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About the websites I sent you, I think what I like the most about them is how stripped down they are. Perhaps it's a nostalgia for an internet before our time, but I find something quite precious in how these sites have very honest and specific purposes and are also DIY projects of individuals and groups. In the case of bivouac the site exists to archive and provide access to information about journeys into the Canadian mountains. The site itself is very simple and it's locally run. There's no advertising and it's not trying to convince you to buy anything. While it is part of the larger *internet*, it itself is also a network and relies on the contributions of independent authors to fill it with content. The entries into the site are often in journal form. In the end the site is there to promote something offline, to assist you in exploring the real world. I attached an example of an article as an html file to this email, you should be able to drop it into your browser. It's all very basic in design and yet incredibly rich in content. For me it's a local project that is made possible through the technology of the internet and yet does not serve the internet. I don't have to use the site and can choose not to, but it's out there and exists as a community that I can join if I want to be a part of it.

A book that I read a little while ago that has been informing a lot of my perspective is Sebastian Olma's *Art and Autonomy* (<https://v2.nl/publishing/art-and-autonomy>). In it he makes a distinction between the aesthetic and poetic dimensions of art, and goes on to explore how while in the past aesthetics may have been a defining element of artistic autonomy, today they are central to the strategies of consumer capitalism and marketing. As such aesthetics are appropriated by advertisers and severed from their original poetic contexts. The associations these aesthetics trigger are still present, yet their deeper significance is stripped from them. These aesthetics and their associations circulate through late-capitalist networks and serve largely as pastiches and "as-ifs" meant to sell a product (or a lifestyle, an image...). Take for example the aesthetics of counter-culture being marketed through mainstream culture, or capitalism trying to sell anti-capitalism. Olma's argument in the book is that artists must take up a "poetics of performative defiance" in order to challenge the role of aesthetics in consumer society.

I think this is quite an interesting lens through which to view digital networks. The distribution and reception of images is largely shaped by the aesthetic qualities of their containers. In a vast network of image distribution aesthetics serve to us as a guide, yet what are the poetics that underlie this landscape?

This is perhaps why I find those sites I previously mentioned interesting. They have almost a type of iconoclasm to them, where the stripping away of all aesthetic markers lays bare their underlying purpose, their underlying poetics. The same motivations were behind my idea of the word cloud. In this case however the images are textual, but nonetheless the textual style serves as an aesthetic mask. Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism and Consumer Society* is another source I'm drawing from here, in particular his notion of pastiche.

(https://art.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/Jameson_Postmodernism_and_Consumer_Society.pdf)

Regarding centralized vs. decentralized networks you raise a good point that data is stored in a centralized location in the case of entities such as Facebook or Instagram. I think what I was referring to as a centralized network is when one entity has a monopoly on the production of content and also distributes it. A school administration would for example be a centralized network with regards to the students in said school, as there is a hierarchical power relationship between the administration and the students that is founded on vested authority. Facebook on the other hand acts as a platform on which many streams of information enter and are distributed. Facebook has its own filters and promotional methods however which shape the content that arrives on the viewers screen. Indeed in a fully decentralized network these filters may not exist. If there is no gatekeeper or corporate curator to the information we access on the internet, then the character of the network may also change.

For me I think the core issue at hand is the question of power in postmodern networks. Large networks can be highly transformative if they are imbued with the right poetics. Perhaps this is the promise of the internet, where it can truly become a vast democratic community. I think however that this will require a change in the role of images within the internet, where images are no longer the aesthetic base for a consumer economy.

Footnote:

I found this quote from one of Olma's books on the V2 website. I think it's quite nice.

"We must take responsibility for the care of society's digital infrastructure and prevent its degeneration into an apparatus of marketing and finance. The alternative is a situation in which the only kind of freedom that remains to us is the freedom to be exploited."