955, p. 3) refers to it thus: “[T]he *fun* of playing, resists all analysis, all logical interpretation.” It is in a very real sense a self-contained phenomenon, as it cannot be explained through anything beside itself. Whereas rational behavior consists of a series of acts that are undertaken in order to achieve some assumedly predefined goal, frivolous behavior is done because it is ‘fun’ or it ‘feels good’. The scholastic counter-argument to this is normally along the lines of “it is can be very rational to have fun”, an example of a silly and mistaken mode of arguing. We have here mistaken the explanation/justification for an act with the motivation of the same. Perhaps this can best be approached through a phenomenology of sorts. Imagine yourself walking along the street, when you suddenly come across some friends sitting at a café, playing a game of chess. You stop, observe the game and realize that one of your friends is about to make a stupid move. In all probability, and if the rules of engagement between the players does not forbid this, you will turn to him (if it is a he) and help him out. Feel free to adapt the example to suit you, substituting a game of cards or Scrabble. A ballgame will do too, in which case it might simply be a case of catching a wayward ball – and instead of rolling it back gently you attempt a sly pass, a move to the hoop or a decent shot towards the goal. Why? The scholastic will claim that you have in some way managed to calculate your actions, pondering the why’s and how’s and through this came to the conclusion that it would be best to help your friend or exert yourself a bit. But why would we do any of those things? There is nothing to be gained through them, barring a sweaty shirt and an indeterminable sense of well-being from showing of your cleverness. What is more so, did you even **think** about these things beforehand? As e.g. Daniel Dennett (in *Consciousness Explained* (1949), based on experiments conducted by Benjamin Libet) has shown, humans can and often do act in complex ways (i.e. not merely react) without any real guidance from their ‘higher faculties’. In Libet’s experiments subjects were tested when conducting a conscious micro-action (being told to consciously hook a finger when they felt like it). The experiment showed that the conscious decision to hook the finger could be measured in the body and parts of the brain *before* it could be detected in the part of the brain that controls conscious action. In other words, the consciousness of a decision happened (about half a second) after the conscious act manifested itself. Although this might seem like neurological parlor games with little connection to what we are discussing, it goes some way towards showing that *calculation* is not necessarily a precondition for action. Returning to our example, it not so that we have used rational thinking in order to do what we do. Instead, we just do it. *We feel* like doing it. And although we certainly are capable of explaining our actions in rational terms, this does not mean that this rationality is the reason we acted in a specific way.

But why should we care about such petty matters? Well, there exists an assumption in much of the social sciences that only conscious and instrumentally rational actions, i.e. serious business, are important enough to be interesting. Actions and endeavors that wholly or even partly fall outside this are seen as marginal and unimportant. There are two problems inherent in such an assumption. One, the idea that mundane acts are uninteresting. Two, the implied notion that non-serious actions are always petty and insignificant. With the regards to the first

objection, we will leave it for now and refer to the work of Wayne Brekhus (1998, 2000), which deals with the importance of the mundane. When it comes to the second objection, we will need to sort out some of our concepts. To begin with, we have the pair rational-irrational. Then, we have seriousness-frivolity. But these two pairs are not enough. As we see in the example above, we can also differentiate between instrumental and non-instrumental actions, between things that are done in order to achieve some other goal and things that are done 'just because'. The former seem rational and serious, whereas the latter seems irrational and frivolous. Still, we can be very serious about our non-instrumental actions and very irrational when trying to achieve things. And this is where play comes in.

"To have some fuqn fun" (United States Courier Report, issue 88) might be one of the most telling quotes from a Warezonian regarding the reasons to take part in the scene. Even if we were to assume that the motivation for participating is the prestige that can be acquired, which has been suggested earlier, the reason for this particular form of competition is still an open question. The Warezonians dedicate a lot of time in order to gain such prestige, far more than seems rational were it simply a predefined position in a hierarchy one strove for. Additionally, this prestige has to be continuously re-won on weektops and the like, only to be potentially lost the following week. So even if it is the battle for prestige that drives the participants, this battle only follows from a more general principle, as there is no end-point to such a strive. To see this we can turn back to Weber (1904-5), and how he in *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* demonstrated the forces that drove modern capitalism. Even though it is true that modern man works mainly to amass money, this money is not the acting force that makes him act in specific ways. Rather it is a cultural force that does this, one where toil and frugality have been elevated to moral goods. And this cultural force is not an intentionally created one, but a way of living that has developed over a long time, and quite without a plan.

Risc: Risc still manages to keep up their comeback. Avalanch is the sole top 10 guy, but they still do have a decent week. keeping up their fight for #3. Not as active as past weeks but Avalanch carries the weight with a little bit of help from Brain and Psed0.

Overall: 5/10

From "Lester's Biased Courier Report",
printed in NWR; Issue LXIX, December 14th 1999

No matter how you approach the issue, the motivations of the Warezonians defy simple categorization. The quote above refers to things that *make sense* in the studied community (comeback, being a "top 10 guy", keeping up the fight for #3). How all this becomes locally coherent is another issue. Why anyone would want to be in the top ten or keep up this kind of fight is not immediately obvious. It is true that we normally assume that anyone participating in a similar activity would at least *try* to do his/her best, and that this is synonymous with striving upwards in the hierarchy (however this is defined). But this does not seem to be a *logically necessary* aspect. In capitalism, people assumedly strive to maximize their wealth. But why would we want to maximize our wealth? It makes sense in our society, yes, but this is as good an explanation we can logically muster. In other societies this is not necessarily so (cf. Sahlins 1976, p. 166-204). As for the argument that the capitalist mindset has developed society in a manner that we now couldn't live without, the "you-wanna-live-in-a-fucking-tree?"-argument, this misses the mark completely. It still does not present an argument for the maximization of wealth as the **only** and **necessary** way of living. We can even assume that it is the superior alternative, and the fact that there are other internally consistent, i.e. rational, ways to behave

economically still remains. But this leaves us with a conundrum. If we assume that the modern, capitalist way of thinking is contingent, we can no longer fall back upon it in explaining why people would compete for a position in a hierarchy. Instead, we will need to look within the social sphere for a more fundamental function or drive.

The Playful Society

In 1944, a Dutch historian otherwise best known for his *Herfsttij der middeleeuwen* (originally published 1919) publishes a remarkable text based on a series of lectures he'd presented while Rector of Leyden University. In doing so he brings to the world a scholarly work that is truly original, one of the few books in the social sciences that one without hesitance can refer to as seminal and unique: *Homo Ludens – a study of the play-element in culture* (English translation published in 1955). The historian is Johan Huizinga, and the book is still one of the finer analyses of play and playing that has been offered (for a critique see Duncan 1988). What he presents us with is a theory where that most childish and non-serious endeavor of all is placed squarely in the center of civilization and its development. Play, in this treatment, becomes nothing less than the foundation upon which systems such as law, war, art and philosophy are built. Playing is even seen as predating culture:

Play is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing.

First line of Huizinga 1955, p. 1

*The spirit of playful competition is, as a social impulse, older than culture itself and pervades all life like a veritable ferment. Ritual grew up in sacred play; poetry was born in play and nourished on play; music and dancing were pure play. Wisdom and philosophy found expression in words and forms derived from religious contest. The rules of warfare, the conventions of noble living were built up on play-patterns. We have to conclude, therefore, that civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come **from** play like a babe detaching itself from the womb; it arises **in** and **as** play, and never leaves it.*

Huizinga 1955, p. 173

Rather than viewing the development of society and culture as serious acts by somber men, Huizinga shows that much of what today is viewed with reverence and imbued with great significance most probably arose through acts a lot less serious than we wish to acknowledge. Law, that gravest of social interactions, is here presented as the codification of contest, and whereas this contest today might be about truth (?), it's earlier forms could just as well be about who told the most amusing and preposterous story, as in the case of the Eskimo drumming-contests (ibid., p. 85). Likewise the search for knowledge to Huizinga seems to be a development directly following from the kind of sophistic battles of wit that were popular among Vedic Brahmins and that are still played in many of our institutes of higher learning (cf. Sokal & Bricmont 1998 and the 'science wars'), in which the point primarily is to vanquish opposition. The strive to compete, the almost animal instinct to engage in play and joking around is not in this view separate from the life of the mind, but central and generative thereof. Such a break with what is fundamentally a Cartesian dichotomy is far-reaching indeed, and although many pay lip-service to the 'necessity (sic) of play', we can with some degree of conviction state that the consequences of Huizinga's thesis to social theory have not been sufficiently explored, if for no

other reason that the non-instrumental has been left out of most studies regarding e.g. economic behavior.

<skimp> Do you believe the warez scene recovered well from the recent FBI bust?
<boring> well to be honest I haven't been around much recently since it happened because of other constraints on my life... but I believe there is a positive side to everything, and hopefully now people will realise that the scene is real life, and it's not just another computer game

<skimp> Do you think some people get into it so much it takes away from their real life? I personally have to take breaks every now and then...
<boring> definately.. although I say it's real life, it mustn't interfere with your actual life away from the computer...
<boring> if you find that the scene is stopping you do other things like going out/etc, then you need to take a look at yourself
<boring> people should come online to have fun and relax, getting #1 in wakup's by trading 23 hours/day doesn't make you a better person

*From an interview with 'Boring' from Moonshine,
printed in CWS; Issue 129, December 9th 2000*

The quote above neatly summarizes the problems in drawing clear boundaries between the serious and the fun in Warezonian. What goes on in the scene can be and obviously feel like 'just' a computer game, but the involved are at least to some extent aware of how seriously outsiders take their activities. Also, some take the game that is the scene extremely seriously, spending a lot of their lives within it. Others view it as a place to "have fun and relax". It is a mere game with serious implications (such as prison-sentences), or the serious activity of having fun. Returning to our dilemma with conceptually grasping the dimensions of rationality and seriousness in human actions, play seems initially to stand on the side of irrationality and frivolity. Countering this, Johan Asplund (1987) has argued the opposite of play is in fact not seriousness but utility. Play, he states, can be very serious indeed, even quite literally dead serious - as can be inferred from the quote above. So even if frivolity and play are at least partially connected, they are not synonymous and can, depending on the circumstances, be opposites. Still, play is decidedly non-instrumental. It can have internal goals, such as scoring in a game, but it is in a fundamental way its own reason - we cannot refer to anything 'outside' of playing to explain it. Again, although it is possible to argue that the reason to engage in frivolity *de facto* was some other and more somber goal, this is a case of rationalization. Logically, the nature of play is such that premeditation in fact makes it something else. Engaging in play we will either forget our rational reason for it or not be playing at all. Compare reading for fun and reading for an assignment, and particularly note the way in which the assignment will be (temporarily) forgotten if the reading material actually is fun. Compare playing with your children with being paid to baby-sit. Or going to a gym with doing physical labor. In all cases, the separate spheres of similar activities will function according to rules of their own. Sometimes the lines might be somewhat blurry (as in the case of keeping fit), but in principle playful activities are reasons unto themselves, and to try to understand them through the lens of utility will miss the point. As will any study of rationalities that assumes utility as the *primum mobile* (cf. Sahlins 1976, Gustafsson 1994).

What then is play, this mystically pure activity? In *Homo Ludens* its nature is carefully laid out, with particular emphasis on "its social manifestations" (p. 7). Huizinga begins by stating that play is at all times a voluntary activity. There can be no forced play, for by force one has only the likeness of play. In addition, play is superfluous, something that can never be a

chore: “It is never imposed by physical necessity of moral duty.” (p. 8) Thus play is presented as a fundamentally *free* activity, one which exists as an addition to the hardships of life. For Huizinga play is freedom itself. The second characteristic of play as presented is that it is extraneous, a sphere outside reality, as it were. It consists of the invented and is a phantasmagoria, obeying only its own internal rules. Huizinga further refers to it as a disinterested activity, a ‘break’ from ordinary life. Tied to this is play’s third characteristic, the fact that it is an explicitly separated activity. Play takes place within a specific sphere, begins and ends unequivocally. Often the physical sphere of playing is even ritually marked, as a ‘playing field’. In other cases, this marking can be more subtle, even unconscious. Temporally we often say that a game ends, whereas children will say they’ve ‘stopped playing’. This, Huizinga notes, introduces us to another of play’s fundamental characteristics, its *order*. Play is in a sense immensely rigid, because it contains a multitude of explicit and implicit rules, norms and values that must be upheld in order for play to exist. Although most obvious in sports, even fantasy-games between small children put great demands on the participants: knowing which spot on the floor can kill you, whether Jigglypuff conceivably could defeat Magmar, and if you are allowed to hit ghosts. Finally, it must be *thrilling*. Without a certain amount of excitement and arousal play would not be *fun*, and without this fun-ness play cannot exist. This much for Huizinga’s definitional characteristics. Johan Asplund (1987) has noted that Huizinga refers to two other distinct traits, but that these are not by necessity part of his definition. One, for him play is agonistic in nature, and is founded on competition and combat. Two, in *Homo Ludens* play is ritual in nature, holy even. Asplund remarks that Huizinga actually doesn’t seem to separate between play and *games* at all, and that most of his discussion fits games and competitions better than it does play. In fact, he says, a lot of playing does not correspond well to Huizinga’s description, for he is interested in social games more than playing as an elementary form. What Asplund proposes is an extension of the thesis. Unorganized tomfoolery can be referred to as ‘just play’, but it becomes play in the sense discussed in *Homo Ludens* when it becomes organized and social. Then play is transformed into ‘the game’, and it is this that can become a fixture in social life and be a part of cultural development.

What Huizinga claims is that the free but ordered sensation-seeking activity of play is what has created and developed culture. Law, war and knowledge have in this perspective all grown out of our tendency to seek amusement in the little contests a lot of our social interaction consists of. Interestingly enough, most of Huizinga’s work discusses economy only as a counter-point, i.e. economy is invoked when the soullessness of contemporary society needs to be addressed. Although this is in all probability a subconscious omission, it is interesting to note that social theories often regard economy as a far more rigid order than e.g. law. It is almost as if there was the tendency of assuming that although rationality generally speaking is relative, it is fixed when it comes to economy. In Huizinga’s case it could be attributed to what in play-theory has been referred to as his “aristocratic rhetoric”, his way of portraying play as something akin to *l’art pour l’art* (Sutton-Smith 1997, p. 203):

Thus by saying, as he [Huizinga] did, that play is outside of ordinary life, that it is immaterial, disinterested, nonutilitarian, voluntary, spatially and temporally separate, childlike, nonprofane, governed by rules, and utterly involving, he idealizes and sacralizes play.

And, as everyone implicitly knows, the one thing that cannot be idealized and sacralized is economy. Purportedly, economic behavior is permanently on the side of base calculation and instrumental action. The economic should not, **cannot** be conducted in a flippant or playful manner. But here we might face another cultural problem. It might be that we cannot see the

economic in behaviors that aren't serious and unambiguously instrumental. When we observe games and other endeavors that are their own reason we might be unable to 'focus' in a sense that would make it possible for us to use economic expressions. We come upon a hindrance in language itself, a barrier constructed by a few hundred years of cultural development. There is a particular language game within which the economic can be discussed, and this makes it enormously difficult to rethink it. The moment the word 'economy' is employed our perspective narrows instantly, leaving only a few things in focus. To counter this we have to change the playing field, bring in examples that we cannot instantly translate back into the concepts we normally use when discussing economy.

In Bataille (1967/1991, p. 64-66) trade among the Aztecs is discussed, and in this we can find a cultural form that does **not** correspond with our view of the logic of trade and economy. The merchants in ancient Mexico were conspicuously different from their counterparts in the Old World. Instead of calculating risk closely and attempting to find those transactions that would give them the best margins, the Aztec merchants seem to have almost gleefully sought out risk and were interested in *honor* above all. They often acted as a kind of shock-troop, signaling conflict. Their economic activities were arranged as adventures, as brave incursions into dangerous territories. Neither did they behave according to the Western logic of trade: "their trading was conducted without bargaining and it maintained the glorious character of the trader." Trade was aristocratic, and thus something that was meaningful in and of itself. We could perhaps liken it to the travels of the Vikings, where exploration, adventure, warfare, pillage and trade were interwoven in one fantastic voyage. The exact result of these voyages was less important than the fact that they were undertaken, and although they were conducted with the aim of bringing home riches, a journey obviously had another meaning as well. Journeys were adventures, and the stories of conquest and escapades that they resulted in were probably as important as profits from trading. Besides, pillage is more efficient than trade and has far better margins. Returning to the Aztecs, the merchant-class did not in fact engage in what we would call trade. Rather, they conducted expeditions during which they gathered riches either by conquest or as *gifts* from the noblemen they visited during these quests. Actually, the merchant used to be bestowed with gifts from the sovereign ("the chief of men" as Bataille notes), would give these to nobles encountered during his travels, and receive even finer gifts from these in return. Upon returning he would present gifts to the sovereign, and again be rewarded by him. There was little or no buying or selling (although we do not know how food and equipment was provided for), but instead a system of gift-exchange and the acquiring of treasure through battle. And whereas the Spaniards regarded trade as ignoble and demeaning, the merchants among the Aztecs were honored citizens. Their exploits were the stuff of legend, their conduct noble and their businesses quests. The merchant's currency was not money, for he dealt not in commodities. Instead, his currencies were honor and glory, for this is what drove him, what made his tribulations worthwhile. Merely to gather riches, to become rich, would be vulgar. But to be glorious...

From now, a new rule has been set... People that only preed during the week will be removed from the weektops. (Only if they did only pres) This week: night sky, duranged, mrsandman, jaydee, bones and grad. This will remove some stats from DEV DMS and AOD mainly... I dont feel like giving 'couriering' points to people that didnt even do a single megabyte of trading!
From the Zero Second Report; Issue 5, January 31st 1999

Glen, former courier of nearly every trading group known to man, has returned to RiSC. This is his second appearance in the once great group, let's see if he can make an impact.

AOD picks up Death Angel from DMS. He has already made his presence felt, with some big 2000AD pre's, which catapulted AOD to becoming #1 this week

Grind, also former courier for many groups, is back in action. He recently quit Millennium.

Word is he is looking for a respectable courier group in the future.

From 'Scene News' in the Zero Second Report; Issue 21, May 22nd 1999

What we find in these merchant-warriors could be described as the conduct of economy as sport, as an honorable avocation. Important here was not the amassing of money for its own sake, but how you proved yourself honorable. A merchant did not become rich because he was smart, shrewd or 'a good businessman'. He gained wealth if the gods loved him, if he was brave in battle, if he was a man of honor. His **quest** led to riches, not his trade. As Bataille (1991, p. 67) wryly states:

These customs, the gift exchange in particular, are far removed from present commercial practices.

Now, in order to prove his good fortune, and therefore his standing among the gods, an Aztec merchant gave feasts. Such feasts, combined with the (human) sacrifices they entailed, were the major social happenings of Aztec society. Kings gave the greatest feasts, but the merchants gave them also, "because it would have been considered base to die without having made some splendid expenditure that might add luster to his person by displaying the favor of the gods who had given him everything." (ibid., p. 66) When returning from an expedition, a merchant would immediately give a banquet at which gifts were given to colleagues. Really big feasts were additionally given in order to further prove how the gods had favored the merchant. During these the lavishness of feasting was taken to extremes, sometimes ending in the Aztec ritual of human sacrifice. Most or all of a merchant's wealth could be squandered during one of these banquets - necessitating further quests. It was through these banquets that a merchant truly became rich in the eyes of the society, and we could even say that the expeditions were undertaken **in order to give feasts**. Economy and trade were in this way not self-contained fields, but a development out of competitions by which the Aztecs tried to prove religious points. If we compare with Huizinga's definition, with play being free, extraneous, limited/ordered and thrilling (plus agonistic and ritual in nature), the ways of these merchants fit rather well. Being involved in these activities was something that could only be done by men who were free, who could devote themselves to what was basically an aristocratic (and therefore extraneous) activity. It obeyed specific rules and limitations, and was tied to the ritual calendar of the Aztecs. It was engaged in out of three reasons: thrill-seeking (expeditions and quests), competition and for ritual reasons. Although it no longer could be called playing at the time we have accounts of it, we can assume that it had, in fact, evolved out of play, as an agonistic game. At the very least we can in it discern playful elements, and even claim that it would not have evolved as it did without the particular behaviors Huizinga finds *sub species ludi*.

Whereas the Western notion of economy as an interested and direct mode of interaction would bar both the kula and the doings of the Aztec merchants from being 'real' economies, they are methods of distributing wealth and provisioning society. They are also endeavors that depend on the thrill of doing, rather than on calculated profit. And they are through this to a degree frivolous. They are **fun**, because they take their energy not from the abstract notion of profit, but from the thrill of the chase, the joy of victory. They are economies, but they are played like games.

The Scores

trader	group	CAT	E	FS	FH	PD	VDR	EB	HOG	MG	DLS	pts
cedric	AOD	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	4	1	237
nail	AMN	3	3	3	4	3	2	2	4	1	4	201
darkwolf	AOD	1	2	7	2	2	0	5	6	8	7	159
bohnz	AOD	5	4	2	3	10	8	0	0	3	2	130
moonsabre	AOD	4	6	0	8	8	4	4	5	7	9	106
avalanch	Ri SC	0	0	0	7	6	3	6	2	5	3	099
drunkkid	AMN	0	7	8	5	4	6	7	10	0	5	092
jfkng	AMN	6	8	9	0	7	0	0	1	2	0	080
boring	???	7	10	0	9	0	0	0	7	10	6	041
kruzin	AMN	0	5	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	10	038

Netmonkey Courier Report for December 14th, 1999

Cedric really ruled that week. The system by which points are awarded might be a tad confusing (you get 10 points for finishing number one on a site, 9 for being second etc. And then sites are rated on a 3x and 2x scale...), but it is still clear that the couriers from AOD were extremely active, scoring all over the place. Those in the know report that this is not due to "actual trading", but to the fact that AOD gets their hands on so many pre's. Well, whatever. Amnesia (AMN) is doing well too.

It's a scorecard. Trader means courier, and the short abbreviations refer to trading sites (i.e. servers, distribution ('distro') sites), with the five first being slightly more important (3x) than the last five (2x) in the eye of the grader. Maximum points would be 250, meaning that Cedric was extremely close. Still, his massive score of 237 easily made him top trader of the week, at least on this card. He won, in so many words. This type of lists seem to make immediate sense to us, accustomed as we are to read similar lists to learn everything from political outcomes and effects of taxation to sports scores and box office results. Calculative practices of this type are also central to the discipline(s) of business and markets. The scorecard reproduced above is a part of the accounting of the scene, its method of ensuring more or less fair and accurate information regarding the central measurables of the community. But whereas the accounts of a farm straightforwardly state how much produce has been sold and how much reside in the stores, the calculation above is slightly different. It tallies how much each participant has done **for the scene**. Being number one on a weektop means that you've worked hard and spent a lot of time in order to service the community by providing it with goodies in an efficient and extremely timely manner. You are someone to count on; your 'name' is important and communicated through the nets.

<glen> my world record of times mentioned in nwr is 19

*glen sucks, glen sucks, glen sucks, glen sucks, glen sucks, glen sucks, glen sucks, glen sucks, glen
sucks, glen sucks, glen sucks, glen sucks, glen sucks, glen sucks, glen sucks, glen sucks, glen sucks,
glen sucks, glen sucks, glen sucks.*
20 ;)

From 'Quotes of the Week!' in NWR; Issue LVI, September 8th 1999

As Warezonias is so widely dispersed, having nodes all over the world (if not the amount of personnel we would associate with such a global conglomerate), such accounting is a way to draw together the scene, making the singular transactions part of something greater. A lot of

action is thus drawn together into a single table, establishing hierarchy among couriers. What takes place all through the network is gathered in this table, at this specific point; something that is reminiscent of what Bruno Latour (1987) has called “centers of calculation”. The act of couriering one single, solitary file is unremarkable in itself. Getting someone to notice that this is special enough, i.e. uniquely timely, requires some form of notation by (normally) the siteOP. As the dispersed siteOPs collect such notations, something the servers can be set to do automatically, we get a collection of weektops, scorecards for the individual sites. But these unconnected statistics do not become truly public until a central agent brings them together. The NWR published weekly lists, unconcerned with the fact that their formula for calculating these was somewhat arbitrary. Although some would contest these statistics, they still function as a way to uphold identities and legitimate the ongoing game. NWR become a center that focused Warezonian, in the same way Latour argues that places such as “Natural History Museums, Geological Surveys, Census Bureaus or other laboratories” (ibid, p. 233) act as centers where the natural sciences can tie up enough “allies” to make general statements about that external world which in part has been collected within.

This collecting of information from the margins to the center is in a sense the basis of management in general (cf. Fayol 1916, Thompson 1967). But it is particularly the way in which this creates an accounting structure that is interesting here. In commercial endeavors, accounting is perhaps the most important controlling function through its management of information and the centralized presentation of this. One way of presenting what it is that accountants do is that they reduce the activities taken into markings in ledgers (by any other name), making any project ‘portable’. Looking at the millions of actions undertaken in e.g. a multinational corporation, these can by such techniques be distilled into an annual report small enough to fit into a slim briefcase. Likewise, Miller (1998) has discussed how accounting is constituted in an emergent fashion, bringing out the argument that any such structure is created through a discussion by multiple actors and through the assimilation of previously marginal forms. He in this way maintains: “there is no essence or core to accounting. Accounting is instead a form of *bricolage*, an activity whose tools are largely improvised and adapted to the tasks and materials at hand” (p. 190). The process by which Cedric can be called top trader of the week contains several ‘weaknesses’, i.e. arbitrary choices. In the very first NWR (then called the Netmonkey Weekend Report), this is made explicit:

In this issue we will feature the top 11 sites in the scene. The way we got the top 11 sites was that we surveyed a buncha ppl and we totaled up the points each individual site received. If you're a siteop and you don't agree with the rating you received, suck my dick, it's the couriers who have voted.

Owing to what seems to be a general human trait of wanting to create at least the semblance of order, however provisionally, Warezonian has created a number of similar totals. Some groups keep their own scores, something that is simultaneously a form of bragging and a validation. By stating what a group has done until now one tells numerous stories. To begin with, most groups live for only a short while, and then either die or merge with a larger group. A statement regarding the number of releases is thus a way to assert that the group is a serious operator, and that it at least provisionally has passed the evolutionary test of long-term survival. Also, as the groups compete for supremacy, totals can be seen as a way to keep face when current releases may be lagging. And, if the total number of releases are high, this communicates something about a groups overall prowess. Taken together, this particular display

functions both to create identity for and within a group and as a form of advertising for the group.

Blizzard was founded in Feb 98 and since this month we have released more than 2200+ quality releases for the scene. But this was just our successful beginning... We have already set higher targets for the next year... So take care pals...
From Blizzard's NFO dated May 23rd 2000

By stating this in an NFO, which will be read by (almost) anyone who utilizes one of these releases (N.B.: Blizzard is mainly a cracking group, i.e. they release cracks that transform shareware and demos into full versions. This distinction is important within the scene.) Blizzard is telling the story of themselves anew, and doing this in the 'public' sphere. In a way we could say that they are re-creating themselves. Related to what was remarked earlier concerning NFOs as carriers of identity, appending data about how much one has released can be seen as a continuing reconstruction of that identity. It is in this way the 'face' of the releaser, the continuous telling of past glories and promises of things to come.

What we must note is that these totals, these scores, are mere measurements. They are measurements that form and build identity, but still just quantifications. Particularly for the couriers it matters not what you have traded, merely that you have transferred a specific amount of data. For releasers, there is some prestige to be gained from the quality of that which is given, but in order to hold on to ones position and bragging rights you must keep up a healthy quantity of releases at all times. In an area where generosity is the rule, standardized measurement is required in order to create order, for without this (ac)counting the visibility of the actions would disappear. And without visibility there can be no differences in prestige. All this can serve as further illustration as to the similarity to a sport, but also shows the fact that Warezonian doesn't operate under the usual constraint of scarcity. At least not in any usual, easily comprehensible sense.

The Rules

As has been stated earlier, one of the defining aspects of play is the emergence of order, and one of the aspects of the emergence of order is the birth of an ethic. In his *Produktion av allvar* ("The Production of Seriousness") Claes Gustafsson (1994) has referred to an observation that might be universal in scope: When children start playing a game they very quickly start to create 'order' within this game by inventing rules, often in an iterative fashion. Kids playing with a ball in a yard initially just kick the ball around, but almost always this seems to be immediately followed by statements regarding what will be counted as something/a goal ("...if the ball passes between those two trees..."), how one can be counted as a player ("...you play with me against them...") and additional rules ("...no biting!"). After a while, rules are added ("...it has to **pass** the trees..."), and difficult situations dealt with ("...if you don't stop I'm telling Dad..."). Playing a game with a very young child (my example being my son Sean, five years at the moment of writing) can be surreal, simply because this rule-creation is active but insufficiently formalized:

We can play with my rules like we do in kindergarden... You put this (half of a game-board) here, and then these (small animal figurines) go in a line here (far away from the board) and then I throw this (throws dice, gets a three) and take three of your animals!
I win!

The following document is included in its entirety, as it so well goes to show the way in which the scene can and does codify its own behavior. It circulated widely in Warezonnia, and although I've taken it from the NFO of Class (dated March 30th 2000) I could have referred to numerous other documents (NWR, other NFOs etc.) instead. The parties that laid down these 'laws' were the games release groups - Class, Divine and Myth - and although the rules caused some rumblings they were pretty much taken as fact, greatly due to the power of the underwriting parties.

[G r o u p N e w s]

In 1998, three people decided the future of how the scene should shape itself and released a 10-point information document stating how a game release should be conducted. In the past year, many of these rules have been broken by its founding members and other groups have purposely broken the agreement. In lieu of recent events, the deciding figures of three groups Class, Myth & Divine, have converged and agreed upon a new set of rules based on the original Faction rules and Myth's recent proposal and have been updated, modified and agreed upon by consensus to a new standard to better suit the scene in this millenium.

These groups have been active participants in shaping the scene in the last 6 months, and were given active participation in voicing their point of view. These new rules will allow for more fair and competitive scene while ensuring a quality-minded environment for the scene. These deciding figures have bestowed themselves to be called the N.S.A., Network Software Association. These rules have been ratified and approved among the three groups and will be recognized and followed immediately on this date, March 26th, 2000.

1. The disk limit is ~~as~~ now 65 x 2,915,000 bytes. This equates to a total of 189,495,000 bytes of compressed data. Groups may not go over the total size to prevent any future cheating. Acceptable compression formats at this time are ACE or RAR or any future compression that supports multiple volumes and long file names, followed by the traditional PKZIPing.

The limit for standard game add-ons is 35 x 2,915,000 bytes for any add-on that includes Music, Speech, Commentary or Play By Play for the original release. Any add-on that does not fit this criteria will be restricted to 25 x 2,915,000 bytes. Only the group that won a game release is allowed to release the add-ons for the game.

2. To prevent sloppy rips, a re-release of a game is allowed to make groups release proper and respectable releases. The following provisions include:
 - a) it can be ripped in >=10 disks less than the previous release by using only lossless compression methods. Lossy compression will not be permitted to compromise the release to fit under this condition.
 - b) it can be ripped in >=15 disks less of the size of the previous release by using mp3-compression while not downgrading any wavs or mp3's sound quality using lossy compression.

That means all the essential gamedata must be still included in the re-release. No essential data is allowed to be removed to be considered a valid re-release. A re-release from a competing group may not use tools, original crack or any other files from the previous release that were modified for the original game rip.

The re-release of a rip can be done by any group and must be done in at most 48 hours after the release of the original rip, as possibly every game is rippable in a smaller size if enough time is spent.

3. Every release under this limit MUST be a functionally and playable complete game with no essential data missing to complete the game. This means that included will be every component necessary for the successful completion of the game e.g.:
 - all game executables that are needed,
 - every level (single AND multiplayer),
 - every track (including practice),
 - all actor graphics & models etc,
 - sound effects
 - registry settings to play on the Internet (e.g. Zone/DirectPlay)
4. Any lossless compression method to reduce the size of selected game data is ALLOWED (e.g. uharc).

5. Lossy compression is ALLOWED for sound, videos and non-texture graphics (e.g. of menu screens) but lossless compression is encouraged before lossy compression. Lossy compression of textures is explicitly FORBIDDEN to prevent the many problems inherent to that.
6. Sound effects WILL and MUST be included. To reduce the size of rips when possible, standard waveformat files (PCM) should be mp3-compressed if possible in a reasonable state of time and is over the size of 20 disks. If the soundfiles existbgi file a its highly regarded when time is invested to extract those files to compress them. Groups are not to required to index files though. Downgrade of sound quality to sound files to allow the game to fit the limit will not be permitted.

It is allowed to rip music, commentary/speech and ambience files as long as the game remains playable. Speech files MUST be included if there exist no on-screen subtitles. It is okay to remove commentary from a release if size does not permit it.

It is highly regarded when all sounds, speech and music are included in a rip and not intentionally put out as addons.
7. It is allowed to remove gamedata that exists in multiple resolutions or formats as long as the game remains playable on a typical system which is defined by a PII-300 with a D3D-card and soundcard.
 - high-resolution textures for highend systems.
 - low-resolution textures for low-end systems if there is no possible options to include the high-resolutions in the release.

If size permits, it is expected that high resolution be released as an add-on.
 - high-screen resolution graphics data standard of 800x600 (or 640x480 if other than 800x600 is not applicable)
 - at least one hardware-dependent data must be included, and must be in Direct3D mode or any other hardware data modes that are acceptable (e.g. Glide textures). A release of software mode only with all hardware-dependent data and textures removed will not be allowed in future releases.
8. Movies (intros, cutscenes) should be removed if they aren't game-related. Movies must be ripped in a way so that the gameplay experience is not compromised, e.g. framing of movies is highly regarded. It should always be avoided to create situations in which user-input is necessary on black screens because the video normally shown has been blacked out.
9. Other allowed add-ons for games include:
 - cutscenes/movies
 - commentary/speech
 - music
 - manual/documentation
 - editor

Intro andOutro add-ons are EXPLICITLY FORBIDDEN. Not more than 2 add-ons should be released for a game release.
10. Children's games (a Kiddie games) and Edutainment software do not qualify under these rules guidelines for acceptable releases. Kiddie games are usually defined via the game target audience of '5-12 years' as stated by the game's producer. Common sense should be based on common sense by all groups to identify what really is a kiddie game. Platform games are not to be considered kiddie games.
11. Levelpacks, game add-ons etc. for rips are only allowed if they are officially released/authorized by the same company/developer/publisher that put out the original game. If possible by its size, the add-on should be made as a standalone and not needing the original game release. The original missions may be removed to allow the game add-on to become standalone if not size can not permit the original game. It should be explained in the NFO if and why a game add-on isn't made to be standalone.
12. In regard to games distributed in the United States that are LATER distributed in Europe or vice versa under the same or different name/publisher. These games if released AFTER another group's release are counted as DUPES unless it can be proven that there is a clearly noticeable PLAYABLE difference in the latter release (more than just tiny differences in graphics or sound). Differences in dates and Game Titles between Euro and US releases are NOT a good enough reason to re-release the game.

13. A brief outline of what has been stripped from the game should be clearly stated in game-release .NFO, as well as information as to whether or not Add-Ons can be expected.
14. Fully cracked Update Patches and Trainers are highly regarded, though they are not the responsibility of any group (including that of which released the original game). If 2 trainers from the same or different groups are released for 1 game, this does NOT qualify as a dupe unless the latter trainer provides no new features over the prior trainer. Beta update patches will not be considered a valid release among any game group. No group shall release a cracked patch for a game if a generic patch exists for a particular game in the scene. If a generic crack exists, a new patch-release must specify that the generic crack does not work anymore.
15. If two or more rips of the same game get released, the first working rip wins. Sites should not nuke any release until the winning rip has been proven to work correctly and follows the above ruleset.
16. No group shall do a rip using another's groups work, be it a crack or tools written by another competing group. Any third party tools shall be acceptable. A crack from an ISO or past release (even in other languages) shall not be used unless permission is given from the cracker/creator of the original release group.

All appointed HQ (Headquarters) should abide by these rules to the fullest extent permissible. Any group that competes in the gaming rip scene will and must abide by the above rules to allow fair competition among all competitors.

Signed,
Leaders, Council Members and Seniors of Class, Myth & Divine.

What we can see in this document is the explicit ordering of Warezonian. Actually, this document seems like a paradox, or at least an enigma - a strict set of rules for the illegal donation of games. We seldom equate gift-giving with strict rules. Neither is illegality normally connected with regulatory structures. Moreover, frivolous activities of the type we're discussing should seemingly be negatively affected by such measures. But important here is the way in which standardization and formalization show themselves as necessary parts of any form of organized action. Although there is no formal hierarchy, even when it is just 'fun', organizing is needed. Without rules, either implicit norms or explicit 'laws', you lose the fun part of the game. The participants want to defeat each other, and if there are ambiguities as to what constitutes such a victory, the enjoyment of releasing diminishes. Moreover, as e.g. Bowker and Star (1999) show in the at times immensely amusing *Sorting Things Out*, this kind of standardization is not something that we either do or don't do. Rather, classification is what makes any kind of complex action and knowledge possible.

Razor - Beck has been messaging me all week saying that Extreme Tennis was not a dupe, and CLS shouldn't have had sites nuke the release. The game that CLS is saying RZR duped on was a game we put on in Sept. 98 called Tie Break Tennis made by Hammer Technologies, based in Spain. These people ALSO made Extreme Tennis, PUBLISHED BY Head Games/Activision. We downloaded both games and the gameplay is exactly the same, except different intro screens.

RZR broke rule 8 of The Faction:

8. In regard to games distributed in the United States that are LATER distributed in Europe or vice versa under the same or different name/publisher. These games if released AFTER another group's release are counted as DUPES unless it can be proven that there is a clearly noticeable PLAYABLE difference in the latter release (eg. new levels, enhanced graphics, or other new features).

Nothing new = Dupe. RZR also duped PDM on a patch they cracked a month ago. Hello!? Ever hear of a dupe list? Does anyone in RZR ever log on to any ftp sites besides their own?

*Apparently not. This is not the first time RZR has done this due to poor research.
From NWR; Issue XXX, January 10th 1999*

In the early days of the scene, there were no real rules as to what constituted a 'correct release'. But as the scene grew, and more and more releases could be created, distributed faster and faster, the need for a regulatory structure grew. A gathering of Warezonians that called themselves 'the Faction' created the original rules, but this cooperative structure died due to infighting. The presented document, a renewed attempt to create a common set of rules for warez-transactions, seems to have fared somewhat better. Most of the points aren't controversial as such, merely specifications as to what is meant by 'too big' or 'raped'. It also outlines what counts as 'sloppy work', such as indiscriminately ripping out graphics and sound. As the groups want to release as quickly as possible, the temptation to simply do a 'quick fix' and sacrifice quality was obviously seen as a problem. We could also view the rules as a way to clarify the actual gift-giving act. The rules regulate what is acceptable as a gift, thus reducing uncertainty to a degree. But furthermore they clarify that the scene is an area of professionalism, and clarifies the 'warez ethics' itself. To release is not a disinterested act, it is caught up in the social sphere of the scene.

Well that was the second week of June. The blockbuster titles have started to come out, but fewer and fewer of them are being ripped well. This could be the beginning of the end of the rip scene (or at least the 50 x 2.88 limit). Ripping of 3DFX has in effect raised the disk limit anyhow, so perhaps it is time to make the change. A disk limit of 60 x 2.88 prohibiting the ripping of 3DFX would go a long way towards eliminating the "cheating" of the disk limit that we are seeing now.

The games with graphic drivers ripped are going to be more and more prevelant as time goes on.

Perhaps a new meeting of the Faction counsul is in order. Origin should be brought into that body this time around anyway. Their constant use of their non-membership to circumvent the rules of common sense has become an annoyance. Surely their leaders can respect the idea that even an essentially illegal hobby such as ours needs some guidelines to ensure fair play. Origin's

use of the faction rules to denounce other group's releases, and their use of their own non-membership to shield themselves from criticism should not be allowed to continue.

From NWR; Issue LI, June 26th 1999

(emphasis added)

Von Wright (1967) has classified rules into three categories. One, there are rules that specify what is and what isn't permitted in a particular context – such as rules in a game. Two, there are rules of grammar, general rules as to what is comprehensible in a structure and what isn't. Breaking such a rule isn't wrong; it is merely to step outside what goes for sense and meaning in a context. Third, there are logical orders, rules that can't be broken without the system collapsing – the rigid rules of mathematics, for example. Adapted to the Warezonian context, von Wright's first category corresponds closely to the set of rules presented above. But in at least one sense, Warezonian is a game, and the rules of the game are also the grammar of the scene. A release can very well be meaningless:

RELEASE:

POINTS:

Hydride 3

-1

Rock, Scissors, Paper 3

-1

TOTAL: -2 Points

COMMENTS:

This group continues to put out flaky/crappy jap games that can understand. Junk is junk, but sometimes the crap needs to be nuked and banned.

From NWR; Issue LXVIII, December 7th 1999

(Jap(anese) games are often very confusing, not only due to the language issue.)

If we read the rules a bit more closely, we see that they actually don't function as a unambiguous rule set for a 'game'. There is quite a lot of ambiguity and flexibility within the rules. 'Common sense' is alluded to in the interpretation of the rule. The concept of something being "highly regarded" is referred to several times. In the end, rule-following "to the fullest extent permutable" (?) is assumed. These rules are obviously not meant as law, but as a set of guidelines to be referred back to and used as the starting-point of discussion. Referring back to von Wright, the rules could be viewed as an incomplete formalization of the way in which the scene works. I have referred to this working as a grammar. As Wittgenstein remarks regarding "a rule for interpreting a rule" (Kripke 1984, p.17-18), we can never find the final rule regarding rule-following, for this too would need a rule regarding how it is to be followed. Rather, at some point we have to follow rules 'blindly', without questioning them. In a sense, we will vacillate between von Wright's categories, assuming a game-rule to be a logical rule and vice versa. It is important to pay heed to the emergent nature of such rule-structures, for as e.g. Pickering (1995) has shown even natural phenomena can travel through similar nets. In his analysis of the quark, he shows that it originally came up as a necessary 'invention' in order to keep mathematical calculation regarding nuclear particles balanced - even when no-one believed in their existence! The quark was thus an accepted 'imaginary' addition, a game-device. Then the construction of very specific machinery managed to capture glimpses of said 'imaginary particles'. All of a sudden the quark is about to become physically real - it enters into the grammar of science. Testing confirms that quarks behave in specific ways - they become scientific facts, *true* by logical necessity. Pickering's conclusion (which by no means is uncontroversial, cf. the 'science wars') is that even logical rules are contingent upon a system of social and material negotiation, i.e. a logical rule in a sphere where it is incomprehensible is not a rule *in that society*.

*I gave them *1* point for LeMans since "technically" the release was within Faction rules and PDM won, MiniMe duping... but users should get MiniMe's rip, it's the same, PDM should feel some shame, (yes that rhymes), and the Faction is a dead entity no one cares about any longer.*

End of story.

From OMG YET ANOTHER GAMES REPORT ISSUE #3 by
The Preacher Kane, printed in NWR; Issue LXXII, January 19th 2000

This example of Warezonian rules is thus a question of a very provisional structure indeed. Some of the rules are fixed in the minds of most participants, such as what duping is. A Warezonian will probably be very sure of what is meant by duping, even to the extent of finding her view of it true by logical necessity. Other rules are more flexible, and have to be interpreted in use. And just as the rules the Faction created were subjected to testing and critique, until they finally collapsed, the new rules will be argued about and revamped.

What I want to show by this is merely the way in which order is created on the scene. The fact that I view Warezonian as a 'frivolous economy', and the fact that in a sense is anarchistic, does not mean that it is unorganized. But it is not organized by an 'invisible hand', nor by an 'enlightened monarch'. Warezonian is a dynamic and emergent structure, and is in a very distinct sense 'self-organizing' (see Kauffman 1993, Gustafsson 1994, Chia 1996). Kenneth Burke (1957) has likened culture to an ongoing conversation, one where you as an individual turn up in the middle of a discussion, acquaint yourself, participate and leave, while the conversation goes on. Entering you have no clue as to what anything means, but as you become more embedded you can venture a remark, object to something, tell your own stories. With regards to ethics, the case seems to be the same. Initially you are stuck in Wittgenstein's dilemma, and simply do what you are told, obey. Jumping into a jumbled mass of rules, laws and opinions, you aren't initially presented with any clear foundation of rationality through which you can infer correct rules of behavior. Instead, you have to imitate behaviors, hoping that that which you don't really understand is the correct way to go about. After a while this blind stumbling about will entrench patterns in your mind, clarifying that which is 'good'. Then you truly participate in the endless debate regarding truth, morality and the meaning of life, and society becomes what happens around you through your doing this. Warezonian is no different than any society, and the fact that it argues slightly differently about rules, and that these rules basically talk about how you should commit the illegalities you by necessity will commit, does not mean that this community is any less ethical internally than any other community. Looking at the vehemence with which rule-breaking is attacked, it might be **more moral** than market economies tend to be. At least it is just as actively moralizing.

YET ANOTHER EDITORIAL: THE NEW RIP RULES

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Around a month before Christmas, the five major games groups had a semi-decent dialog going about rip rules. This was in response to a number of "unrippable" and "hard-to-rip" games that hit the market (UT, WOT, U9). While some of them did get done, it was clear that rule changes were needed in order to make rips playable. And besides this, a change to the disk limit was required. Now, this wasn't the first time groups had been talking – there's been chatter for over half a year, probably more. This week with a rather hefty release (size and title wise) Myth has proclaimed new rules.

Now lets get one thing straight. Despite some confusing wording, these rules were devised by Myth, although many of the ideas were proposed by other groups. Neither CLS nor any other group has agreed to them. So this set of rules is a mute point. What Myth has done is set a course of events in motion – they've acted as a catalyst. You can expect, within a week, that an official set of rules will be adopted by all groups.

So there's not too much to debate here. Some of these rules are decent, some are a bit off – 70 disks is a tad large for any game if you're a modem user, as is 35 disks for an addon, however the re-rip rule if used correctly could prevent abuse of the inflated limit.

Written by Preacher Kane in NWR; Issue LXXVIII, March 29th 2000
(Note that the new 'official' rules were in fact already agreed upon, and that the controversial issue of rip size was adjusted down to 65 disks (à 2.88Mb).)

THE POTLATCH

By far the most famous case of a gift economy is the *potlatch*, a ceremony among the Kwakwaka'wakw Native Americans of British Columbia. Often referred to by the name of the most studied tribe, the Kwakiutl, the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation (and the other nations that engaged in the potlatch, which number at least the Haïda, Tsimshian and Nootka Nations (British Columbia) and additionally the Tlingit, Chilkat and Gitksan Nations in Alaska)¹⁴ has been as much a mainstay in (economic) anthropology as the Trobriand islanders. Anthropologically first studied by Franz Boas (1897) and his pupil Ruth Benedict (1934, see also Codere 1950 and note that a certain Niblack had written a report regarding the Kwakiutl for the Smithsonian as early as 1890), one of their central rituals formed the second pillar (the *kula* being the first) upon which Mauss constructed his seminal theory. Since then it has been a frequently used example in the anthropological debate. The case has become so central that in anthropology the native term has become generic for particular gift-exchanges, and e.g. Mauss describes the *kula* as a 'grand potlatch'.

The Kwakwaka'wakw seem to have lived a charmed life. Cultured and peaceful, they just happened to live in an area with abundant natural resources, and as a result of this could accumulate remarkable surpluses. Industrious and moderately advanced technologically, they in addition to their primary production from fishing, hunting and other forms of animal husbandry created a wide range of fineries and refined products, and were justly famous for their blankets. From anthropological data it is possible to reconstruct their productivity at least in part, and it seems to have been quite notable – they persistently created an abundance that made a distinct impression on the anthropologists that observed them. But what is more significant is that it made white businessmen quite eager to set up trading posts in the area, the importance of which we shall return to. While the prosperity created by the tribes wasn't one of mythical dimensions, they produced far more than they consumed, and their basic needs were obviously filled at almost all times. Consequently, their economy was quite healthy, at least in this respect. They managed and they created a surplus, something that can serve as at least a rudimentary definition of an economy. Mauss was quite taken with them:

[T]hey are very rich, and even now their fishing grounds, hunting grounds, and fur-trapping provide them with considerable surpluses, particularly when reckoned in European terms. They have the most solidly built houses of all the American tribes, and a very highly developed cedarwood industry. [...] Their material arts are of a very high order. [...] These people have excellent sculptors and professional designers.

Mauss 1924/1990, p. 34

Exactly what it was that made the Kwakwaka'wakw behave as they did is a bit unclear. They had been prone to violence and warfare in the 19th century (Harrison 1992, p. 228), and we know that the Canadian government later made overt warfare between the clans illegal. They also seem to have had the tendency to gather riches even though their tendency for consumption was more in line with how we usually view Native Americans, i.e. content with consuming at a level of subsistence. One could easily assume that their (forced) peacefulness and affluent economy would have led to an exceptionally placid and content way of life. Instead, they refined the symbolic and ritualized battle for honor to one of its most extreme forms. The tribes were far from egalitarian, and all had developed nomenclatures for classifying individuals according to rank and their prospects of rising or descending in these hierarchies. In fact, much of their energies seems to have been spent on continuing power games and trying to rise in social standing. Honor and name were important mechanisms in this. And as honor

could not be won through warfare, other avenues had to be explored. In the aptly titled *Fighting with Property* (Codere 1950) the potlatch is analyzed as precisely that, a substitute for open warfare.

A potlatch is, above all, a feast. The term is from the Chinook argot (though derived from the Nootka word 'patshat!'), and although the different tribes and clans had their own terms, this trade language was a *lingua franca* and the term seems to have been generic (Drucker 1955, p. 55). Different authors give slightly different translations of the term, among them 'giving', 'to feed' or 'to consume'. Among the Kwakiutl (i.e. the Kwakwaka'wakw) it means 'place where one is sated' (Berking 1999, p. 32-33), although Keating (1994) claims that the correct term is 'P!Esa" which can also mean 'to flatten an opponent' or 'baskets being emptied'.

In addition there are several terms distinguishing types of potlatches. For example, the Tsimshian distinguish a yaok, which is a large intertribal potlatch, from all the other kinds of potlatches. The Haida spoke of a walgat, a funeral potlatch, and the sika, a potlatch held for other reasons. The Kwakiutl equivalent of yaok is maxwa.
Keating 1994, note 1

It was a social gathering of great import, and at least during the period we have direct accounts from (approx. 1870-1950) it seems to have been one of the most central rituals for the participating tribes. In modern times, its importance has waned, and although the rituals still sometimes seem to be conducted it no longer has the same central function in the economy of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation (or any of the other nations). What is interesting about the potlatch, and why it is more interesting than banquets in other societies, is its political nature. It is economically important, central even, but it is also central to social structure, politics, religion, morality and law within the community. It should come as no surprise that Mauss used it as one of the main examples in arguing for his notion of the 'total social phenomenon'.



Figure 3: Hudson Bay blankets stored for a potlatch.¹⁵

When a chief for whatever reason wanted/had to prove himself, one of the best ways to do so was to give a potlatch. Simply stated this consisted of arranging a feast during which the chief gave magnificent gifts to the chief of another tribe, in order to shame the recipient and celebrate the splendor of the giver. The 'goal', if we can talk of one, was to give so much that the opposing party would be unable to repay the gifts and therefore suffer great dishonor. Although not 'pure' systems of reciprocity, the aim for any chief was to be able to repay gifts

with more fantastic gifts. Chiefs would go to great lengths to try to prove that they had given a potlatch that simply could not be replicated.

I am Yaqatlenis, I am Cloudy, and also Sewid; I am great Only One, and I am Smoke Owner, and I am Great Inviter. These are the names which I obtained as marriage gifts when I married the daughters of the chiefs of the tribes wherever I went. Therefore I feel like laughing at what the lower chiefs say, for they try in vain to down me by talking against my name. Who approaches what was done by the chiefs my ancestors? Therefore I am known by all the tribes over all the world. Only the chief my ancestor gave away property in a great feast, and all the rest can only try to imitate me. They try to imitate the chief, my grandfather, who is the root of my family.

Benedict 1934, p. 190-191

We could call the potlatches *competitions of honor*, polar opposites to the competitions of acquisition commonly found in Western societies. Potlatches occurred first and foremost in connection to political issues, such as the succession of a deceased chief, but they could be given for whatever reason, including “the naming of a child”, “removal of shame” and “the carving of a hat” (Tollefson 1995, p. 62). Politically, it could be used in quite a few ways, and in addition a potlatch could serve as a legal precedent in disputes, such as claims to resources. In this way, potlatching not only served as marks of honor, but the mark that a potlatch created was also referred back to in the case of disputes. We could further understand the potlatches as symbolic events by which the participants navigated both the moral and the political landscape of inter- and intra-tribal life, as well as a way of enhancing social bonds. It is many things, but first and foremost it was a function of a very clear norm in the societies in question. In the nations, social standing was always associated with generosity, even to the extent that it was impossible to talk about status without simultaneously talking about an individual’s largesse (Hyde 1979, p. 28). Even children participated in the potlatches, and a boy reaching puberty would celebrate this by taking his third name (first adult name), a ceremony that involved his giving presents to all the members of his clan.

Wa, out of the way,

Wa, out of the way.

*Turn your faces that I may give way to my anger by striking my fellow-chiefs.
They only pretend; they only sell one copper again and again and give it away
to the little chiefs of the tribes.*

Benedict 1934, p. 192

I am the great chief who vanquishes,

I am the great chief who vanquishes.

Oh, go on as you have done!

Only at those who continue to turn around in this world,

Working hard, losing their tails (like salmon), I sneer,

At the chiefs under the true great chief.

Benedict 1934, p. 192

In order to fully grasp the extent of generosity that distinguished the potlatch we need to understand how an individual giving a potlatch did in fact give away most or all of his/her¹⁶ property, and often that of friends and family too. As an example, one of the best documented potlatches is the case of the Nimkish Kwakwaka’wakw Dan(iel) Cranmer, a great potlatch given to celebrate his marriage (Keating 1994, see also Codere 1966, Cole 1991, Loo 1992). It lasted

for six days, was given around Christmas time in 1921, near Albert Bay, and the guests numbered around 300. Keating reports the giving in a play-by-play fashion:

1. On the first day, Cranmer accepts gifts from his wife's family. All of this and Cranmer's own fortune will be given during the following days.
2. On the second day, the first day of giving, Dan Cranmer gave 24 canoes, four motorboats, three pool tables and assorted things such as "blankets, gaslights, violins and guitars, kitchen utensils and three-hundred trunks." Moreover he gave great amounts of clothing to women and children and threw coins for children to gather.
3. It is unclear what he gave on the third day, as Dan Cranmer "couldn't remember", but the potlatching was apparently not paused.
4. On the fourth day he handed out more trunks, gramophones, sewing machines and furniture.
5. On the fifth day cash was given to many of the participants.
6. On the sixth day 1000 sacks of flour and some sugar was dealt out, an expense of more than 3000 dollars.

For this, one of the greatest potlatches ever documented, Dan Cranmer was imprisoned. As potlatching was outlawed (through Canada's Indian Act of 1885) he and fifty others were brought up on charges, and 22 were sentenced to jail (for two months). The legal issue, though interesting, is not all that important here, but goes to show how central the institution was. Why would Cranmer engage in such behavior, giving away all his wealth even when it was illegal and could result in a prison sentence? And even if we ignore the legal repercussions, why give away things to this degree? Effectively, he gave away everything he had. All of the participants received ample, even magnificent gifts, and no-one left empty-handed. This to celebrate a marriage, and of course the magnificence of Dan Cranmer. It is the latter that is central here. By giving a potlatch he is not only celebrating a special moment in his own life, he is tying up his life in the history of the tribe, proving himself a worthy and honorable man.

First and foremost the potlatches are social events. This cannot be emphasized enough. Although it is (usually) a chief who conducts the giving, it is in effect the entire tribe that is acting and whose wealth is given (Mauss's "total service"). While the greatest honor went to the head of the tribe, the entire tribe in effect shared and enjoyed the fame. Furthermore, the potlatches were also times when titles and names were bestowed, and the entire social fabric was symbolically re-constructed during a potlatch through the careful stating of all social changes within a tribe. In addition, the potlatches created and maintained ties between clans and tribes, and functioned as a kind of buffer. In the same manner as Sahlins (1972, p. 30-32) discusses how prodigality among hunter-gatherers can be understood, we could view the potlatching as a complex way by which the tribes level out their economic achievements as a kind of insurance against worse times. This, however, might again be the Westerner talking. Although the ritual probably did create a more stable economy for the Nations as a whole, the functionalism inherent in assuming this to be the 'reason' for the potlatch suggests a certain theoretical lassitude. Functionality might be an important aspect of survival for a ritual, i.e. functional rituals have an evolutionary advantage, but it doesn't actually explain how the ritual came to be - a fact that is implied in Huizinga's cultural theory of play. Gustafsson (1994, p. 162-163) expounds on this by noting that there are a multitude of rituals that do not 'make sense' at all

outside of their cultural context, and exemplifies this by referring to the ritual of ‘penis bleeding’ that certain tribes in New Guinea practiced (I will leave the specifics of the ritual to the sociological imagination of the reader). They do make sense within the societies they are practiced in, and we can observe them and even find explanations for them that suit us – such as social cohesion and economic benefits in the long run. Still, this does not mean that either explanation is translatable, nor that either is the ‘reason’ for the ritual. Instead, rituals seem to develop quite randomly, driven on by processes that have been called things like ‘the play-element’, ‘the civilization process’ (Elias 1978a) and ‘memetics’ (Gustafsson’s term). In all cases one refers back to processes of increasing organization (rules and norms), radicalization (the purification of a form) and dynamics/adaptation, all occurring not as intentional and planned actions but as a part of ‘blind’ cultural development. Potlatching, seen from this perspective, was not only a social gathering, but in fact a reflection of e.g. Kwakwaka’wakw society as a whole. We could say that it both creates and is the social in these communities.

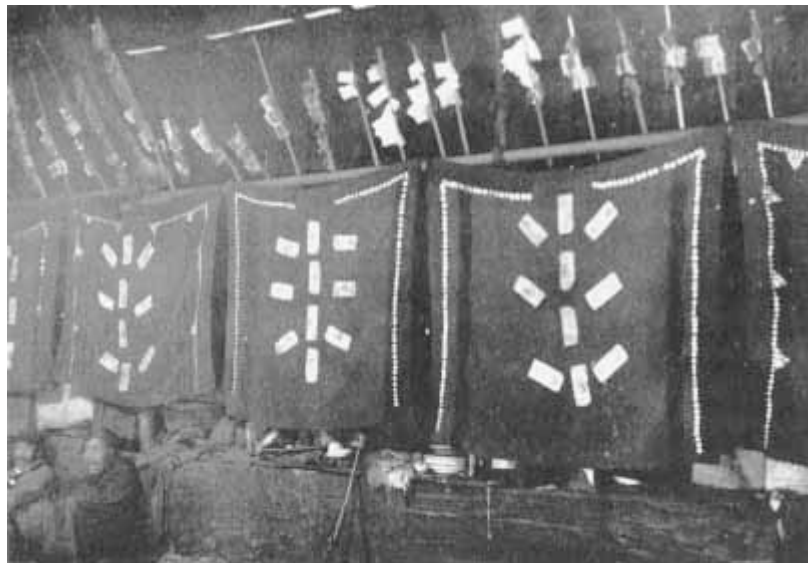


Figure 4: Dollar bills (\$600 in all) pinned to blankets and poles, part of a potlatch given by Yacouylas.¹⁷

What was at stake in potlatching can be described simply: the identity of the participants. A game with clear winners and losers, the potlatch was what gave individuals both valued names and determined their ‘faces’. Giving created and showed off your face, not giving took away from it. Mauss (1990, p. 117 (note 163)) tells of a mythical chief named Maxyualide who, having never sponsored a feast, got the additional name Qelsem – ‘Rotten Face’. As the tribes were wealthy beyond their immediate needs, it seems that wealth was not all that important to them, but society and identity is. In a situation where the community can easily feed and house themselves, the further accumulation of property must be addressed in some way. Europeans promptly invented feudalism and capitalism (Marx 1867/1976), but this is not a necessary development. Where Europe developed a burning interest for accumulation, e.g. hunter-gatherers generally seem to have developed other interests:

Why should we plant, when there are so many mongomongo nuts in the world?
Bemused Bushman quoted in Lee 1968 (from Sahlins 1972, p. 27)

Among the First Nations of British Columbia the interest focused on social standing. Although it might seem unnatural to a Western observer, the chiefs apparently ignored the

possibility of amassing great piles of material possessions and concentrated on giving them away instead. Hyde (1979, p. 34-35) quotes the early anthropologist H.G. Barnett:

Virtue rests in publicly disposing of wealth, not in its mere acquisition and accumulation. Accumulation in any quantity by borrowing or otherwise, in fact, is unthinkable unless it be for the purpose of immediate redistribution.

The potlatch economies were moral economies, for virtue lay not in thriftiness but in indifference to material possession. Much like the Aztec merchants described by Bataille, the communities seem to have viewed wealth as something that simply came to the worthy and the virtuous. The fact that you had managed to collect riches proved nothing in and of itself. To be able to give everything away, however, showed not only that you had more than your rival, but in addition that you didn't care about such trifling things and possibly that you were so sure of your abilities of amassing in the future that you simply could give it all away today. In such an economy, the individual act of owning something is a marginal phenomenon. Economy, which is always a social matter, is born in the exchanges (much as pointed out by Simmel). This is furthermore a question of *symbolic exchanges*, as the given was primarily a symbol for the honor of the giver and shouldn't be understood as the mere shuffling about of commodities (cf. Baudrillard 1993). This also relates to the reciprocities in these rituals. A chief who had received gifts in a potlatch naturally had to prove that he was a worthy participant in the system, and therefore had to give a potlatch of his own, and a greater potlatch if possible. To fail to give a greater potlatch was shameful, proof that one was not an honorable man – for an honorable man would have enough riches to reciprocate with. A participant's identity, his 'face', is thus at stake. If he fails to play in the correct way, he finds himself outside the game and simultaneously society itself. Mauss (1924/1990) points out that the system of obligations he has outlined is very visible here. You have to potlatch, for this is the main way in which honor is attained, and honor is all. You cannot refuse the gifts given by a fellow chief, for this would mean that you fear the gift and means losing face (in particular cases, though, it can mean that one declares oneself to be above the things given). Finally, you have to give potlatches of your own, to one-up the other chiefs, and by this reciprocate.

In Tollefson (1995, p. 62) we learn that a Tlingit chief would strive to sponsor as many as eight potlatches during his lifetime, a goal that supposedly was reached by at least two chiefs: Xat-ga-wet of Yakutat and Shakes of Wrangell. A chief was in a sense bound to giving potlatches as often as possible, and Tollefson quotes an elder as stating: "a chief must prove his ability and never stop proving it." In this way, a potlatch was not merely an instrumental way to achieve status, but a process by which social standing was re-affirmed. Even if sponsoring a single potlatch could attain the giver great honor, the chiefs did in fact compete in the giving of ritual feasts. Some have in this seen evidence that the system was in fact a process of investments, capital advanced with a profit-motive, a view similar to the one where it is seen as a mechanism to buffer the individual tribes' economies from external shocks. Here, again, our normal language-use in economic matters might lead us astray, as our thinking of motives and gains are so tightly interwoven with our specific economic culture. Even though he recognizes the particular nature of the contest Berking (1999, p. 43) goes so far as to quote rates when he is discussing the reciprocities in potlatching states:

On the occasion of a festival, or even in the form of one, 'potlatch-giving' consists in the ceremonial and generous handing over of costly presents, which, after a certain period, must not only be reciprocated but just as ceremoniously and generously outmatched, with annual interest

rates above one hundred per cent not at all uncommon.
(emphasis added)

A similar view can be found in the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu (1990, p. 105-106) where the time between gift and counter-gift is presented as a *function*, i.e. an instrumental phenomenon. In such views the structure of the gift-exchange is viewed as a system of implicit contracts – a view that makes gifts and commodities structurally synonymous, with the exchange of gifts being more laden with meanings but not qualitatively different from commodity exchange. But Helmuth Berking does not in fact present the potlatch thus, and his use of the term ‘interest rate’ is probably not meant to be verbatim (although Mauss’s (1990, p. 42) use of the same term, which Berking utilizes, might). He goes on to note that the participants do not struggle for wealth, but for ‘names’ and titles, and that the potlatch only circulates wealth in order to gain stature. The material form of the gifts is not particularly important, as they serve only as tools to acquire that which is truly valuable (for them), social renown. Sahlins, again (1972, p. 249-250), quotes a study by Hogbin where a similar structure was observed among the ‘Gawa in New Guinea:

The leaders were “men who ate bones and chewed lime – they presented the best meat to others, leaving only scraps for themselves, and were so free with areca nuts and pepper that they had no betel mixture left. Folk-tales about legendary headmen of the past relate that, although these men had ‘more pigs than anyone could count and bigger gardens than are made now,’ they gave everything away”.

If we look at the other, more extreme form of potlatching, this becomes radicalized further. In some cases, chiefs did not contend themselves with giving away wealth, but destroyed it instead. This, the final form of showing disdain of wealth, shows us just how radically different the potlatch was. Mauss’s (1990, p. 6) remarks on “the purely sumptuary destruction of wealth that has been accumulated in order to outdo the rival chief” scarcely begins to do justice to the agonistic nature the potlatch could take. Bataille (1991, p. 68) begins his discussion about the potlatch by describing how Tlingit chiefs in the 19th century would engage in the killing and reciprocal killing of slaves in order to shame their counterpart, and further refers to a custom among the Chukchee of the Siberian Northeast where dog teams (which in their conditions were probably more valuable than slaves) were slaughtered in order to repress rivals. Less drastic but as ‘uneconomical’ was the practice of throwing e.g. immensely valuable copper plates in the sea. A chief could shame his rivals by burning great quantities of candlefish oil or his own house. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the life of a chief through suicide was sometimes presented as a counter-gift, a variation of the practice of suicide as the annulment of shame that can be found in many societies. Whatever reasons we might wish to find in the gift economy of giving escalating feasts, we cannot claim that this kind of wanton destruction of material goods has a productive motive in the usual sense. Even if we were to believe (mistakenly or not) that the normal potlatches are intentionally devised mechanisms for the equal distribution of wealth and insurance for pending famine, the destructive feast will still escape our conception of economic rationality.

One of the most prized possessions among at least the Kwakwaka’wakw were the big copper plaques for which they were justly famous. These were decorated with totemic animals and all carried a name (such as “Drawing All Property from the House” (Hyde 1979, p. 28)). They were immensely valuable, and the giving of these was usually accompanied with a long rendition of its history. If a chief wanted to truly shame his rival, he would take a copper –

preferably a particularly glorious and valuable one – break this and give it to his rival. The rival would reciprocate by breaking another, just as valuable copper and give back the pieces of both coppers, something that was then reciprocated with a great feast. But the rival could also outdo himself by instead of giving back the pieces throw them in the ocean. This final act resulted in great glory for the chief (ibid., p. 32). He would then have completely forfeited the return gifts, and his rival would be shamed. We can scarcely imagine an action that would leave the eponymous *homo oeconomicus* more bewildered.

*Doubtless potlatch is not reducible to the desire to lose, but what it
brings to the giver is not the inevitable increase of return gifts;
it is the rank which it confers on the one who has the last word.*
Bataille 1991, p. 71

Radical destruction of wealth can be seen as the *final* final word in an argument, a way in which the cycle of reciprocities can be ended. The contests will go on, but will at the same time lose some of their immediacy. Now the potlatches needn't be directly reciprocated, merely 'imitated'. We can see two angles to this. Destruction can be viewed as analogous with *sacrifice*, as a cleansing ritual. It can by this go to show the both the wealth of the destroyer and his distance to possessions. But it can also be viewed as returning wealth to its origin (God, gods or Nature), as seems to be the case in the ritual slaughter of prisoners of war (slaves) among the Aztec merchants. By upholding the cycle of regeneration, the potlatching chief can through destruction actually be showing his honor as a responsible consumer, acting on the behalf of the entire tribes consumption. We could compare this to the notion of *hau*, which has been identified as the generative force of economy, that which makes growth possible (the *hau* of the forest, for example (see Sahlins 1972, p. 157-162)). In both cases, destruction is not willful obliteration of the material, it is a way to interact and engage **with the idea of economy itself**. Hence we can read the potlatches as **commentaries on economy** as well as economies in and of themselves.

RETURN TO WAREZONIA – THE ELECTRONIC POTLATCH

We have now reached the point where the title of this text can be addressed. I claim that the structure evident in the potlatch is structurally synonymous to the structured interactions of competitive giving on the warez scene. More succinctly put, I would like to call Warezonian the 'electronic potlatch' alluded to in the title of this essay. On the warez scene the rituals might be less overt and veiled in the particular colloquialisms of the computer underground, but there are fundamental similarities. Instead of tribes we have the groups, instead of coppers and candlefish oil we have games and applications, and instead of megalomaniac bragging we have... well, megalomaniac bragging in NFOs.

The way in which the societies of the First Nations were structured wholly around the practice of the potlatch, with social life within the tribes being dependant on it, is mirrored on the warez scene. In both cases, it is the process of giving and proving ones mettle that gives meaning to the social, and the material instances of exchange can be viewed as mere instruments for a 'higher' purpose. As has been stated several times before, there is a strong element of civic duty in the dealings of Warezonians, just as there is in any community. We all to a degree want (leaving the discussion of free will vs. determinism aside for the moment) to be good citizens, i.e. we wish to have some form of social standing. In some this tendency is more pronounced, but if possible we will behave well rather than badly (remembering the fact that

the 'bad boy' is a social role, as is the fool, and the clown). Among the people discussed above, the giving of sumptuous feasts was virtuous, simply good manners. It was not in any way *special* or *astonishing* to behave in this way, rather the opposite. To be parsimonious was uncivil, the mark of the uncultured lout. Giving gifts was in this sense *mundane*, just as it is in Warezonian. Both societies have developed a system out of this fundamental tendency to share and swap, a system that has taken on a life of its own while it turns evermore radical and extreme.

On the warez scene you can sometimes come across the term 'sneaker net'. This refers to the most primitive form of warez distribution, the way in which games were pirated (without profit) in the earliest days. The sneaker net is simply the network set up by walking (in sneakers, assumedly) over to a friend's house with a program, in order to install it on her computer. Not a big deal, more part of the natural tendency to help out a friend, and really no different in structure from taping an album for a friend or the sharing of a recipe from a cookbook. We could say that Warezonian developed directly out of such inauspicious arrangements, as information technology and networks and the culture of these evolved in concert (cf. Star 1995). For in the beginning warez releasing was not the efficient and competitive business it is today. Rather, games would be cracked more or less on a whim, haphazardly. We have to remember that the early computer-games often lacked security functions, and sometimes these were simply printed sheets of codes that could be easily photocopied (I remember fondly my sheet of codes for Sinclair Spectrum games, printed on a dot-matrix printer and rather faded and tattered by the time it was bequeathed to me.). Even the early cracking of encoded security schemes didn't create anything even close to the electronic potlatch. It wasn't until some individuals in the demo-scene (where you compete in creating the most accomplished code in a predetermined and minute allotment of memory space, e.g. psychedelic moving graphics using as little code as possible) started to adorn the games they cracked with little introductory demos when the race for status can be said to have begun. In some cases this marking was as subtle as a signature on an introductory screen, whereas in other cases could be as elaborate as rolling credits over dazzling graphics. This, the 'naming' or a release was of course the equivalent of declaring oneself a provider, making your contribution explicit and known to the community - the 'calling out'. In these early days the lack of efficient methods of distribution kept the competition rather staid. A popular method was actually the staging of parties where releases were swapped, something that shows the local nature of the scene at these times. Also, the postal service was utilized, as participants mailed releases to each other. Releasing was even then a way to attain status, but the real race for status had not yet developed and the fame of releasers was often pretty local. This was changed through the birth of the BBS scene, when technological development made the wider distribution practical and accomplished the tying together of a virtual community. Here, and with the added speed and functionality that the move to the internet provided, the warez scene became truly competitive. Aided by new technological possibilities, the traditions of the scene took on a more radical flavor. It was no longer enough to release a game every two months, or every two days, but now you had to release quantities weekly, or find yourself described as a non-entity. Just as their Native American counterparts, the Warezonians slowly and unwittingly made their competition more and more extreme, so that we today actually can refer to '0-sec' releasing, the immediate donation.

If we were to compare the tradition of potlatching and the warez scene in more detail, the similarities become even more pronounced. Giving a feast for a Tlingit chief was a way to enforce his identity and show off his grandeur. The Aztec merchant proved through lavish banquets that the gods favored him. A releaser shows through a release that he/they are capable

coders and ‘good for the scene’. All are in fact just being virtuous, within their own contexts, just as the parsimonious businessman is virtuous within the confines of bourgeois capitalism. Proving virtue has the capacity to shame all those who haven’t, so there is a moral obligation to retort (see Bourdieu’s scheme presented earlier) or otherwise suffer dishonor. But this publicizing must be done ‘correctly’, according to the rules – telling how many programs one has personally accumulated is not explicitly forbidden in Warezonian, but bragging of this type is definitively gauche. Publicizing the amount of software you have released, on the other hand, is common. Furthermore, in all cases it is actually a small aristocracy that is doing most (all) of the giving, while the common people participate as an outlet for the inner circles largesse. In Warezonian these are the ‘lamers’, the great unwashed masses of the nets who download software from websites the elite would never frequent. The patrician tendencies in all these systems (we could term-wise liken them to the ‘big-man’ orders in Melanesian economies (cf. Sahlins 1963) show of the righteous nature of exchange in them, that which Mauss (1990, p. 22) referred to as “trade [...] carried on in a noble fashion.” Release groups can through releasing show their magnificence, their exalted position. Consequently they also adorn themselves with names that could almost pass for names given through potlatching: Pirates With Attitude, The Corporation, Legend Never Die, Pinnacle, Drink or Die, Really Into Spreading Elite, The Corporate Gods, Class, Divine, Razor 1911, Paradigm – to name some of the more famous names. One gets the feeling that Yaqatlenis would not have problems grasping this naming, although he probably would have found the release groups inclination to keep to just one name unnaturally modest.

Comparing these societies further, we will also notice that for all their aristocratic posturing, they are acephalous. Warezonian is basically anarchistic, or at least very decentralized, whereas the First Nations at least according to some (see Drucker 1983) lacked any universal political organizing. Even if we take the rigid structures of social standing into account, political authority was always a tentative notion, regulated through the rituals of the potlatches: “Both sides in moiety potlatches knew the rules and so proceeded to conduct their political affairs like chess players, with each side making its response only after the other had acted.” (Tollefson 1995) They are political spheres, even excessively so, but lack the rigid ‘management’ we call statehood or fixed institutions. What can be inferred from this is that it is not merely the question of a permanent ruling class frivolously dealing out gifts, but in fact something more complicated. Though the ‘business’ is conducted in a noble manner, it is a very serious endeavor for those who participate, for it is only by participating and playing the game you can hold on to your position. A Warezonian that no longer contributes to the scene will find himself locked out of it, just as the chief who didn’t give a feast got a ‘rotten face’. Among the Kwakwaka’wakw, the Haïda and the Tsimshian failure to reciprocate a potlatch could even result in enslavement, the total loss of identity and freedom. The givers are locked into a system of perpetual generosity, having to prove oneself over and over again. It is like a continuous game of ‘king of the hill’, where the only thing you can say about the person at the very top is that she is very, very vulnerable. And being at the top does not mean that a hierarchy is established for more than a fleeting moment of glory and prestige. Which doesn’t make it any less fun, though.

BACKLASH:

RELEASES:

Phoenix_v1.1_Update-BACKLASH

Total: 1

POINTS:

1

Comments:

Just when I was about to delete these guys from my review (and from my

memory), they finally do something. A patch. Yay, competition for Razor.

The Good:

A sign of life.

The Bad:

Don't expect a repeat of this momentous effort anytime soon.

[...]

DVN proved it can rip, with UT, WOT, etc. They proved they can get games early. They can train games, they can crack. What they CAN'T seem to do is accomplish these tasks on a regular basis, and long dry periods occur as a result. Until they get active on a weekly basis, they've got the 3rd/4th spot secured, but not much hope of moving up.

*From OMG YET ANOTHER GAMES REPORT ISSUE #5 by
The Preacher Kane, printed in NWR; Issue LXXIV, February 25th 2000*

What additionally unites these two particular systems is that they serve the purpose of counterpoints to classical views of economy. Naturally they haven't developed as such, being cultural forms and thus being their own reason. But by being so different, so *alien*, they allow us to think in new ways. As has been suggested earlier, potlatches, electronic and traditional, can from our perspective function as commentaries on economy in general. They are the negation of conventional thinking in economy, aggressive manifestations of anti-economy (Attali & Guillaume 1974). As our 'mirrors of production' (Baudrillard 1975) they can be ways for us to observe ourselves, our prejudices regarding the thinking of the economy. Prolonged exposure to them would probably alter our thinking radically.

ABUNDANCE

One of the reasons why economics is frequently referred to as the 'dismal science' (approx. 1850, originally attributed to Thomas Carlyle) is its quite unnatural preoccupation with scarcity. In economics, all manners of scarcity are seen as the driving forces of the (economic) world, and particularly material scarcity is taken as natural law. The few things that are not scarce are usually labeled 'ubiquities', and they too are normally seen as more or less scarce (air and water are ubiquitous, whereas clean air and drinkable water are scarce). In fact, economic models are almost always based on scarcity, with 'rational choice' and exchange tit-for-tat functioning as the mechanisms with which this scarcity is managed. Building upon an assumption of man as being virtually insatiable, endowed with a voracious appetite and a limitless potential hunger for any and all things thrown in her path, existing or not, it makes for some pretty funny results. Although the model of behavior described above can sometimes be observed in small children, particularly in stores that stock candy and toys, it serves less well as a *general* model of human economic behavior. Also, it assumes that the 'initial' state from which economy grows is one of need and meager resources.

If we return for a moment to the Kwakwaka'wakw, they quite obviously lived in such abundance that one wonders if the idea of meager resources might not have baffled them. Their fishing, for instance, was so rich that scarcity was an aberration, not the rule. And the coppers they so valued were not mined but actually lay on the ground waiting to be found! Their problem, which we will return to, was more one of distributing the abundance they so easily generated. We might think that they represent an anomaly, as we know that most societies have developed out of a state of perpetually hard circumstances. Or do we? In his essay *The Original*

Affluent Society Marshall Sahlins (1972) lays forth the theory that the original state of affairs for human societies actually was one of relative affluence. Not affluence of the type we usually recognize, one with great quantities of material goods, but neither was it a state of scarcity and dearth. Instead, the 'primitive' tribes of hunter-gatherers he discusses lived relatively carefree lives, consuming little but working even less. In fact, they do not lack the possibility to gather a surplus, quite the opposite, but as they find no point in doing so they prefer to hunt and gather enough to sustain themselves for the day and spend the rest of the time sleeping or socializing. Sahlins (ibid., p. 13) quotes Gusinde in discussing how, among other examples, the idea of the economic in possession could be turned on its head among hunters:

The [Yahgan] Indian does not even exercise care when he could conveniently do so. A European is likely to shake his head at the boundless indifference of these people who drag brand-new objects, precious clothing, fresh provisions, and valuable items through thick mud, or abandon them to the swift destruction by children and dogs... Expensive things that are given them are treasured for a few hours, out of curiosity; after that they thoughtlessly let everything deteriorate in the mud and wet. The less they own, the more comfortable they can travel, and what is ruined they occasionally replace.

It might go against our notion of what is meant by the word 'economic', but for a nomad the weight of possessions can easily make them fundamentally uneconomic. Likewise, a band of hunters can find themselves in a situation where they have amassed too much meat to carry around comfortably, leaving them no other economic way out than having a party and feed all the neighbors. Their problem is thus less one of managing scarcity than it is one of managing the occasional (or not-so-occasional) abundance. Similarly, referring to ethnographic data regarding the working patterns of indigenous Australians, gathered before cross-contamination with capitalism occurred, Sahlins (ibid., p. 14-32) shows that these people in general worked far less than modern man does. As 'primitive' people often reside in areas where basic resources are easily obtained (and such areas did and still do exist), they could gather enough sustenance for the day in as little as two hours, and seldom needed more than four. Feeling no pressing need to exert themselves any further, they instead enjoyed the plentiful leisure time this allowed. I can think of no more forceful argument against the notion that the original state of man and the economy is scarcity. As has been suggested by e.g. Baudrillard (1975, cf. Callon 1998) it might be more correct to state that scarcity is a creation of economics and the capitalism it grew out of. Following Marx (1867/1976) we can state that scarcity was a concept that had to be developed in order to allow for the project of capital, but although there is nothing to say that a construction could not be real (cf. Hacking 1999, Czarniawska 2001b) it cannot be primordial. When it comes to scarcity, the empirical evidence is stacked up against it.

Another problem with the idea of perennial scarcity is that it would make economy a wholly static system. Classical economic theory concentrates on how economic activity is arranged in chains of tit-for-tat exchanges, where a 'perfect' market is one where an equilibrium is sustained at all times. Observing this view we will find that development depends on shocks to the system, not on the system itself. An economy of scarcities, managed with barter and markets, will after a while merely circulate things as all try to get the exact analogous value of their inputs out of transactions (cf. Lash & Urry 1994). It isn't until a surplus is introduced into the system, either through new resources or technological development, that dynamism and non-incremental growth becomes possible. But the mere existence of new resources and additional possibilities for utilization goes against the notion of scarcity as an elemental

concept. Extension of the economy, of any kind, is logical proof of the existence of abundance, but the fundamental ambiguity inherent in this has received little interest in economic theory.

“That can’t be right! I live in constant scarcity and with unfulfilled needs!” This counter-argument is logical and to be expected. I am not arguing that there is an unlimited amount of matter and resources merely there for the taking. Yes, we have unfulfilled needs, and yes, there is starvation in the world. But what Sahlins is saying is that at least the former is not a necessary state. Needs are for the most part culturally formed (Sahlins 1976, *passim.*), and for those needs that aren’t, at the dawn of humankind these could be fulfilled with little more than moderate exertion. Modern society has developed in a way that makes it impossible to revert back to this stage, but it still poses a serious challenge to how we conceptualize the birth of economy and therefore economy itself. Likewise it seems to be a mistake to claim that people always will fight continuously for higher levels of need-satisfaction, as a change in cultural form (such as the adoption of a sub-culture) can result in the reformulation of these needs. Taking culture seriously, as a force which can permanently alter our view of the world, we would have to conclude that there might be no way in which we can differentiate between needs and wants except in a few elemental cases. Scarcity, then, is not something that economy combats or manages, it is what afflicts economy when it has developed into a particular form.

What we are discussing is basically the old formalism vs. substantivism-debate in economic anthropology. Is economy a set of formal rules, a single unitary form of rationality, or is it a set of processes going through the social world as a whole? In other words, should a social science look for laws (Wilk 1996 refers back to Flannery’s term of a “Gee Whiz, Mr. Science” school) or interpretations? The formalist standpoint, where ‘economy’ stands for the Western conception of calculative rationality (which is assumed to be universally applicable), might be discredited in anthropology (see Wilk 1996, p. 13), but its legacy is alive in studies of business, organization and management. And particularly in economics. The substantivist position, where the economy is immersed in the society (and vice versa), might superficially be more popular (if seldom made explicit), particularly due to the way in which ‘constructivist’ standpoints have become established in these areas, but its consequences are rarely expounded upon. A substantivist standpoint, which allows for cultural forces not only in the establishment of economic behavior but in economic rationality itself, questions models of economy which aim at making behavior universally translatable, i.e. ways of portraying economy that makes all motives reducible to simple models of self-interest. Scarcity, as a factor that must be dealt with by the individual calculating agent, is part of just such a model and should at least not be taken immediately for granted.

General Economy

Classical economy imagined the first exchanges in the form of barter. Why would it have thought that in the beginning a mode of acquisition such as exchange had not answered the need to acquire, but rather the contrary need to lose or squander?

Bataille 1967/1991, p. 67

Even if Georges Bataille has had the dubious pleasure of being turned into an early patron saint of postmodern approaches to knowledge, and his writing on sexual perversion and transgression has many admirers, we can in his oeuvre find much rigorous if idiosyncratic analysis. Surprisingly enough, even for him (cf. the preface to *ibid.*), his most analytic and thorough theoretical work dealt with economy. For this strange perverted man, who shared his

time between garish bordellos and dusty libraries, rewrites economic theory totally in the pages of *The Accursed Share*. Beginning from an exposition of the way in which nature depends on an abundance of biochemical energy for growth within its system, he goes on to define *abundance* and *excess* as the moving principles of economy, a concept he understands so widely that he calls it the 'general economy'. In fact, this thesis is already well developed in an essay Bataille published in 1933, sixteen years before the original publication of *La part maudite*. In *La notion de dépense* (published in *La critique social*) he begins by outlining the insufficiency of utility as a principle by which economic behavior can be described. Were it so that all of economy could be described through utility, most things in human life would fall outside of it, among them much of what drives the economy itself. Gustafsson (1994) has made a similar point by remarking that if it is only the natural and the necessary that should interest us in the economy, almost nothing would remain. We use clothes that are too refined to be considered utilitarian, we eat refined foods, we have things like 'furniture', 'cars', 'books' and 'computers', none of which can be found in nature and all of which are to an extensive degree fineries created by cultural excesses. Were it not for excesses, we would still enjoy our Paleolithic affluence.

What he [Bataille] proposed in his enigmatic and mesmerizing book The Accursed Share was that, in our modern capitalist productivism, we have lost sight of this fundamental law of physics and material existence: that the surplus energy and wealth left over after the basic conditions for subsistence, reproduction and growth has been satisfied must be expended.

Yang 2000, p. 482

What interests Bataille is what interests any economist, any businessman. It is the question of *surplus*, that which is not immediately consumed in the processes of the economy. But whereas this for the businessman is an unproblematic if highly desirable goal, and it for the economist is a mere result of other processes, for Bataille it is an enigma and the quintessential issue of economy generally – it is the 'accursed share'. Analyzing economy empirically, not through intellectualized models, he comes to the conclusion that the drive of economy comes from management. But this is not the management of scarcity and utility functions, as the economists would have us believe, nor the kind taught in business schools. The original affluent society dealt in utilities; feeding oneself for the day, finding a dwelling, surviving, reproducing. After that it frolicked. In this sense much of economic theory is stuck in the Paleolithic, for it deals with problems that were solved and managed then, with lots of time left over for socializing. Now, after immediate needs are fulfilled, all else is by logical necessity excess. And even if we were to claim that much of this excess amounts to culturally created needs, and therefore necessities, we still have plenty of economic activity that amounts to frivolous outlays: perversions, luxury and gambling being Bataille's examples. We can without hesitance add gaming and other forms of monkey business to this list. Activities such as these are for Bataille instances of *expenditure*, the necessary 'blowing off steam' for modern man. But he does not mean this in a psychological sense. He views such excesses as a necessary and creative force in economy, much as a steam engine couldn't function if it did not generate an excessive and explosive surplus of... steam. Likewise, in every case of scarcity and starvation we can find a super-abundant growth (of the population, of the use of a particular technology, etc.). On all levels, from the astronomical (e.g. the sun) to the individual (e.g. pornography) we find forms of spending that are reasons unto themselves instead of being directly utilitarian.

As for the present historical situation, it is characterized by the fact that judgments concerning the general situation proceed from a particular point of view. As a rule, particular existence always risks succumbing for lack of resources. It contrasts with general existence whose resources

are in excess and for which death has no meaning.
Bataille 1991, p. 39

Bataille travels far from the equilibrium of the market economy, where everything has a corresponding price and a utility function. For him, the occupation with utility and balanced books might be suitable for parts of the economy, but definitively not for the whole. On the whole, there is abundance, and this abundance can be found in many particular cases too. He criticizes Mauss, whom he drew greatly upon for empirical data, as Mauss's view of e.g. the potlatch emphasizes the *reciprocal* nature of the ritual. This, the strive for balance might in fact hide the most fundamental part of the potlatch and similar rituals. We could hypothesize that they in fact were instituted out of a different strive. Just as the hunters in Sahlins, for whom an abundance of meat is a problem that must be managed, the Tlingit may have found themselves in a situation where they simply produced so much that e.g. storing it became a problem or a nuisance. Why, asks Bataille, not view the potlatch as that which it resembles most: luxury?

Almost all theories of gift-giving call attention to the return. Whether this is a return-gift, social bonds, debt, shame or any other form of response, the gift is always seen as at least partially *interested*, never free. This was of course Mauss's great theoretical contribution, the logic of the gift-relation. But as e.g. Imken (1998) in his analysis of Bataille has remarked, this places gift-giving within the same closed and static sphere that the market occupies, with its continuous tit-for-tat. Imken notes that Bataille's analysis is harmonious with modern thinking regarding complex open systems, the conceptualization of organizing as something else than the machinic equilibriums of closed systems. He goes on to compare Bataille's occupation with waste with the way in which modern thinking regarding emergent systems emphasize things such as dissipation and chaos (see e.g. Prigogine & Stengers 1984). The idea that waste and non-utilitarian expense is a fault in the system is in Bataille turned upside-down. Waste and expense is what makes the system possible, for without excess nothing can happen. If we take the case of the potlatch, for Mauss it is fundamentally a system wherein honor is achieved through investment of material goods, face bought through gifts. Bataille radicalizes this. He claims that although this might be the end-result, it is an unintended consequence. The potlatch is a game of luxury, it is a glorification of the extraneous. The giver, the one who has lost most is the one who will feel victorious. If the potlatch is returned, the extravagant gifts he will receive places him in debt and obligation. A participant strives to be *free*, free of obligations, but at the same time free of material bonds. The destructive potlatch is not an aberration; it is a logical consequence of how the game is played. Return in this system is necessary in order for the game to continue, but it is a regulatory aspect, not a reason for engaging in it.

Derrida (1992) seems to agree with Bataille in this. His critique of Mauss hinges on the fact that the gift as presented in *The Gift* is in fact nothing of the sort. The systems Mauss creates are systems of "economy, exchange, contract (*do et des*)" (ibid., p. 24). The necessity of the reply might be a subconscious transferral of the Western economic mindset! Derrida goes on to state that what is given in the gift is, in fact, respite – the gift of time. Gifts are never gifts except in this sense. Echoing (bizarrely enough) Bourdieu, it is the period between the exchanges that become significant in Derrida's reading. But Bataille is more far-reaching in his critique. In his view gifts are gifts, and "the ideal would be that a potlatch could not be repaid." (Bataille 1991, p. 70) The rituals of expenditure and the results of these rituals are interesting but not central. Neither are the temporalities central. For Derrida these open the space for 'play', non-rational activities, but this space is always tentative, subject to the return of the exchange. The vision of excess, on the other hand, views *economy itself as play*. Rationality is

constructed in retrospect, and all structures are based on some superfluous move that later has achieved the title of necessity. If Derrida is a realist (*sic*), Bataille is a fantastic optimist. *The Accursed Share* is the playful foundation of economy, and it is an actual fundament. Kosalka (1999) writes:

Each culture he [Bataille] analyzes, be it Tibet, the Aztecs, or early Islam, is defined by an initial choice of gift, of the way in which the excess wealth the culture produces is expended. "Human unproductive expenditure creates new unproductive values, which reconnect humans to the universe through the loss principle." In this notion, there is more than a slight echo of the demands of Dionysus as the foundation of a healthy culture. There is the possibility of a sovereign act of cultural production that bears little resemblance to a rational choice determined by maximization of available resources. It is the very moment of definition of humanity rising above the utilitarian dominance that signifies the life of an animal.

Without wanting to elevate Warezonian to the level of a world-culture, the description is otherwise apt. The scene can in a way be likened to a "way in which the excess wealth the culture produces is expended." It imbalances capitalism, and acts as its valve.

The Abundance of Warezonian

Looking back again to the behavior of the Warezonians, we can begin to formulate some ideas as to the reason they have adopted such a culture. First, Western society quite obviously is fabulously wealthy. Quite a few live in a situation where large amounts of money can be directed to the excesses of a hobby. For some this is golf, for some fashion, and yet for others it has been the warez scene. With primary, secondary and tertiary needs fulfilled, an individual can quite obviously engage in activities that are not directly geared towards further accumulation. Second, there is an abundance of products in the world, particularly of the kind discussed here. For every influential piece of software there is a plethora of runners-up, cheap alternatives and simply inferior substitutes. Software revenues for PC games in the US alone amounted to \$1.6 billion in the year 2000. With the profusion of points-of-sale and small software companies, no dependable statistics as to the amount of officially released programs exist, but any observation of the industry will reveal that the amount of software released yearly is staggering. Third, with the revolution in information technology we received a superfluity of connections and storage space, great vast tracts of unused resources. Transfers became extremely cheap, space ceased to be a restricting factor, and communication became more manageable. Fourth, for a product that is priced a zero, there are abundant takers. As the networks proliferated, it became feasible to talk of the 'end-user', an entity you live in an odd relationship with - belittled as a 'lamer' he also was a way to make sense of the warez transaction. On the whole, resource-wise Warezonian resembles the mythical West, with abundant resources, wide tracts of land, and great possibilities. Unfortunately, the attack of the lamers might be analogous with the appropriation of land by the American settlers, many and often rather desperate individuals with little cultural sensitivity. Consequently, Warezonians have largely retired back into reservations of their own making. But the sentiment is still there.

HoW, in short, a group that is dedicated in bringing you what you want. Our goal is simple, bring the Warez scene together as ONE force, ONE group, ONE scene. Most of all, the goal as in all lives, keep and spread the warez for free!

From the NFO of House of Warez, dated September 27th 1998

The electronic potlatch could thus be understood as an adaptation to very specific conditions of abundance, particularly technologically created such. When it has become possible to actually give and share things with abandon, something has obviously prompted the participants to do so. We could trace this back to the ideology of freedom and rebellion prevalent in the early days when computer enthusiasts first started forming a culture. Or we could trace it further back, to the primitive act of competition, which would mean that the market mentality survived in a specific context, and that the revolution in information and network technology changed that context. But whether we view capitalism or Warezonianism as the aberration, the fact is that one cultural form which the abundance of information technology can give birth to is that of competitive giving, a form of gift-economy. Warezonianism is the result of a particular form of abundance, the one inherent in ease of movement and removed barriers for duplication. When a program can be copied a thousand times at basically no cost, the idea of it as a 'scarce' resource seems strained. When such objects can be transferred around the world quickly and almost for free, the term 'transaction cost' loses much of its sting. When you can be generous, with few limitations and no costs, what can you do? The Warezonians have adapted to the abundance around them, and the fact that they have done so in a manner that at least resembles altruism is testament to the tendency of sharing among the social animals.

Furthermore we have to remember that ritual expenditure of this kind is always a field of great exuberance and enthusiasm. Participants on the warez scene do their work with discernible joy and obviously get a lot of pleasure out of their activities, just as their brethren among the Native Americans seem to have had tremendous fun during potlatching. These feasts are excesses of ritual and excitement, celebrations of the human spirit. The mere existence of an almost unlimited energy that can be tapped out of people if they feel that the activity is 'fun' is another form of abundance, and often as neglected in economic theory. Warezonianism couldn't exist weren't it not for the fact that the participants find meaning and fun in the game, and the simple fact that they find the game to be fun releases enough energy to seriously expose the software industry. Abundant resources and great fun to be had is a powerful driving force. Coupled with a technological development that has been referred to as a revolution, the birth and subsequent growth of a subculture of this type seems both logical and possibly even natural.

Ernfors & Ernfors (1990) have in their study concerning the co-existence of archaic and modern economic systems in the Third World referred to the gift as a "Ghost in the modern machinery of the Commodity". This Ghost can in their analysis then take forms such as bribery, theft and upheld bonds of kinship within a 'modern' market economy. In a sense, economic development has not hindered earlier structures to remain in place within the larger system, creating a situation where both systems appear to the other as instabilities. A variant of this might be discernible in Warezonianism. As the modern market economy has developed into a global structure of mediated immediacy, it has at the same time made radical deviations possible. In one sense, Warezonianism is the perfect market. One price, everything immediately present, global, decentralized. Based on observations regarding the way in which the rituals of the potlatch changed with the introduction of Western trading posts and similar instances of the market economy into the territories, Mauss has famously referred to it as "the monster child" of the market and the gift. Warezonianism could in this vein be called the return gift, the monstrous introduction of gift-exchange into capitalist hegemony.

The more the capitalist machine deterritorializes, decoding and axiomatising flows in order to extract surplus value from them, the more its ancillary apparatuses, such as government bureaucracies and the forces of law and order, do their utmost to reterritorialize, absorbing in the

process a larger and larger share of surplus value.
Deleuze & Guattari 1984, p. 34-35

The unencumbered nature of modern global capitalism has normally been viewed as the final point in a necessary development (cf. Fukuyama 1992). What is interesting, though, is that so little has been said about possible developments out of this. A perpetually more efficient capitalism creates a larger and larger surplus, and this must be managed. Technology and economy work in parallel, both trying to offset and manage the creations of the other – handling remains. The question becomes what forms this accursed share will take. Warezonias might be one, but will it be alone? Wasteful, uneconomical, irrational little activities, which in time may grow...

VI

THE GIFT NEXUS

At the very beginning, this text was identified as an essay, a provisional attempt. Close to the end, this seems increasingly appropriate as a description. My tale of Warezonian is not a final product, and was never meant as one. The warez scene is postmodern, post-industrial, fragmented, unstable, disequilibrating, undomesticated. Presenting it through the traditional devices of academic writing did not seem appropriate. Presenting it in an essay, in a mode of writing as hesitant as the scene is provisional, seemed far more rewarding. It means that no final certainties have been presented, only observations, implications, ideas. Thus this text is a sketch, a rough outline for a particular form of knowledge production.

What this essay has tried to do is to present Warezonian, and additionally point out some of the challenges it poses. This is its contribution, nothing more, and nothing less. Insofar as there is something of value within these pages it is this empirical data, the ethnography of a virtually unknown tribe. And that should be enough. I have tried, following Mauss, to present different sets of observations and indicate their similarities. But whereas he wrote about “archaic societies” I have tried to update the discussion regarding the gift-exchange. Although there have been some works done on modern, i.e. Western, instances of this (see Davis 1972, Werbner 1990, Komter 1996), the discussion regarding gift economies has been hindered by its apparent disappearance from the modern world. With the internet, things seem to have changed somewhat. We now see new instances of this primitive behavior, and gift-giving can again be viewed as a viable system of economic ordering (see Goldhaber 1997, Ghosh 1998, Moody 2000). It is in this light that I believe that Warezonian is an important addition to the general discussion regarding economy, simply because it is such an exemplary and extreme case of something which is brewing right now and which always has been present in some form. Furthermore, this and (eventual) following studies of Warezonian can perhaps be a catalyst for developing theorizing about gift-economies generally.

My personal biases have probably become apparent to the reader. I hold political convictions that make me far more sympathetic towards the Warezonians than some might find appropriate. And although I’m no firebrand, I’m no great friend of bourgeois capitalism. Whether this has colored my description in an undue manner is left to the reader. Still, I could claim that it is **precisely** this bias that has enabled me to understand the Warezonians. Were it not for my interest in alternative economic models, I might never have realized that my little forays into the seedier parts of the networks actually could say something about economy. Also, studies of business and economy is quite often affected by the opposite bias, that of blind faith in the market. The fact that this text shows off a particular partiality might be most informative if viewed as a *negation*, the conscious choice of adopting an opposite view to the normal acceptance of capitalism as the one true and natural order of things. Warezonians do not accept this, the mentality of the (software) industry, and believe that there are a number of ways in which property and ‘fair use’ can be interpreted. If the social sciences truly are to be about understanding social phenomena, viewing this conviction as morally wrong is counter-productive. Uncritical adoption of the mindset of bourgeois capitalism is neither objective nor unbiased. In other words, I’m probably no more biased than any other researcher. This does not mean that I don’t see the need for reflection and attempting to work around your preconceived notions, merely that I acknowledge and accept mine. But am I objective? The

question is natural, but mistaken. The existence of Warezonian is objectively true, and although my interpretations might be subjective (that is, after all, the definition of an interpretation) the scene isn't.

So, what is there to be said regarding this partial and incomplete telling of the society of the Warezonians? To my mind, there is quite a lot. I feel we can make many observations regarding human economic behavior by studying this rather simple structure of exchanging files. We could view it as a potent critique of the market economy, and a commentary hereof. Or, we could view it as part of the gene pool from which the new economy will spring. In any case, there is the *fact* of Warezonian, the unassailable truth that there are people born and raised in the market culture of Western civilization that today, Anno Domini 2001, spend most of their days trying to outdo each other in generosity. This observation, as I already pointed out, is important enough in itself. However biased my view of the Warezonians is, they exist. This is the contribution of this text. It is proof of the multitude of ways in which economy can manifest itself, and the fact is that the market is just one of these.

9 REASONS WHY _YOU_ SHOULD BE HUMMING WAREZ

- 9) f*ck the software companies!
- 8) You get first crack (pun intended) at the newest programs.
- 7) f*ck the software companies!
- 6) You have a compelling reason to upload! (Great for leeches like me.)
- 5) f*ck the software companies!
- 4) You can kiss many file ratios goodbye. Good couriers usually get exempt status on the "home base" boards; you will definitely wind up with some bodacious upload credit on the boards you hump to on a regular basis.
- 3) f*ck the software companies!
- 2) When you're a courier, women will pull up their skirts and ask you to play doctor. (Unless you're a female courier, in which case change gender to "men," clothing to "pants," and direction to "down.")
[Needless to say, this is just wishful thinking on my part. In the six months or so I've been schleppin' bytes, I have yet to be woken up at three AM by Mariah Carey pounding on the door and screaming, "Let me in, you bastard, before I come all over your doorknob!"]
- 1) f*ck the software companies!

From "YOU HACK 'EM, WE HUMPS 'EM or Why YOU Should Be a Software Courier" by Dixie Flatline (-=EMC=-/@VD-/UltraTech Courier)

That the 'new economy' is on the minds of lots of people both within the business world and within academia should come as no surprise. In recent years it has become more and more usual for thinkers and assorted pundits to suggest that the changes in society that the new technologies of information-processing and transfer has caused might be more encompassing than we can appreciate at present. Among these pundits we can note Manuel Castells, whose visions of the network society and 'informationalism' have been widely praised (see Castells 1997, 1998, 1999). Although I find his work somewhat derivative, he has managed to catch onto something regarding the way in which technological change affects society. A change in the modes of production, regardless what this production is, will alter society. This is natural, as technology isn't a separate aspect of human life, but instead one of the most ingrained parts of society. It is technology that enables the formation of complex behaviors (see Godelier 1977), and it is only through embedding a technology in society that it truly becomes technology (Latour 1987, 1999, Bijker & Law 1991, Pickering 1995). So the observation that information technology has and will change society might be a mere tautology, as is the observation that

society will in its turn change the technology. Rather than stating that changes will occur, we have to analyze these in real life, for as e.g. Elias (1978a, 1991) showed, culture and society is change. Castells, in all fairness, has tried to do this. He has outlined three features of the ‘paradigm of informationalism’¹⁸, which he then tries to apply to the empirical world:

1. IT and its self-expanding processing capacity
2. IT’s recombining ability
3. The distributional flexibility of the new information technologies

These are the features that drive m-commerce, informational networking, e-anything and the exciting new developments both in the growth of new economies (such as the yet uncertain rise of Africa) and on the frontlines of science (nano-technology, genetics, biotech). In Castells’s analysis, this is what creates the information age. And he is not alone in thinking so. Kevin Kelly (1999) says much the same thing in *New Rules for a New Economy*, as he talks of a “Network Economy”, and outlines his ‘ten ways’ of the same. And the economy listened. Even after the so called dot.com-crash during the last half of 2000 and the first half of 2001, there is an undeniable optimism regarding the ways in which ‘everything’ will be changed and changed again by the networks. Following Castells’ three features, technology will grow (faster, more omnipresent), it will combine in new and exciting ways (convergence) and it will adapt flexibly to current and new problems. And we are pretty sure the world will be a better place due to this. And quite a few people either are or have become immensely rich due to this. There is no readily apparent explanation to why the network economies have ushered in the time of the true mega-corporations, but sometimes it seems that recombination and flexibility have been a boon mainly to a handful of immensely wealthy corporations. We might actually see not a new economy but a ‘new capitalism’.

Some argue against this. The Finnish philosopher-wunderkind Pekka Himanen wrote, together with fellow Finn Linus Torvalds and the aforementioned Castells, a book that was published in 2001 with the rather ostentatious title *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age*. The title is a less than subtle allusion to Weber’s classic, and tries to emulate the argument of this for our ‘new age’. If capitalism was built upon the work ethic of good Protestants, the coming age will in Himanen’s analysis be about developing a hacker ethic. This is identified as the cooperative structure of coders, where ideas and code is shared, and work is done primarily out of enthusiasm and the joy of participating in a social sphere. Himanen’s argument hinges on the assumption that ‘hackers’ (which here refers to enthusiasts more generally) seek meaning in their lives and codes, and thus do not want to participate in the ethic of work being its own reward. If they find some work to be meaningful (such as developing the Linux-kernel), they will work hard without a clear profit motive. If they do not, they will demand high salaries, or (assumedly) just quit and go seek meaning anew. On the dust jacket, the argument of the book is summarized thus:

Underlying hackers’ technical creations – such as the Internet and the personal computer, which have become symbols of our time – are the hacker values that produced them and challenge us all. These values promote passionate and freely rhythmmed work; the belief that individuals can create great things by joining forces in imaginative ways; and the need to maintain our existing ethical ideals, such as privacy and equality, in our new, increasingly technologized society.

It might seem that this is very much in accordance with the thesis of this text. But it is not. To begin with, there is the problem of meaning. I do not claim that it is in any way special

for the Warezonians to find meaning in their competitive giving. Nor is there anything special in the fact that Linux-coders find their work intrinsically meaningful. This is also always the case. What Weber showed, and Himanen seems reluctant to discuss, is that the Protestant worker found *work itself* meaningful, and were probably as happy (or happier!) than the average Linux aficionado. The hackers might not agree with this view, but there is no real difference here. The “hacker values” that are presented in the quote above are no different than the values of Protestants toiling with the earth. If we e.g. compare the hackers with the aboriginals Sahlins writes about, we will see that the former are still, at heart, Protestants. They are climbing the ladder of accumulation, even if they do so a little less overtly than the bourgeoisie. What we attach meaning to will vary depending on our culture and has always done so. The Warezonians attach meaning to the scene, in the same way the Tlingit found meaning in the potlatch, the Trobrianders in the kula and the Protestants in work.

The other problem is that of novelty. Himanen’s book, as so many others regarding the network society, emphasizes the paradigm shift that the new technology has created. It makes it seem that we, as humans, are entering something wholly new. This is the direct opposite of my contention. The technology might be ‘new’, but there is precious little that is new about society. In our continuous quest of finding the new and the interesting we constantly miss the very real fact that what is truly spectacular about the social world is not its newness but the way in which it has remained unchanged. Like crows, we scholars are beguiled by shiny things, and often ignore the mundanity that fills the world (cf. Brekhus 2000). But as people, we still have friends over for dinner, we still give alms, and we feel for those who have less than we do. The variations that culture brings can be radical and revolutionary, but again referring back to Norbert Elias (see also Gustafsson 1994), this has always been the case. There is very little truly new in the ‘new economy’.

What was spectacular in Mauss’s *The Gift* was that it showed how the same thing can recur in numerous settings. He even wished to extend his observations regarding giving, receiving and reciprocating to our modern times. Although such a search for universal features in human societies might seem unfashionable today, as we tend to see this as reductionism, Elias (1978b, p. 104-110) remarks that this is in fact an inseparable part of looking for what makes each culture and era special. Under the telling and wonderful heading “Mankind’s natural changefulness as a social constant” he outlines some aspects through which a more general theory regarding e.g. human behavior could be reached. Among the observations he brings forth is the fact that a social science that focuses solely on that which is special and particular to any given society will only amass “a heap of unrelated facts”. Likewise, he notes, the social sciences often seem to be convinced that anything is possible in human societies, a variance without boundaries. But, notes Elias (drawing particularly on biology), this is not so. There are limitations to what man can do, something he exemplifies with a question for further research: “Which biological characteristics are prerequisites for the changeability, and particularly for the capacity for development, shown by human societies?” (ibid., p. 107) Even though this text doesn’t deal with that question, a similar notion could be utilized. A comparative method for analyzing economies must at least in part deal with the primitive forms from which more complex wholes can develop. Studying human interaction, certain behaviors such as sharing and exchanging (in its more general form) are prevalent, but economic theory has greatly ignored such basic forms and preferred to deal with later abstractions. The ‘new primitivism’ tentatively drafted on these pages should therefore analyze the way in which these basic forms act as “prerequisites for [...] changeability, and [...] the capacity for development”. Weber’s analysis of the Protestant work ethic showed how an ideological construct, an

immensely powerful such, could alter the path of economy. Himanen's analysis, e.g., does not. Instead, it portrays behaviors that can be found in all economies, from the archaic as studied by Mauss, to the hypermodern as predicted by Baudrillard. As Andy Grove, who, as Mr. Intel, should know a little something about the 'new' in economy has quipped:

*[J]ust as every generation thinks it invented sex,
every generation thinks it created a new economy.*
Wired 9.06, p. 141

With this in mind this essay might feel best at home in the company of economic anthropologists, after all. In this small specialization of a less-than-popular discipline the need to be fresh and original at all times has been less pronounced than in the at times wildly populist field of management and organization studies. And although I feel that this specialization has suffered from its emphasis on pre-capitalist economies, I also believe that there is much to be gained from establishing a theoretical dialogue between these 'primitivists' and those of us who study modern or hypermodern economies. For even though there are economic anthropologists who have studied our present economic condition (Appadurai 1986 and Douglas & Isherwood 1979 come to mind, as does Sahlins 1976), and there are people in business studies who utilize anthropology, many discussions that could be fruitful for both parties have yet to be engaged in. Within the latter field, it is almost solely cultural anthropology that has been used as inspiration, and e.g. Marxist anthropology has been all but ignored. Within the former field, the analysis of modern economies often comes as something of an afterthought.

Early on in this text reference was made to the concept of 'hybridity' in economic structures, a concept that has perhaps been most widely used within the discourse of post-colonialism and postmodern analyses of economy. I have borrowed the concept from Mayfair Yang (2000), who in her article *Putting Global Capitalism in Its Place* coins it to denote ways in which capitalist and non-capitalist forms come together and intermingle. Her stand here is that Marx's notion 'articulations of modes of production' is unsatisfactory if we wish to view ways in which economic logics and rituals from different time periods coexist. The Marxist reading of e.g. global capitalism presents this as a stable form, untainted by complexities of e.g. surviving ritual forms. Yang points out that this runs in to problems in cases where competing logics structure the economic field, such as in cases where capitalist production meets non-capitalist consumption – the case in many ritual economies.

The notion of hybridity [...] expresses this mutuality in that an organic hybrid will always bear the physical traces of the heterogeneous elements of which it consists, thus presenting a distinctively different form from its progenitors.
Yang 2000, p. 478

Capitalism, as a hegemonic structure, seems invincible to many – although they may hold differing views as to whether this is a good or a bad thing. The concept of economic hybridity can be seen as a challenge to this. Returning to the potlatch, the reason Mauss referred to it as a "monster child of the gift system" was that it in fact developed tremendously by the Nations coming into contact with the Western market economy. Hyde (1979, p. 30) notes that what we know of the potlatch is in fact accommodation to a new economy (!):

As first studied, the potlatch was the progeny of a European capitalism mated to an aboriginal gift economy, and with freakish results: sewing machines thrown into the sea, people embarrassed into sitting in houses set afire with fish oil, Indians dancing with pink silk parasols or stooped

under layer after layer of cheap wool blankets, and as the sun set the Canadian Royal Mounted Police riding off with coppers and other ritual property to suppress the potlatch, which their government had declared illegally wasteful.

Codere (1950) shows that the Kwakwaka'wakw actually embraced Western capitalism quite well, being productive and all-round good workers. What Westerners simply couldn't fathom was that they could behave as good Protestants in the fisheries etc., and then go back and happily destroy gramophones according to the dictates of ritual. They participated in both forms of economy (and possibly a few more besides), creating a dynamic and hybrid 'whole economy'. The behavior of the Warezonians shows remarkable similarities. In both cases, the communities draw upon the surplus of the market economy in order to create economies that squander. In both cases, outsiders view this as criminal acts. Although many have viewed the potlatch as a perversion brought on by market economies, thereby reinforcing the view of capitalism as a powerful penetration into 'nature', I would wish to bring on another perspective. In the case of the potlatch, the market economy enabled it to take on its true and radical form. I do not accept the view of the Kwakwaka'wakw as naïve and childlike natives, fooled by the evils of capitalism. Rather, they adapted to the new economy in a fashion that is difficult for us to understand. They created a hybrid form, just as the Warezonians have created a marketplace for honor and gifts. The point of economic hybridity is the challenge it poses for simplistic views of economic behavior. Sure, both the potlatch and the warez scene exist in a relation to the market economy, but if we view this relation as a one-way street we will miss what is interesting about these oppositions. Potlatching was terrifying enough for the Canadian legislature that one had to pass a law against it. And even if we were to view Warezonian as a parasite, it is still a potent and vigorous one, a fact that can be easily discerned from the viciousness with which it is attacked. These forms are not merely the incursion of capitalist logic in a sphere earlier dominated by the 'nicer' logic of the gift. Rather they are commentaries and adaptations to the market economy, and if we are to grasp the whole spectacle of economy we need to stay reflexive to such intermingling.

So Warezonian might best be understood as a commentary of and mirror to our present view of economy. What does it mean to be productive? What is the fundamental point of economy? Furthermore, Warezonian and the computer underground generally can show that the gift as a phenomenon is far more multifaceted than often assumed. As an example we can take a case of 'evil gifts', computer viruses. These are also products painstakingly created, and then given to the world. Exchanges are not always entered freely, so the gift of the virus might be seen as a counterpoint and comment to the more common forms of exploitation. Through the lens of Warezonian we might be able to see our own economy more clearly, or at least see it as less of a given.

What this essay has done is to present a particular type of what Appadurai (1986) has called "tournaments of value". The kula and the potlatch are classical examples, but he also refers to things like art auctions (cf. Bourdieu 1984). In these tournaments the economic is staged in a ritual manner, as "expressive, ritualized forms of economic rivalry" (Harrison 1992, p. 226). They show us the drama of economy, the expressiveness of which is all too often hidden behind the iron logic of the market. Consisting of elaborately staged events, these tournaments contain a complex web of meanings, where each move can hold connotations. In the communities within which these tournaments are acted out, they **are** the meaning. Through them, identity is created, social status reified, and society as a whole 'provisioned'. By engaging in the rituals of economy, the community makes itself visible, it enacts itself. Some would say

that this is what is done on the market as well. But what is unspoken and mediated though the language of money on the assumed ideal market is visible and explicated in the tournament. The concept of ‘egoboo’, referred to in the discussion of Linux, shows this. Bragging rights, by any other name, is the heart of agonistic play. It is the total communication of all participants that is at stake. Through economies of the tournament economy is connected back to the life of the community. It is no longer a neutral sphere, but a necessary part of social life. In his prologue to Himanen (2001), the main ringleader of the Linux kernel, Linus Thorvalds, writes a humble sociology of his own. Less humbly, he calls this Linus’s Law, and it is basically a simplified variant of Mintzberg’s theory of motivation. In this, Thorvalds states that there are three basic categories of motivation. These are, in ascending order: survival, social life, and entertainment, and in his sociology all things strive to develop up to the level of entertainment, including economy and war. It is an amusing assertion, and probably correct in a way. But what we have to remember is that the boundaries between these categories are fluid at best. Huizinga pointed out that without play (entertainment) there is no social life, and Sahlins showed that survival might be less of a problem than we think. Is economy about survival? Is it about social life? Is it entertainment? Yes, yes, and yes. It is *meaningful*, and this encompasses all three. Therefore, a ‘new primitivism’, for we need to delve back into the question of the fundamental aspects of society. And therefore economic anthropology, for we need to grasp what is meant by the provisioning of that society.

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Talk to me on EFNet.

– DIAMOND

From the NFO of REVELATiON, dated August 9th 1998

In 1899, Thorstein Veblen presented his magisterial study of what Mark Twain called “the Gilded Age”. This book, the *Theory of the Leisure Class*, might seem a bit dated today. Despite this, it gave us two concepts that are still interesting and powerful: *conspicuous consumption* and *vicarious consumption*. Conspicuous consumption refers to how Veblen in his contemporaries identified a mode of consumption that had nothing to do with needs. Instead, he noted, women dressed in a manner that was far from practical, effectively signifying that they did not have to do manual labor, while men consume luxuries of other kinds. In both cases, consumption is not about filling a need, but serves a semiotic function. Veblen details at length how people that no longer need to work, the leisure class, go about filling their days. By consuming in a grand and glorified manner, they make themselves seen; they mark their place in society. Vicarious consumption is the continuation of this, extending the cycle of conspicuous consumption to the field of friends and family.

Conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure. As wealth accumulates on his hands, his own unaided effort will not avail to sufficiently put his opulence in evidence by this method. The aid of friends and competitors is therefore brought in by resorting to the giving of valuable presents and expensive feasts and entertainments. Presents and feasts had probably another origin than that of naïve ostentation, but they required

their utility for this purpose very early, and they have retained that character to the present; so that their utility in this respect has now long been the substantial ground on which these usages rest. Costly entertainments, such as the potlatch or the ball, are peculiarly adapted to serve this end. The competitor with whom the entertainer wishes to institute a comparison is, by this method, made to serve as a means to the end. He consumes vicariously for his host at the same time that he is witness to the consumption of that excess of good things which his host is unable to dispose of single-handed, and he is also made to witness his host's facility in etiquette.

Veblen 1899/1934, ch. 4

If the Gilded Age was an age of ostentatious consumption, ours is not far behind. That Warezonian is a field of vicarious consumption should be obvious. But what is less obvious is that there is little in the way of a leisure class on the scene. Therefore I would like to talk of Warezonian as a field of *conspicuous production*, production that has no other (real) purpose than signifying the abilities of the producer. This might be what characterizes the network society. If we look at the massive amount of production that is created daily on the internet, be it mp3s, weblogs, shareware, Winamp-skins, or any other of the thousands of possible digital goods, we are in an age where everyone can become a producer. So the tournaments of value have become dramas of production. We can see this in the workaholic tendencies in modern corporate life, but what has received less interest is the massive (and growing!) amount of work done without a profit-motive. It is a new kind of accursed share, and perhaps we need to re-evaluate what Bethoud & Sabelli (1979) called “our obsolete production mentality”. Warezonian is but a limited and extreme version of this, the conspicuous production of the network society. Political economy has normally been the science of choices, of picking between given alternatives. It has rarely dealt with the creation of the new, the birth of new forms and new resources. But Warezonian is a flower, a created whole, a massive outburst of energy. It was not chosen, it was built.¹⁹ It shows that economy is not the tightly reined and well defined entity that we so often assume. It shows how economy can come to be. It shows the age of the gift nexus.

DEVELOPMENTS

Thus ends the essay. What now? I believe that Warezonian and the narratives thereof could be fertile ground for quite a number of studies. One of the strengths of (economic) anthropology is that the empirical studies therein have been subjected to continuous criticism and reassessments. At the same time this is one of the main weaknesses of qualitative studies, the fact that studies are seldom followed up. I would hope that Warezonian gets studied more deeply than I have managed to do in this exploratory essay. I do not know if Warezonian will survive, or if it will engulf all economy. Probably neither, but I would still like to know what happens to my alien economy, my monster child. The study of gift-economies needs criticism and requires new readings, particularly in the new instances I have tried to illustrate. Furthermore, I can imagine a series of more particular studies that could be fruitfully conducted within this field.

I have not discussed the fascinating questions of altruism versus egoism. Much of what is done in Warezonian appears altruistic, and could at the very least illuminate what we mean by the word. If someone works very, very hard at giving me things, and obviously gains a lot of pleasure and meaning out of this, is it sensible to call this egoistic? Actually, Warezonian would be a great area to study business ethics generally. They are engaged in a continuous discussion regarding ethical behaviour and justifications, and pose an interesting challenge to the issue of

intellectual property rights. If we were to assume that the releases themselves act as mere signs, is it theft? Can you own the rights to a crack or a release? Additionally, the anarchistic properties of the scene would require further analysis.

I think that the notion of a hypermodern gift-economy and conspicuous production would benefit from a deeper theoretical analysis. I have merely sketched out the field, and there are a manifold of perspectives that could be applied generally to the notion of gift-economies today. We have yet to see a theoretical analysis of file-swapping and peer-to-peer-networking. Also, the study of freeware-coding and open source-software would benefit from a more theoretical approach. Richard Stallman, being the most prominent spokesperson for 'free software' (being among other things the main architect behind GNU), might actually be an excellent subject for a book on business ethics.

Naturally, I would wish that my notion of a 'new primitivism' would be developed further, and not only by me. Likewise I would welcome a closer working relationship between people from business studies and the colleagues in economic anthropology. I believe that this would be beneficial for both parties, just as I believe that there is something to be said for the search for universal (but not reductionistic!) forms of human behaviour. The 'new primitivism' needs a stronger theoretical basis, and far more empirical material, in order to develop.

A consequence, and an unplanned one, is that I think that Warezonian should be a godsend for the post-modern analysis of society. Much of what you can see on the warez scene was predicted in one way or another by Baudrillard (1975, 1981, 1993). The fragmentary on textual nature of communication would certainly please followers of Derrida (1976, 1982). I have already shown how I believe that the theory of the general economy, as presented by Bataille, could be employed. And I can imagine no better field for an empirical study of the notion of capitalism and schizophrenia as developed by Deleuze & Guattari (1984, 1987).

And lastly, shouldn't an extremely efficient system for the production and distribution of digital goods interest all those e-commerce researchers I've been hearing about?

EPILOGUE

Lewis Hyde, in *The Gift – Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, has noted that there is one sphere where the gift-economy has always existed. This is the field of academia, where articles, findings, manuscripts, data, et cetera are given to the community as, basically, gifts. Scholarly books rarely bring in any money, and even if you were to receive a small cut of the 'profits', this is almost never in any relation to the amount of time and passion you have put into it. When it comes to a text like this one often talks of its 'contribution'. The word itself is interesting. A contribution is not part of a market exchange; it is an input to a greater good – in this case, the amassed knowledge of the academic community.

A scientist may conduct his research in solitude, but he cannot do so in isolation. Each individual's work must "fit," and the synthetic nature of gift exchange makes it an appropriate medium for this integration; it is not just people that must be brought together but the ideas themselves.

These remarks on the scientific community are intended finally to illustrate the general point that a circulation of gifts can produce and maintain a coherent community, or inversely, that the conversion of gifts to commodities can fragment or destroy such a group.

Hyde 1979, p. 80

I have contributed with an ethnographic description of a structure of very peculiar economic behaviours. How the community receives this, and how they react can never be predicted in the act of giving. I have tried to produce conspicuously, and outdo my rivals. They will, no doubt, reciprocate and answer. The cycle continues. *Wa, out of the way; Wa, out of the way...*

¹ OxYGeN is not necessarily what one would call a major group. Any number of other groups or releases could have been used as an example, and this specific release was chosen quite arbitrarily.

² Virgil, ‘Aeneid’: “*I fear the Greeks even when they bring gifts*” . On the occasion of finding a large wooden horse outside the city of Troy.

³ This is a very rough estimate, and I’m far from pleased with it. I doubt that there could be as many as ten thousand truly active Warezonians globally, operating at one time. At best there are a hundred active groups, such that will be active for any longer time. Even the biggest groups usually have less than a hundred participants, and most have far less (20-30 seems to be a fair estimate for a medium-sized group). Still, there are lots of sites, and a site can easily have 300 users (although there is considerable overlap as participants will strive to have access to as many good sites as possible). I am convinced that the hard core of the scene consists of a few thousand individuals at most, but this will always be a question of demarcation. If one counts informed end-users the figure could be a hundred times larger, and if one concentrates on those that truly ‘matter’ (i.e. those who do most of the releasing/couriering) the figure could be below 200. The exact size of the scene is not critical in my argument, though. And any well-documented correction of my estimates will be greatly appreciated.

⁴ See References for additional information regarding sources. All documents available from the author upon request.

⁵ “This is [‘Dis be’] the one and only Br0th3r M1ch3r0b [Brother Micherob] from the Yorkshire Posse [Group] (fear, lamers!@#\$.). This is a file containing some very 0-day [recent] exploits and information, so I’m trusting in you BoW reading elite guys [‘dudes’] to keep this secret technique out of the hands of lamers.”

Lamer=insufficiently knowledgeable and therefore contemptible individual (cf. ‘loser’).

Elite=truly knowledgeable and praiseworthy individual and/or the status of being such.

⁶ As my main source regarding the history and development of Warezonian I have used Ipggi’s “Scene History”, revision V: April 8th 2000 (available from <http://www.defacto2.net/scene-archive/history.html>). In addition, back issues of NWR have been consulted, as well as other ‘internal documents’.

⁷ A sub-culture all its own has grown up around ‘abandonware’, i.e. discontinued programs. One can e.g. discuss whether the decision to no longer provide service for a particular piece of software makes reverse engineering more acceptable. Also, many fine computer games are no longer available through companies, and aficionados have taken to provide the public with semi-legal copies.

⁸ I have to note that the technology and vernacular regarding shells is a weak point in my understating of warez trading. When Warezonians discuss ‘shellboxes’ they seem to refer to computers that are attached to the internet backbone, i.e. central (often official, corporate or academic) and exceedingly fast servers. “Having a fast shell” is important to a trader, but the exact way in which a trader uses a shellbox seems to vary.

⁹ The original subtitle to Mauss work was *Forme et Raison de l’Echange dans les Sociétés archaïques*. In the edition from 1950 (transl.: Ian Cunnison) this became *Forms and Functions of Exchange...* whereas in the 1990 edition (transl.: W.D. Halls) it is translated as *The Form and Reason for Exchange...* I contend that the former is more in line with Mauss argument, even if the latter is more exact as a translation.

¹⁰ There is much current debate (Weiner 1992, Godelier 1999, Mosko 2000) regarding the issue of how inalienability relates to reciprocity. Annette Weiner has argued that the Melanesian societies from which much of the anthropological theory of the gift is drawn is *not* based on reciprocal giving, but instead on a kind of defensive or strategic giving where tribal chiefs attempt to ‘keep-while-giving’. In her theory the important objects are thus not the ones that are given but the ones that aren’t. For a review and a critique of this view see Mosko (2000).

¹¹ The criticism deals with the particular interpretation Mauss gives of the *hau*. It would seem that the idea of a person's spirit 'living' in that which is given was in part poetic license on Mauss's part. Sahlins (1972) sees it more as a kind of interest or generative force, and remarks that the Maori obviously didn't find the *hau* particularly efficient as far as enforcers go. Instead, failure to reciprocate and other misdeeds (such as theft) were dealt with by the far more efficient institution of witchcraft. In writing this I will keep to Mauss's more poetic rendition, as it is better equipped to deal with the question generally and as the Maori are of little interest here, mistreated though they still are in their native land.

¹² Here I have benefited tremendously from Peter Kollock's *The Economies of Online Cooperation: Gifts and Public Goods in Cyberspace* (1999), specifically with regards to the concept of 'public goods'.

¹³ This essay is greatly indebted to this work (Gustafsson (1994): *Produktion av allvar*). Although it is not always referred to, it has been one of the primary sources from which I've developed my thinking regarding rationality and frivolity. It is my hope that this essay will go some way towards furthering the approach to management/business studies Gustafsson has developed.

¹⁴ I am not a linguist, nor am I an expert on the tribes of British Columbia. Due to this, there is a possibility that I have mixed up different ways of representing the names of the Nations. I have used what I have been led to believe is the most indigenous term when known, but I also use the common terms from the anthropological literature.

¹⁵ Image courtesy of <http://www.anu.edu.au/~u9508666/potlatch/>

¹⁶ Potlatches could be given by women, but this was far rarer than the great potlatches given by (male) chiefs. Particularly the daughters of chiefs gave more informal potlatches, though.

¹⁷ Image courtesy of <http://www.anu.edu.au/~u9508666/potlatch/>

¹⁸ As Castells is sometimes compared with Marx I have to comment on some rhetorical points. Both write prodigiously, use empirical material in an idiosyncratic manner and are far from afraid to extrapolate aggressively. But whereas Marx's style of writing was honed during his work as a journalist, Castells writes like the sociologist he is. And where the trial of time has proven Marx's originality, the jury is still out on Castells.

¹⁹ I would here like to acknowledge the discussions regarding production, choice and economy I've had with Professor Emeritus Albert Danielsson.