

A catalog of formats for digital discomfort

... and other ways to resist
totalitarian zoomification.

Due to physical distancing measures under COVID-19, we are finding ourselves in what can be identified as an increased condition of gathering online. This condition includes learning situations, as well as moments to share and exchange our views, analyses, approaches, results, prototypes and proposals in a wide spectrum of academic and para-academic situations.

Through the imposition of closed, proprietary, exclusive and over-optimised commercial formats for so-called "webinars", this situation is rapidly resulting in the settlement of a monoculture in mediated gatherings. GAFAM & co are taking over research and educational ecosystems, while turning all interactions into business transactions. It is therefore urgent to find ways to capture the damage of this cloudy landscapes, wider bandwidths, endless remote-working video calls and pervasive user-ization (the dominant tendency towards subjectivity-as-user-only). These are all elements partaking in an evident cultural and aesthetic flattening on platforms. These elements come to erase diversity, smoothly deepen structural dependencies and provoke relational precarity. They reproduce a techno-colonial regime that passes through deadly environmental damage and exploitative labour.

Yet, by building on and accentuating the techno-colonial regime, platform-settlers also unwillingly energize an array of counter-forces. These counter-

forces are currently collectively mobilizing to explore or invent new structures of mediation. They are asking: What are the potentials hidden in surprising ways of combining different media, in existing memories of community organizing, or in re-appropriations of techniques? What forms of remote gathering otherwise might be more opportune to our present presences?

In times of turboacademia, we feel this mobilization and desire to share the responsibility to look around and *underneath* digital infrastructures. Such a responsibility involves resisting compliance with *informatics of domination* in order to make space for the praxis of ongoing transdisciplinary critique. Part of this is trying and combining space-times, using on- or off-line tools, developing methods and semiotic-material tricks in order to organize situated formats. These trove of tactics are based on references that come from worlds beyond the *webinar-Oh-sphere*, and they engage forms of teachings that can assist the ongoing mobilization.

Curated as an anti-solutionist collection, the Catalog of Formats is an attempt to document the plausibility of such practices and to encourage affirmative counter-forces. The Catalog may work as a device for trying emergent formats and hopefully destabilizing *too comfortable* articulations of online gatherings. It is an invitation to do so while enjoying the rigorous, engaging and creative formats for and by communities themselves.

The modes of using the Catalog are as diverse as the types of gatherings it might be useful for. This is why we do not necessarily recommend reading it in a linear fashion, but to try out oblique and fragmented approaches. We defined nine vectors as possible lines of consideration for anyone interested in setting up an online meeting, and a tenth one is on-topic for the Obfuscation series of events the Catalog was born into. We composed the structure so that the user of the Catalog can cross its sections: these vectors can operate as entry-points to then be combined, intersected and adjusted depending on the needs or desires of organizers.

- #1: Temporalities**
- #2: Spatialities**
- #3: Material conditions**
- #4: Participants**
- #5: Methods**
- #6: Media**
- #7: Traces**
- #8: Governance**
- #9: Tools and infrastructure**
- #10: Obfuscation**

vector #1: Temporalities

If the research situation you want to organize has clear temporal limits or needs, this might be the vector to start building it from. Your temporal requirements may be defined by the immense complexity of merging timezones, or by the bodily need for AFK (away from keyboard) moments. It could also be informed by a desire to facilitate the conditions for the emergence of a durable community, for example, in long-term projects or through iterative meetings. If time is key for you, the cases compiled on this vector might provide you with some ideas.

Consider these items as points of departure, and check the formats below as examples:

Intensity

This might be a key need for you if the temporality of your event is ephemeral and its contents are thick.

☞ **Queering Damage:** *a one-day workshop, which intensity facilitated the gathering of 2 local organizers with one international organizer. 8 hours of workshop, with one lunch-break.*

<https://queeringdamage.hangar.org/index.php/About>

Extensity

Longer processes might provide conditions for a looser engagement of participants and wide or open-ended interactions. Extensive formats also require more resources for maintenance and accompaniment.

☞ **Echoraume:** *an ongoing open source initiative to empower ongoing cultural life during times of corona crisis.*

<https://echoraume.klingt.org>

Hybrids of extensive plus intensive

Most formats might need to combine two speeds or intensities to provide with diversified modes of relation for a variety of participants and uses.

☞ **Relearn curved:** *a summersschool that lasts all summer, with continuing working groups, plus several intensive situations organized around a pre-planned programme.*

<http://relearn.be/2019>

Smooth getting to-know-each-other

Especially for trans-disciplinary situations, a format that facilitates a smooth engagement of participants

with differentiated backgrounds but similar urgencies/interests might be of use for the creation of more self-sustainable communities.

☞ **Birds of a Feather sessions:** *“A BoF session, an informal meeting at conferences, where the attendees group together based on a shared interest and carry out discussions without any pre-planned agenda.”*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_Engineering_Task_Force#Organization

Synchronous

Formats providing full synchronicity assure the crossing of participants and the sharing of a same experience. Nevertheless, to assure that participants cross and share the same experience, take into account that if your event aims for a transnational audience, synchronicity might not be an option due to diversity in time-zones.

☞ **Feminist Server Summit:** *The feminist server summit was a one day meeting between various DIY and independent server projects. We were interested in discussing the potential of a feminist server practice, and curious about possible approaches to it. We mixed live interventions with pre-recorded interviews and e-mail correspondence so that we could hear from as many server-related projects as we could.*

<https://areyoubeingserved.constantvzw.org/Summit.xhtml>

Asynchronous

Giving access to materials for participants to process them in their own rhythms and terms is a great way to provide your format with a grounded experience, arranged in their own chosen moments.

☞ **Online exhibition À propós du Cthulucene:** *Accessible content at the open virtual space of an art center. Curated by María Ptqk*

espacevirtuel.jeudepaume.org/a-propos-du-chthulucene-et-de-ses-especes-camarades-3220/

Openendedness

Some formats have a beginning but not a planned end. Such openendedness can be very inviting for an emergent community!

☞ **Digital Solidarity Networks pad:** *This is the start of a listing of some resources regarding mutual aid strategies and social closeness through alternative digital infrastructures in times of physical distancing, remote working or care giving, etc. This pad contains examples of collective digital alternative practices, in a time where everything points to the further consolidation and accelerated normalization of the Big Tech industry (Zoom, Facebook groups, Slack, Microsoft Teams, Skype, etc.). Other attitudes are possible.*

vector #2: Spatialities

If you are in need of a particular architectonic arrangement (virtual architectures are architectures too!), a helpful entry point could be to check how others planned their spaces in order to combine ideas and design your own. When you are considering the group's atmosphere and dynamics, spatial understandings can help determine its shape and size. Ask yourself: What ways of organizing the group would be conducive to orchestrating the diversity of voices and practices? What number of rooms and meeting areas will be of use? How can I make and indicate differences between formal and informal spaces? Spatial thinking also implies a consideration on how the insides and the outsides are marked, and how rigid you need them to be for determining the pre-conditions of attendance. When traditional classrooms or conference halls are neither available nor desirable, perhaps this vector will be of help to nevertheless organize space otherwise.

Consider these items as points of departure, and check the formats below as examples:

Concentric environment

What is the design of the landing platform which your participants will inhabit during your activities? Do you want it all to happen at a single landing-spot?

☞ **Next-Iterations event:** *A platform that simulated a theater building: hall, bar, stage, backstage. Backstage took place on a Big Blue Button instance, and discussions took place in IRC channels (one for "bar conversations", another for on-content discussions). There was also a corner to download materials, at the bottom of the site. It was all designed for a 2-days online event by Dennis de Bel.*

<https://iterations.space/live/>

Excursions to the outer space

Sometimes going out to visit (online) places together can be of use for a situated discussion or a recontextualized experience.

☞ **Mario Santamaria's Internet tours:** *In short, we will carry out a collective exploration of the physical infrastructure of the Internet, an experience halfway between the tourist route of the non-tourist, performance and profane awakening.*

Frontality

On your event's situations, consider the level of frontality you want to provoke. Frontality is useful for keynotes and panels, but very limitant for hands-on workshops or group discussions.

☞ **EASST/4S 2020:** During a massive transnational online conference, [p]resenters would gather in [videocall] 'rooms' at their appointed times, share their slides, and deliver their talks. *"Discussants can make their contributions. Audience members can submit questions by text, or, if invited by the chair, by video and audio."*

<https://www.easst4s2020prague.org/virtual-meeting/>

Multidirectionality

For engaged participation and surprise outcomes, consider a creative format of space arrangement that provokes multi-directional exchanges, experiments and discussions.

☞ **Constant's worksessions:** *intensive trans-disciplinary situations to which participants from all over the world contribute. Every six months Constant opens such a temporary research lab; a collective working environment where different types of expertise come into contact with each other. During work sessions we develop ideas and prototypes that in the long-term lead to publications, projects and new proposals. Work-sessions favour the use of F/LOSS software. To facilitate collective work, these Guidelines of collaboration apply:*

<https://constantvzw.org/site/Open-Call-Bureau-cracksy.html?lang=enlang=en>

vector #3:

Material conditions

Resources are always limited, and often limiting. Being aware of the specific material conditions that you have for organizing, can be an intelligent way of being attentive to what can be done, but also triggering or inventing creative impulses. Does the activity you are organizing have a budget and is it fully funded? Budgeting can be a task in itself: Is everyone paid for their work? Are there other forms of exchange that could be explored? Are participants responding voluntarily to an open call, responding to a commission, entering the space through a personal invitation? Being accountable of your accounts is also a thing. To what extent is your budget transparent? Are you informing others about the costs and expenses of this event? Is it inter-dependent on public structures? And if so: How is the event designed to responsibly return its value to the public?

Material conditions also apply to the very physical conditions that participants are embedded in when attending a gathering. Those conditions can be marked by elements of precarity, intimacy and restlessness to name just a few. How to then not imagine participants engaging from neutral rooms, but to make it possible to participate given their different contingencies?

Consider these items as points of departure, and check the formats below as examples:

Transparency

The degree of transparency says a lot about one event's politics. Consider publishing an outline of your budget, informing about your funders and also acknowledging all your contributors and providers.

☞ **University of Alicante transparency portal:** *contains information to broaden and strengthen the transparency of the public activity carried out within this university. It is also provided by the required mechanisms to guarantee the right of access to citizens' information.*

<https://transparencia.ua.es/en/university-of-alicante-transparency-portal.html>

Publicness

Is your event accessible to anyone, or restricted to

some? If it is public, how does it return its findings to society at large?

☞ **Teaching To Transgress Toolkit (TTTT)** *was granted a EU fund and hence is 100% public. It takes care as a series of events to render generated knowledge available.*

<http://www.ttttoolbox.net/>

Immediate surroundings

Spots of connectivity might vary a lot depending on class, mobility, domestic or professional constellations and of course all those elements have an agency in how open someone is to show immediate surroundings. Visibility is not always a desirable option. Please take care of that.

☞ **Clarkson Visual and Audio Recording Policy Proposal:** *Visual and audio recordings of group events by their nature involve the rights, needs, and concerns of many individuals. We may not be able to give a single definition for respectful use of recordings (both official and personal); however, as a community, we should commit ourselves to use recordings of all individuals with respect.*

<https://lin-web.clarkson.edu/~jmatthew/publications/ClarksonVisualAudioRecordingPolicyDraft.pdf>

vector #4:

Participants

When putting a gathering together, it is fundamental to have in mind who is participating in it: Is it a small, or a rather large group of people? What are their backgrounds? Are they participating as differentiated individuals, or also as a community with shared urgencies and concerns? Are they all coming through the same channels? Are some of the participants invited guests while others are signed-in as "audience"? It's often wise to also take a moment to consider the range of expertise between participants, some people may join with a deep understanding of the topics while others may be curious debutants. Remember: every participant will for sure appear with whole worlds in their backpacks!

Consider these items as points of departure, and check the formats below as examples:

Number of partners / organizers

This will affect the reach of your calls, the focus of your discussions and the diversity of your methods. A too-big number of partners, though, might come with the inconvenience of logistic roughness.

☞ **Libre Graphics Research Unit's Co-position** *in the larger context of the Libre Graphics Research Unit, a collaboration between Medialab Prado (ES), WORM (NL), Píksel (NO), Constant (BE) and others. The Unit is a two year project bringing artists, designers and Free, Libre and Open Source Software developers around the same table to exchange ideas and share experiences about digital tools and future artistic practice.*

<http://aa.lgru.net/pages/Index/>

Selected presenters

If your event requires a call for participation, it might need to limit the number of contributors in order to allow organizers to have a careful follow-up .

☞ **The Discard Studies Twitter Conference's editorial team** *will select ~25 Twitter essayists from the call for papers.*

<https://discardstudies.com/2020/08/31/cfp-discard-studies-twitter-conference/>

Peer review

Take into account scheduling a peer-review process for your event to happen under distributed sensitivities. This might imply, though, an increase of coordination needs as well as a consideration of whether and how reviewers get paid.

☞ **sgem**: *Each abstract is reviewed in a double-blind peer review process by 2 reviewers minimum. The double-blind review process ensured that both authors and reviewers remain anonymous during the whole process. The authors do not know their reviewers and the reviewers don't know the author/s of the reviewed abstracts;*

<https://www.sgem.org/index.php/peer-review-and-metrics/peer-review-process>

Usual suspects

It is very plausible that your event's main topic is shared by an already-existing community of concern. In that case, it could be of interest to take this group into account when thinking of possible ways to merge discussions with newcomers.

☞ **Depths and Densities workshop at Transmediale**: *populated by a mix of known companions and just-met participants (in total, a convergence of circa 30 voices), each bringing her own particular intensities regarding the tools, the theories, the vocabularies, and the urgencies placed upon the table. The discussions were recorded on the spot and transcribed later.*

<https://transmediale.de/content/depths-and-densities-a-possible-bodies-workshop>

Sporadic audience

If your infrastructure allows for such access, it might happen that your event ends up welcoming a number of surprise participants. Think of the best ways of hospitality for that group of potential discussants!

☞ **Internet Yami-Ichi**: *let's turn off, log-out, and drop in, on the real world. The Internet Yami-Ichi is a flea market for "browsing" face-to-face.*

<http://yami-ichi.biz/>

Ratio of types

Depending on the kind of knowledge exchange you want your event to be based on, it might have more guests than applicants... or the other way around. It can also happen that it has more presenters than audience members! It's all fine, just try not to let it happen unnoticed.

☞ **XPUB** *events are often by and for the post-graduate students at the Piet Zwart's courses. Such specificity provides with an atmosphere of not complaining and of embracing complexity together.*

<https://project.xpub.nl/collectiveioning/>

vector #5:

Methods

How the activities in your event are shaped matter (a lot). The processes through which a discussion takes place, the modes in which concerns are raised and problematizations are shared, the dynamics that are proposed in order to balance diverse disciplinary sensibilities, the list goes on...What often seem like pragmatic decisions on procedures, strategies and techniques to shape the gathering may produce very different experiences and results. Methods apply as much to the particular activities (How is a hands-on workshop planned? How does a moderator behave? When does a question get posed?) as well as to the overall design of the gathering. Organizers need to pick their own situated methods to welcome participants, host speakers, facilitate discussions, accompany activities.

Consider these items as points of departure, and check the formats below as examples:

Caucusing (Affinity Groups)

White people and people of color each have work to do separately and together. Caucuses provide spaces for people to work within their own racial/ethnic groups. For white people, a caucus provides time and space to work explicitly and intentionally on understanding white culture and white privilege, and to increase one's critical analysis around these concepts. A white caucus also puts the onus on white people to teach each other about these ideas, rather than relying on people of color to teach them (as often occurs in integrated spaces). For people of color, a caucus is a place to work with their peers on their experiences of internalized racism, for healing and to work on liberation.

☞ <https://www.raciaequitytools.org/act/strategies/caucus-affinity-groups>

Distribution of voices/presences

Very often, due to deep social exclusions, some voices take the spacetime of discussions and others remain unheard. There are methods to try to level voices, and you might want to try some at your event.

☞ **À la carte seminar (TEO=Taller de Experimentaciones Objetuales):** *A cards game to regulate voice weights (oral power relations) for an egalitarian reading group methodology / the cardboard methodology, in rarefying and making explicit the complex conditions to have a conversation on a topic we usually don't talk about, operated as a device allowing us to think and talk 'differently'.*

<https://workshopalacarte.wordpress.com/>

New curricula

Making an ad-hoc curriculum is an ideal way of re-visiting your topic's literature and understanding what is missing or what has been there for too long, historically... to then adjust and counter-propose research paths.

☞ **Anthropocene curriculum.** *[A] "curriculum" in the complete sense of the word: running the circuits of epistemic and aesthetic loops that inform the way earthly creatures can survive, thrive, and collaborate in a knot of conflicting concerns, needs, and ways of life.*

<https://www.anthropocene-curriculum.org/>

Trial and error

Trying things next to other people, learning from errors... and doing it differently next time... or not.

Experimental methodologies are fundamental to let go of the monoculture of questions, perspectives and manners that contemporary research on complexity tends to sit in the middle of.

☞ **Interactivos?** *Program initiated in 2006. Each year a new international collaborative prototyping workshop is celebrated in which different topics are addressed through creative experimentation with free hardware and software tools: creative programming, graphic experimentation, interaction design, digital narratives, etc.*

<https://www.medialab-prado.es/en/programs/interactivos>

Transdisciplinary situated attunement

Open a topic to the knowledge of an emergent community from different backgrounds, and try modes in which bodies of knowledge inform and infuse each other.

☞ **Possible bodies.** *Weaving between technological writing, fiction and theory, Possible Bodies asks how "[so-called] plants" grow with and through the technologies, infrastructures and techniques of 3D. It is a persistent affirmation of the possibility for radical trans*feminist experimentation, especially in an environment that tends to erase the exciting complexities of natureculture for the sake of efficiency.*

<https://possiblebodies.constantvzw.org>

Comparative studies

Take several bodies of work, and find tensions and shared sensibilities in-between them.

☞ **Sheila Jasanoff:** *I have studied how different socio-technical imaginaries of the risks, benefits, opportunities, and potentialities of science and technology are produced and sustained, including in times of crisis.*

<https://sheilajasanoff.org/research/comparative-studies/>

vector #6: Media

Depending on the necessary content and the desired dynamics, your event will see specific media needs emerge. You can take a moment to consider if resources could be shared textually, if communications need audiovisuals (live or recorded), or if conversations can be solely audio-based. Media-wise, the density of exchanges can also be an issue: are your event's talks going to be mono-directional, or do you prefer to have multi-directional discussions? Are images central to the situation, do they have an illustrative role? All these decisions will be especially influential in the infrastructural arrangement of the event. Take a moment to consider your media combinations, and it will help you to consider the limits and potentials of each medium.

Consider these items as points of departure, and check the formats below as examples:

Text-based media

From plain papers to microblogging tactics or the collective taking of notes, text will for sure provide a transversal mediatic presence. Welcome it properly!

☞ **Who Speaks? Glossary:** *This glossary offers markers in the discussion about Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, States, Democracy, Computation, and Technology. It should serve less as a comprehensive explanation of terms one might encounter, and more like indicators to points of interest in the contemporary discussions around AI. The terms are therefore markers for pressures around race, gender, technology, and the social systems that incorporate their workings. AI does not emerge from a pristine space, but rather in the midst of the messy political landscape that surrounds us day to day.*

<https://whospeaks.eu/glossary/>

Sound

Sometimes involving sound-only situations on your event can provide with both a more attentive attitude towards some content and a set of slots to be AFK, a very needed kind of time.

☞ **Corona under the ocean** series of podcasts.

<https://institut-kunst.ch/we-do/phenomenal-ocean-corona-under-the-ocean/>

A/V

Often committing to the preferred media arrangement, audiovisual formats both have the potential for a deep and intense experience and the risk to be asking too much from all: participants, speakers,

workshop leaders, organizers, maintainers and the infrastructural structure itself.

☞ **LibrePlanet online event:** *had a large number of remote speakers, we hosted our own Jitsi instance for remote speakers to connect to and enter a video "call" with the conference organizers. Some details of the Jitsi Meet configuration were tuned up to remove links to non-free services or proprietary browser download sites. A screen capture of this call was then simultaneously recorded by the FSF tech team, and streamed out to the world via Gstreamer and Icecast.*

<https://libreplanet.org/wiki/LibrePlanet:Conference/2020/Streaming>

vector #7:

Traces

Every online situation leaves traces of some sort: ranging from dispersed notes taken by individual participants to scattered abstracts or recorded materials. Some of these you will keep on-, and others off-line. The ways in which you treat such traces will make a difference in terms of the openness and continuity of your event. It is always nice to leave some traces of the gathering for others to later come back to. Yet, the work of keeping and managing an archive can be energy consuming. There is always a maintenance and communication workload to documentation, the limits of which depends on how exhaustive it becomes. Equally important for that workload is what is kept, and where. Also, certain documentation practices might contradict your plan or perhaps conflict with—and even damage—specific participant's needs and desires: you should make a plan for your traces and make it always clear for all in advance. Be transparent about your reasons for keeping traces and be ready to welcome participant's archival needs. It is fundamental as organizers to be explicit about your archival aims and to be open to negotiations, if needed.

Consider these items as points of departure, and check the formats below as examples:

Partial Reports

No event is neutral. No content is innocent. This is why partial reports are an excellent idea to gather reports that are not objective, but situated stories of what took place.

☞ **“Cybernetics of Race/ism and Sex/ism”** *was a class that, in many ways, provided the theoretical background for everything else we have explored throughout Code Societies. It was personal history and social critique. It was wide-ranging and detailed, rigorous and emotional.*

<http://sfpc.io/code-societies/blog/2020-cybernetics-of-race-ism-and-sex-ism.html>

Tools and method revisions

The metaverse will be certainly thankful if you share what you did and how you did it :)

☞ **Dat foundation:** *after the event, published a review what we did and what we learned from it, for other operators or our-future-selves to not repeat mistakes.*

<https://events.dat.foundation/2020/review/>

Reader

What was the key literature that circulated along your event? If you have such a list, make it accessible so others can also read it! You can also be generous and add the abstracts and/or transcripts generated by you and your peers.

☞ <http://reader.lgru.net/pages/index/>

Bug reports

For sure you'll identify misfunctionings in one corner or another, during the process of making your event. Try to be generative and circulate the reports of those bugs!

☞ *This critical reading of the MakeHuman interface is an attempt to get to terms with the various co-conspirators in maintaining that illusion.*

https://interfacemanifesto.hangar.org/index.php/The_MakeHuman_bugreport_v0.2

vector #8: Governance

This vector invites you, as an organizer, to attend to sets of rules, best practices, codes of conduct, degrees of delegation and collaboration guidelines that govern your event. In other words: the vector of governance is the one that makes explicit the politics behind each online gathering. Either the event organizers provide participants with a systematic set of internal tools to arrange the governance, or participants may self-organize such decisions, putting forth a bottom-up form of governance.

The way roles and tasks in the event are taken, offered and given is also part of how the meeting is governed. For example: Who will moderate the discussions? Who will take care of the logistics? Who is attentive to watching clocks and calendars? Who is in charge of hospitality? Who is the go-to person if there is a case of harassment?

Consider these items as points of departure, and check the formats below as examples:

Code of conduct

Communities, settled or emerging, need to provide themselves with socio-technical protocols to manage complex situations, from harassment to inappropriate appropriation. It is fundamental to design your own, adapted to your present and future circumstances, to regard for the safety and well-being of anyone feeling vulnerable at your research events. And of course, CoC are not enough and need to be constantly reviewed, enlarged and adapted.

☞ **Geek Feminism CoC:** dedicated to providing a harassment-free experience for everyone, regardless of gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, or religion. We do not tolerate harassment of participants in any form.

https://geekfeminism.wikia.org/wiki/Conference_anti-harassment/Policy

☞ **Code of Acquisitions:** *The Code of Acquisitions platform allows anyone to submit their cases anonymously or openly. Cases could range from gender and race discrimination to misconduct of payments.*

<https://codeofacquisitions.org/>

Licenses

In one way or another addressing to the apparatuses

of law and governance in equal parts, licenses are cultural artifacts that provide key information about when, where and in which terms a specific piece of work can circulate, and/or be changed.

☞ **CC4r**: *articulates conditions for re-using authored materials. This document is inspired by the principles of Free Culture – with a few differences. You are invited to copy, distribute, and transform the materials published under these conditions, and to take the implications of (re-)use into account.*

<https://gitlab.constantvzw.org/unbound/cc4r>

Budget

The openness of a budget, what it contains (is it representing only productive, or also reproductive economies?) and the degree of transparency of each of its sections says a lot about the way a community does its management of resources.

☞ **Dat://** open collective expenses summary.

<https://opencollective.com/dat#section-budget>

vector #9: Tools and infrastructure

Which services are you relying on for your event? By now, many tools and platforms will have been marketed your way, each of them a proposal, or should we say tools to impose ways of hosting online gatherings. These tools interlace all activities pertaining to an event: scheduling the gathering, meeting with the organizing team, communicating with participants, circulating calls, gathering in groups, streaming contents, editing content, keeping materials in an archive or just chatting informally. Depending on your plan and budget, and the institutional culture you are part of, this techno-ecology might have different shapes, flavours and sizes. In any case, it is crucial that you take a moment to consider how your tools are affecting your event (and maybe even your institution), and what you can do to pick the right combo. Your infrastructural combo might not need all standardized suits. There might also be space for building tools for your event, and using your event as an opportunity to build tools for your community. Your efforts may range from reading the terms and conditions of all possible platforms making sure they reflect your values, to exploring server and hosting opportunities for on premise solutions. Being very intentional with your toolset and protocols, and even considering designing your (community's) technical constellation are all possibilities. These efforts take time, especially since many of us have to start from basics. While the process is laborious, picking your short and long term tools and platforms certainly is an important step to not making "just another webinar" :)

Consider these items as points of departure, and check the formats below as examples:

Schedule planning

Think of what needs to happen, and also leave some space for what you don't know still, but might happen. A multiplicity of possible time parameters might be at play: from differentiated time-zones to improvised re-scheduling of whole sessions. Perhaps also you want your schedule to be accessible by an extended team of organisers?

☞ **Pretalx**. *An open source conference management tool. It starts you off by creating a Call for Participation that is exactly right for you. You can then review incoming submissions with your team and choose the best ones. Once*

you've made your choice, create the best schedule for your conference with our schedule editor.

<https://docs.pretalx.org/>

Collective writing and notetaking

During talks, workshops, performances and debates, it is always interesting to have collective note-taking areas, beyond individual self-provided notebooks or documents. Your range of attention towards such areas can travel from basic provision to full-on moderation, passing through creative documentation tactics or playful techniques to invite polyphony in.

☞ **Etherbox** (interviewed by Michael Murtaugh et al.). /Q: *What makes an etherbox?* /A: *Well for one thing, etherpad. It's basically a shared editor where users can write the same text simultaneously.* /Q: *Could another way of collaborative writing work equally well? Like for instance, what do you think of Google docs?* /A: *Sorry that was a provocation.* /A: *Ha ha. Well as a matter of fact, etherpad started as a product of ex-Google employees, then got bought by Google, only to be later Open Sourced.* /Q: *And Piratepad, is it the same?* /A: *That's just a public instance of the etherpad software, it is of course not a box like me. But the naming is interesting too, as it demonstrates how other kinds of political imaginaries can be activated.*

<https://networksofonesown.constantvzw.org/etherbox/manual.html#interview-with-etherbox-1>

☞ **WikiMedia pad facility:**

<https://etherpad.wikimedia.org/>

Videocalls

Either for the process of pre-producing and post-producing your event, or even for making the event itself happen, videocalls provide with an audiovisual multidirectionality that can be of use to some extent. Sometimes flattening the discussion a bit, and often limiting the modes of mise en scène, this is nevertheless something that definitely will be on your list of tools.

☞ **Big Blue Button (BBB)**. *It is open source, non-profit and it doesn't go hunting for user data. Tobias Fiebig says: 'In a crisis you grab the first tools', 'But as soon as the urgent need has passed, we, as a public institution, should put our efforts into public utilities.'* *BigBlueButton might well fill this role as a public remote teaching tool.*

<https://www.delta.tudelft.nl/article/open-source-alternative-zoom>

☞ **Big Blue Button:**

<https://bigbluebutton.org/>

Streamcasting

In case you want your event, or part of it, to reach a wider audience, perhaps streaming it is the smoother decision for its live audiovisuals.

☞ **Icecast:** *In Icecast you usually have a “station” (mountpoint) sourced by a source client like IceS and streamed by Icecast to a large amount of listeners. This implies that all listeners of that mountpoint get the same stream.*

<https://icecast.org>

Informal chats and encounters

For moderating discussions in your event sessions, or for parallel informal conversations during talks or workshops, chat can be an optimal tool to facilitate the flow of your community with.

☞ **Freenode IRC:** *The project was originally founded to provide interactive discussion facilities to peer-directed project communities. Peer-directed projects combine open, informal participation with broad licensing and wide dissemination of output.*

<https://freenode.net/philosophy>

Accessible via the web interface:

<https://webchat.freenode.net/>

Openended editing

Some processes of knowledge sharing do not have a finalisation date. There are tools for coming back to materials again and again, and to assure others could keep editing them in the future.

☞ **Eva Weinmayr’s PhD MediaWiki:** *This open-source MediaWiki is a tool to develop, map, share, and communicate the writing of this PhD thesis. It is a platform for producing and disseminating the research. It records and maps a looped, iterative, and knowledge-creating process of structuring, writing, thinking, discovering, discarding, and restructuring.*

http://wiki.evaweinmayr.com/index.php/Main_Page

File sharing

Abstracts, budget spreadsheets, CFP drafts, recordings and commented revisions will flow from one place to another within your organizing community, and perhaps also from it to the outer worlds. It is hence important to count on a reliable file-sharing system to send files along.

☞ **Host b.** *A generic one click host.*

<https://hostb.org/>

Archiving

Surely you’ll need to also keep a number of files at hand, and that might be a shared need with your

team (to be able to consult and modify same files, while collaborating).

☞ **OwnCloud.** *You can deploy ownCloud in your own data center on-premises, at a trusted service provider or choose ownCloud.online*

<https://owncloud.com/>

Web design and content creation

From very sharp content generation apparatuses to the more basic instances to create your own web structures: there are many options to try and play with. These are just two of them, for very differentiated needs:

☞ **WordPress:** *one of the most popular CMS platforms. You can either make a blog or even build an e-commerce site with the help of it. WordPress is a very user-friendly website creation tool.*

<https://wordpress.org/>

☞ **Hotglue:** *Simply manipulate pictures, text and video directly in a browser window! Editing a page looks exactly the same as viewing it, the only difference is that you can move things around! No programming skills needed!*

<https://hotglue.me/>

Budget management

On a daily basis, budget sheets need to be updated, invoices need to fly in and out and versions need to be compared and/or merged. If all is accessible for stakeholders and transparent for all, the chances to facilitate the emergence of a community under trustful conditions are much higher, and so is the chance to catch bugs faster or be creative with your numbers, as a group ;)

☞ **MoneyManagerEX:** *the most popular cross-platform, easy-to-use, free, and open source budgeting and personal finance software.*

<https://www.moneymanagerex.org/>

Synching times

Because it is really difficult to synch agendas, and because if you are preparing a transnational event, you'll really need to be inventive about the time-zones issue...

☞ **Time and date:**

<https://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/meeting.html>

☞ **Framadate:**

<https://framadate.org/>

vector #10: Obfuscation

Obfuscation strategies represent creative ways to evade surveillance, protect privacy, improve security; as well as protest, contest, resist and sabotage technology. Obfuscation methods render data more ambiguous, difficult to exploit and interpret, less useful. They rely on the addition of gibberish, meaningless data; they pollute, add noise, randomize. Obfuscation invokes an intuitive form of protection: it distorts that which is visible to render it less (or in)visible. It hides the trees among the forest.

This Catalog was produced under the very specific circumstances of the process of preparing for a series of online events on obfuscation (as a matter of concern, as a topic, as a praxis, as a research tactic). Such situatedness provided the Catalog with a concrete orientation given the needs, tones and manners of the event's organizers.

Consider these items as points of departure, and check the formats below as examples:

Deception techniques I: Anti-bot honeypots

To not be tracked, one could resort her event's page to anti-bot technologies. Things like spider honeypots that would trap crawlers in an attempt to prevent data collection in the first place.

☞ **Spidertrap:** *An automagically-generated web page which contains large numbers of spurious, realistic fake email addresses and hyperlinks to further, randomly-filled pages of more of the same. Which ought to completely snarl up SpamBots.*

<https://wiki.c2.com/?SpiderTrap>

Deception techniques II: Decoys

There's tons of computer security literature related to decoys, although in many cases these decoys are deployed against human adversaries, i.e. the goal is to distract attackers or provide them with misleading/false intelligence.

☞ **Deception Toolkit, DWALL and, HoneyD** *are designed to produce large numbers of deceptive services of different characteristics that dominate a search space. The basic idea is to fill the search space of the attacker's intelligence effort with decoys so that detection and differentiation of real targets becomes difficult or expensive.*

http://all.net/courses.all.net/Deception/deception/Deception_Techniques_.pdf

<http://www.all.net/dtk/>

<https://dwall.online/>

<http://www.honeyd.org/>

Fakeness

To address automated data collection, in addition to the spider honeypots one could create fake documentation, fake schedules, have parallel (albeit hidden from humans) webpages with contradicting information... there's tons of literature on this:

☞ Salem & Stolfo, "Decoy Document Deployment for Effective Masquerade Attack Detection"

https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-642-22424-9_3

☞ Yuill et al.'s "Honeyfiles: Deceptive files for intrusion detection."

<https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?arnumber=1437806>

Prevent automated processing

Obfuscation techniques can also be used to prevent automated text/image/audio processing/recognition. Here organizers could resort to the type of technologies that they hope make it to the workshop.

☞ **Fawkes:** pre-image processing (coming with ethical concerns of its own...)

<https://sandlab.cs.uchicago.edu/fawkes/>

☞ **Typographic interventions.** making the font readable to humans but not to machines, though of course this also comes with trade-offs as copy paste does not work.

https://spivey.oriel.ox.ac.uk/corner/Obfuscated_PDF

☞ **Captchas:** *Captchas are sometimes called reverse Turing tests, because they are intended to allow a computer to determine whether a remote client is human or machine.*

<https://www.usenix.org/system/files/conference/woot14/woot14-bursztein.pdf>

☞ **Anonymouth:** *A tool of stylometric anonymization, Anonymouth is a Java-based application that aims to give users the tools and knowledge needed to begin anonymizing documents they have written.*

<https://directory.fsf.org/wiki/Anonymouth>

Anti-SEO on ourselves?

Despite their creativity, tools and actions listed above could be very interesting but also tricky, because if information ends up on Google it would potentially confuse or mislead humans looking for that information on Google. So it is important to take into account that these techniques would also have a detrimental effect on the visibility/reachability of these materials,

undermining to some extent the very reason organizers decided to put them online. Would the trade-off be worthwhile, and at which point? This is all of course unclear, unsolved, to be tested. On the bright side, this would undermine Google's ability to provide (or claim to provide) high-fidelity information. On the flip side, we'd have to be willing to pocket the cost of misleading or confusing humans that rely on Google, i.e, we may end up doing a sort of anti-SEO on ourselves. We'll be feeding Google more data, yes, but to some extent we'd allegedly have an interest in Google having that information and ensuring its fidelity. We would expect obfuscation to confuse the machine at a limited cost for the human, so how do we reconcile this? And can obfuscation really help?

Colophon

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The first booklet version of this Catalog was co-produced by the Obfuscation event series organizing committee [1], Digital Life Initiative at Cornell Tech [2], BEHAVE's ERC-Consolidation Grant [3] and the Department of Multi Actor Systems (MAS) at the Faculty of Technology, Policy and Management at TU Delft [4], in February 2021. In collaboration with the Institute for Technology in the Public Interest (TITiPI) [5], the Catalog is transforming into an editable MediaWiki form.

[1] <http://www.obfuscationworkshop.org>

[2] <https://www.dli.tech.cornell.edu/>

[3] <http://behave.tbm.tudelft.nl/>

[4] <https://www.tudelft.nl/en/tpm/>

[5] <http://titipi.org>

Copyleft with a difference note to whoever encounters **A catalog of formats for digital discomfort ...and other ways to resist totalitarian zoomification**: this is work-in-progress, please join the editing tasks!

You are also invited to copy, distribute, and modify this work under the terms of the Collective Conditions for (re-)use (CC4r) license, 2020 [4]. It implies a straightforward recognition of this Catalog's collective roots and is an invitation for multiple and diverse afterlives of the document:

[6] <https://gitlab.constantvzw.org/unbound/cc4r>

Downloadable pdf [7] and wiki version [8] of this Catalog:

[7] <http://titipi.org/projects/discomfort/>

[8] http://titipi.org/wiki/index.php/Catalog_of_Formats_for_Digital_Discomfort

Referenced projects and materials, each hold their own license.

Sister initiatives

This Catalog is inspired and infused by many “sister initiatives”. The ones listed below are the most immediately connected and inter-dependent. Others are highly influential in an atmospheric, almost meteorological sense. They can be taken as references and sources for digging further:

The Relearning series

<https://constantvzw.org/wefts/relearningseries.en.html>

There's an elephant in the room!

<https://constantvzw.org/wefts/distant-elephant.en.html>

Digital Solidarity Networks

<https://etherdump.vvvvvvvaria.org/publish/digital-solidarity-networks.raw.html>

Queering damage

https://queeringdamage.hangar.org/index.php/Main_Page

X-pub wiki

https://pzwiki.wdka.nl/mediadesign/Main_Page

Xenosolidarities?

Tensegrity vs technosolutionism

<https://ntrcltrs.hotglue.me/xs/>

Relearn curved

<http://relearn.be/2019/>

**Let's not just do
another webinar,
please!**