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Yes, I agree! It is almost impossible for an image to exist today on the internet without it being shared hundreds, millions of times, distorted, edited, re-posted, hence decontextualized. Therefore, Yes, a digital image is no loner its subject, but it is its medium and all the other subjects it is being attributed. However, according to science, social media is not a decentralized networked, although I see why you associated the terms. So I will deviate a little to analyze the terminology as I both agree and disagree with you.

I agree because social media makes communication, sharing. identities and everything that goes through it become decentralized. There is no source for truth, for the origin, no roots so to speak, in that sense. An image, as you mention, quickly becomes devoid of its “original” meaning and it is being attributed a different one. Think about memes, for example, whose purpose is that of being decentralized, of being spread and shared. Through meme-ification an image is cut off from its context and by attributing text to it, it becomes a joke, or as you mention, it acquires a textual and stylistic identity.

But I also disagree with you statement because in determining whether a network is centralized or decentralized one has to think about data storage (see image 1). A simple definition would be that a centralized network stores its data [think of Facebook or Google] in one place. I imagine a sky reaching golden tower where all of our personal information is stored and there is only one entrance door. This information values not because of its content but because of its quantity. Going back to the definition, Google Drive, for example is a centralized network because the data that we put in there is being stored by Google’s servers. That is why these kinds of networks have triggered the debate around surveillance and privacy, as they thrive on accumulating personal information. On the other hand, a decentralized network would be like the DIY, peer-to-peer sources you have mentioned, where the data is being stored by individuals.

The question you have asked at the end of the letter has been igniting a lot of debate, however without a definite answer. I believe that there might be a solution in the middle, where both localized and big centralized networks meet. For example, Facebook is a great social aggregator, which in its beginnings created the opportunity for a lot of people to meet, which in a world without such a social network would not have existed. However, it is a chaotic platform, where one cannot control the spread of information, as well as the development or expansion of the groups/networks being formed. In thus sense, the architecture of the network influences the future possibilities and future formation of nods and connection within. Hence, an ideal network could maybe be one that is closed enough to be able to be organized, but open enough to allow the formation of new connections. One that has some sort of stability.

To my mind come two images of networks that could be thought of as an alternative.

1. The brain is both a local and distributed network. It feeds on outer sources, as well as internal ones; it recycles but it also welcomes new stimuli and information.
2. Thinking about brains, I started looking into other brains except of the human one and I realized, looking at my house plants, that the cucumber plant has a very network-like thinking. Through its tendrils, the cucumber plant is always looking for things to cling on, and to form new connections. It does this so that its chances for getting sun light are higher. Hence, in its climbing journey the cucumber plant is forming nodes, contributing and enhancing the possibilities for the plant's growth as well as the possibilities to form new connections. This plant is like a growing figure with many tentacles.

The question remains pretty much the same, in the case: how could we speculate even further about networks and their figures, to the point of fiction and story telling? What kind of images come to mind?

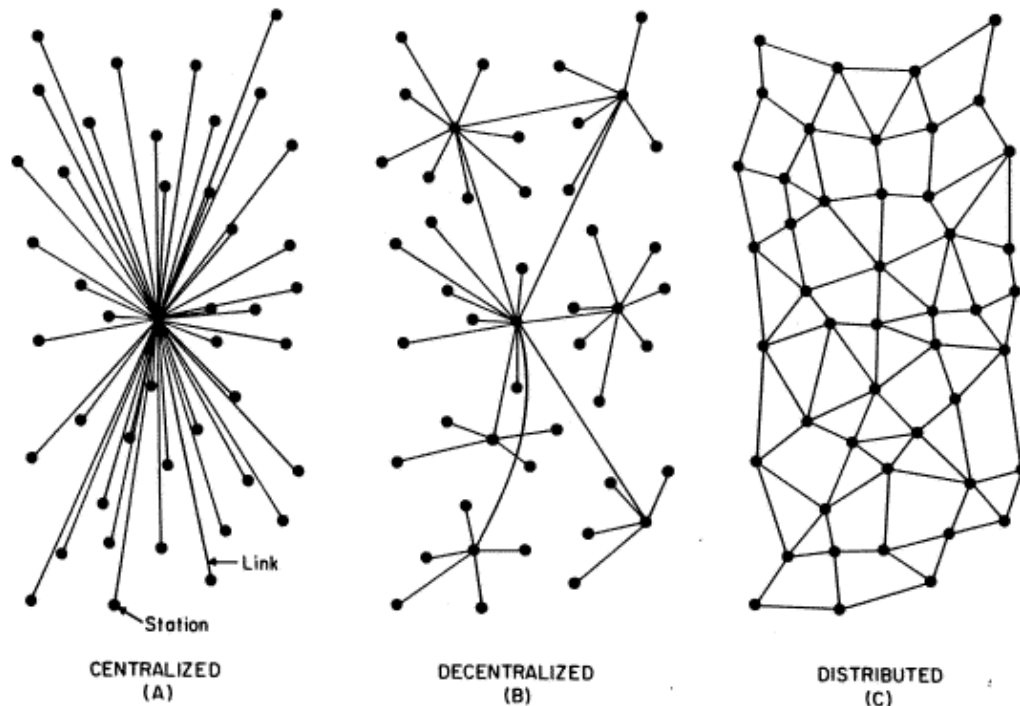


FIG. 1 – Centralized, Decentralized and Distributed Networks

[image 1]



P.S: In your text, you talk about the relationship of image, meaning and distribution. I found this beautiful poem that relates to your thoughts very much and that could spark some more inspiration and discussion between us.

There are no images here
In the solitude, only
The night and its stars which are
Relationships rather than
Images. Shifting darkness,
Strains of feeling, lines of force,
Webs of thoughts, no images,
Only night and time aging
The night in its darkness, just
Motion in space in the dark.
It is a night full of darkness,
And space, and stars, and the hours
Going by, and time going by,
And the night growing old, and all
The webs, and nets, of relationships
Changing, and it is Spring night In
Provence, here where I am,

And under the half moon the almond
Buds are ready to burst. Before noon
The blossoms will open, here by
This peach colored house amongst
The steel gray pines and the gray
Limestone cliffs. Now the buds
Are round and tight in the dim
Moonlight, in the night that
Stretches on forever, that had
No beginning, and that will
Never end, and it doesn't mean
Anything. It isn't an image of
Something. It isn't a symbol of
Something else. It is just an
Almond tree, in the night, by
The house, in the woods, by
A vineyard, under the setting
Half moon, in Provence, in the
Beginning of another Spring.

(Kenneth Rexroth: "Aix en Provence: Spring")