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# Organizing Media: Security and Entertainment

Timon Beyes

## Orgware

One of the most remarkable works on display at 2015's Venice Biennale in Italy was Simon Denny's installation *Secret Power*. Concocted with the designer David Bennewith, the exhibition staged an artistic inquiry into how the world is imagined, mapped, and organized according to the National Security Agency (NSA) and its "Five Eyes" allies, the intelligence apparatuses of the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Representing New Zealand in the Biennale's exhausting mix of centrally curated show and dozens of national pavilions, *Secret Power's* main location was the time-honored Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, a library representing Venice as an affluent and influential world power during the Renaissance. Completed in 1588, the Renaissance Biblioteca had been built in an era of expansionism, empire, and early globalization. It was designed to celebrate culture, knowledge, and science in harmony with civil and military duties and, of course, the church. Its walls are adorned with paintings by then-famous artists (Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese among them), depicting philosophers and thinkers, and its ceilings with allegorical images about the

30 organization of knowledge and power as enacted by the organizational apparatuses of state, military, and church. In the early seventeenth century, the Venetian authorities decreed that a copy of each and every new publication would need to be deposited in the library. Celebrating the medium of the book and of maps—among them Fra Mauro’s *Map of the World* from circa 1450, which summarizes the cartographic thought of its time—in 2015, the library’s walls and ceilings serve as iconographic backdrop and correspondence to *Secret Power*.

Denny and Bennewith have turned the library into a contemporary server room. In an infrastructural double of hardware and exhibition architecture, the visitor encounters an ensemble of nine half-empty server racks—in Plexiglas enclosures that simultaneously work as vitrines—and a workstation. Moving from vitrine to vitrine perhaps echoes the practice of browsing from one internet window to the next (Gad 2015, 188). The blinking hard drives integrated into the racks are apparently at work, processing data and generating information that the visitors cannot access; one has to make do with what is made visible to the human eye. Roughly one-half of the “server vitrines” focus on a montage and sculptural interpretations of selected sets of slides and documents



[Figure 2.1]. Simon Denny, *Secret Power*, installation view, Marciana Library, 2015. Photograph by Jens Ziehe.

leaked by Edward Snowden. Vis-à-vis, the other half of the vitrines is stranger still. The objects on display are based on the portfolio of a designer and entrepreneur by the name of David Darchicourt, whose social media profile states that he was the NSA's creative director of defense intelligence from 2001 to 2012. The material visually resembles the NSA infographics, tools, and plans as well as other material leaked by Snowden. Yet it seems to (at least mainly) consist of Darchicourt's own work as well as sculptural reinterpretations of his designs.

Nothing here seems made up or invented by the artist. Presenting a "mimesis of the given" (Foster 2017, 78), most of the material was found on the internet, then partly processed and remediated, synthesized and collated, by the artist. The rendering of the material is on one hand forensic, evidence exhibited and magnified. Yet the connections and juxtapositions seem impressionistic and circumstantial, conjectural and speculative (Leonard 2015). There is an obvious allegorical layer, given the juxtaposition of contemporary "secret power" and the historical depictions (of power and knowledge) on the library's walls and ceiling. At the same time, the installation's atmosphere is brash and vulgar, since the presentation of the material relies strongly on commercial printing and prototyping techniques, perhaps harking back to the *Wunderkammer* aesthetics of early museums and libraries (Byrt 2016). Overall, it seems more trade fair than art space—as if an ethnographic museum would try to present the workings of intelligence agencies.<sup>1</sup>

Forensic and allegorical, ethnographic and speculative: what is at stake in the exhibition, and what it enables the viewer to register and think, goes beyond the staging of an intelligence agency's visual culture. On display are organizational documents and machines, symbols and traces, agents and structures: the installation is largely made up of *orgware*. It is "speaking of organization in its own language" (Latour 2013a, 381). Yet, in suggesting conjectures and connections between these materials, and in relation to the allegorical depictions of the organization of power/knowledge that adorn the library's walls and ceiling, the exhibition goes further than speaking

32 of organization in its own language. It seems to speculatively trace a contemporary constellation of sociotechnical ordering and its effects. This constellation or nexus operates both technologically and aesthetically: it relies on media infrastructures and networks, and it shapes what can be experienced and expressed. This way, *Secret Power* not only makes manifest what might be the most elaborated and wide-ranging surveillance system ever imagined (Byrt 2016); it also presents a troubling interdependence of technologically driven forms of organizing and conjures up an organizational nexus that coalesces around modes of algorithmic and affective, bureaucratic and entrepreneurial, ordering.

## Thinking Organizationally

The Berlin-based and New Zealand-born Denny has been called a “post-internet artist” (Leonard 2015, 11). His work suits the notion of a “postdigital aesthetics” in that it takes pervasive digitization of everyday life, global networking of communication, “and the immersive and disorientating experiences of computational infrastructures” for granted (Berry and Dieter 2015, 5). Schooled in conceptualism, pop art, and minimalism, and working with all sorts of artistic media, the artist investigates and makes present the images, rhetorics, and mechanisms—or perhaps the visual clutter, rhetorical noise, and hidden operations—of an organized world shaped by pervasive and ubiquitous computing. According to writer and art critic Chris Kraus (2015, 20), Denny therefore engages in a kind of anthropology of contemporary media culture. He identifies aspects of this culture and then transplants and remediates them into the bracketed spaces of museums and galleries—perhaps a translation of the legacy of ready-made sculptures into a postdigital world (Byrt 2016).

Denny’s particular focus is on the digital economy, and he makes no secret of his infatuation with tech culture as it materializes in, and is driven by, businesses and start-ups.<sup>2</sup> In its emphasis on organizational contexts, then, his work manifests a kind of artistic-

organizational research. An anthropologist's eye is turned to the aesthetics of organization that shape, and that are shaped by, the age of ubiquitous computing and connectivity "after" digital media. In this sense, these installations present investigations of "organization" and "organizing" as decisive phenomena of the contemporary media-technological situation. They interrogate and stage how "media organize" (Martin 2003, 15), how media are organized, and how organizing is mediated. They therefore perform a seemingly simple yet consequential recursive logic: to explore how media technologies condition contemporary life, one needs to inquire into their organizational effects. And to discuss how media technologies are produced, take place, disappear, or are transformed, one needs to trace the organizational constellations in which they are inscribed and which they make possible.<sup>3</sup>

Adopting Bruno Latour's plea for the deployment of adverbial forms to understand organization as a "mode of existence" (Latour 2013b), Denny's work can thus be understood as an art of thinking and speaking organizationally. Thinking and speaking organizationally means not to presuppose (an) organization as given framework and outcome but to employ the notion of organization as a preposition, which propels one to follow and trace the processes of organizing and being organized.<sup>4</sup> As Latour puts it somewhat contortedly, this implies trying "to follow a particular being that would transport a force capable, in its displacements, of leaving in its wake something of organization no matter what the scale" (389–90). He suggests following the circulation of multiple "scripts" of organizing, performative narratives that engage actors and in whose "scripting" actors participate (Latour 2013a, 391). Yet of course such scripts rely on material, technical, and embodied practices and infrastructures; they are mediated, affective, and discursive.<sup>5</sup> These modes or scripts shape, yet are never limited to, formal entities such as corporations, state administrations, or clubs. As Latour puts it, organizations "remain always immanent to the instrumentarium that brings them into existence." Hence organizations are "flat" (Latour 2013b, 49).

34 This epistemological angle might sound familiar to a media-theoretical perspective according to which a media-technological “instrumentarium” “determine[s] our situation” (Kittler 1999, xxxix). Yet it risks overlooking the recursive relation between media technology and social, or sociotechnical, ordering. As Reinhold Martin has shown with regard to the “military-industrial complex” in the U.S.-American context of the twentieth century, scripts or modes of organizing can constitute an “organizational complex” of power and knowledge. Such a complex both relies on and employs media technologies to shape what can be perceived and expressed. As “the aesthetic and technological extension of what has been known since the early 1960s as the ‘military-industrial complex’” (Martin 2003, 3–4), this organizational nexus enables the emergence of specific—consumerist, individualized, self-organized—subject positions as well as new forms of networked, deregulated control (Deleuze 1995). In this sense, organization is as immanent to the “instrumentarium” as is its productive agent and driving force. Thinking and speaking organizationally thus means assembling Latour’s “flat” and invariably mediated scripts and tracing, or speculating on, their convergence into a constellation of social organization. This, I think, is what Denny’s work and, in particular, *Secret Power* negotiates and asks us to consider.

## Products for (and of) Organizing

To prepare a closer look at *Secret Power* and its scripts of socio-technical ordering, I briefly dwell on another Denny installation that directly poses the question of organization. In *Products for Organizing*, on display at London’s Serpentine Gallery from the end of 2015 to early 2016, the exhibition space is (again) divided into two sections called *Products for Emergent Organisations* and *Products for Formalised Organisations*. Echoing *Secret Power*’s exhibition architecture, the former is made up of a series of vitrines designed for hard-drive stacks. The vitrines display a kind of sociomaterial history of hacking and hacker communities, yet one that is presented as an organizational history, which focuses on what Denny calls

“organisational moments” (Gad 2015). It touches upon, for example, the Tech Model Railroad Club of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, formed in the late 1940s and sometimes seen as the invention of hacking culture; the “blue box” sold on the University of California, Berkeley campus by Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs as a way of getting free long-distance calls; early hacking groups who broke into the Los Alamos National Laboratory; the invention of computer bulletin board systems as organizational devices; and cryptography and the “cypherpunks” of the 1980s and 1990s.

Along pieces of hardware now packaged as commodities—Wozniak and Job’s box here looks like a proper Apple product—there are documents that resemble technical manuals relating to key themes within the history of hacking. By “speaking organizationally” about such events, Denny not only insinuates that hacker groups developed their own “products for organizing”; he also seeks to trace and visualize the hacker movement’s organizational logics, presenting their emergence as a “product of organizing,” as it were. In this sense, “the objects that populate these narratives are presented as products capable of delivering certain organisational results: models for use, with packing suited to the reimagining” (Gad 2015, 190).

In the section on *Products for Formalised Organisations*, Denny assembles three case studies of proper organizations: Apple; Zappos, the shoe sales company owned by Amazon; and Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), the British intelligence and security organization, which also appears in *Secret Power*. The cases reproduce “flat” managerial and operational models apparently at work in these organizations and designed to work flexibly and nonhierarchically. A tool called Agile is an outgrowth of collaborative software-development methods, now translated into a kind of operating system for everyday organizational life. Another one, called Holacracy, endeavors to reconfigure an organization’s work relations in an antihierarchical and self-organized way. No matter whether the organization typologically belongs to the public or private sector, whether it is a sales platform or a security agency,



36 postdigital organization here seems ordered according to models of distributed authority. Moreover, the organizations' headquarters are on display in the form of architectural models, which perhaps not surprisingly take a loosely ring-shaped, circular form. This form is itself reproduced in internal visualizations, employed as a metaphor for the smooth and unhindered circulation of ideas.

In translating such "organizational moments" into visual, sculptural form—into "a monument to organisational life" (Gad 2015, 190)—Denny seems to embrace their materiality, images, metaphors, and human protagonists. The installation presents the interrelations of technology and organization as a pressing matter of concern in the age of pervasive and pervasively commercialized computing and therefore as self-evident subjects of contemporary artistic inquiry.



[Figure 2.2]. Simon Denny, *Products for Organising*, formalized org chart, architectural model—GCHQ 2/Agile, 2015. Photograph by Nick Ash.

The dichotomy of the two sections recalls Ned Rossiter's (2006) distinction of "organized networks" and "networked organizations." Organized networks employ the sociotechnical means of connectivity for new practices of organizing. They "are shaped by the power of socio-technical needs, interests, affects and passions that hold the potential to translate into new institutional forms" (208). Networked organizations, alternatively, "become networked in an attempt to recast [themselves] while retaining [their] basic infrastructure and work practices" (207). To some extent, Denny's exhibition reproduces this distinction. Contemporary media technologies, that is, provoke both new forms of organizing (here manifested by the emergent and antihierarchical scene of hacker culture) and the partial transformation of established corporations and state administrations. Yet in thinking organizationally, or so I would argue, the artist undermines the spatial juxtaposition between two sections that stand for apparently antithetical organizational setups. Is it (still) the case that it is organized networks (and not networked organizations) that are marked by an atmosphere of openness, practices of sharing and more loosely project-based activities (Lovink and Rossiter 2011)? "In cartoons, flowcharts and glass-cased models, all inscribed with jaunty narratives, he portrays what ought to be opposing movements—the top-down structure of big business and the free, flat world of hacking—showing where they meet in the middle in corporations such as Apple" (Cumming 2015). Arguably, this "middle" is constituted by media: by a set of shared technologies that enable *organizing* (note the exhibition title's gerund) in different contexts and thus afford techies, entrepreneurs, and bureaucrats to jointly usher in a new age of sociotechnical organization.

Of course, the juxtaposition of emergent and formalized organization can be read as a story of co-optation: of countercultural experiments and "moments" turned into instrumental tools to foster commerce, consumer captivity, and state surveillance. However, the genealogy of technology development in its cultural context tells a more complex story, according to which the legacy of the

38 military-industrial complex and that of the American counterculture comes together to spawn the “new economy” (Turner 2006). Denny’s installation seems closer to this kind of narrative. It draws parallels between—indeed, presents a fluid milieu of—commercial entities and hacker groups, bureaucrats and techies, and otherwise refrains from any conventionally critical position or statement. Of course, Denny could be accused of too easily believing in the relentless self-mythologization of the corporate world and a management discourse built on the rhetoric of participation and collaboration, thereby masking or disavowing the everyday life of hierarchy, domination, and control that shapes formal organizations. But precisely because there is no simple mechanism of cause and effect between collaborative technologies and the leveling of organizational hierarchies, *Products for Organizing’s* sculptural rendering of the scripts that circulate in emergent and formal organization hints at a broader organizational complex.

### **Secret Power’s Scripts of Organizing**

As *Products for Organizing* perhaps most clearly shows, thinking organizationally can be described as “both . . . subject matter and methodology of [Denny’s] work” (*e-flux* 2015). Moving back to *Secret Power*, my intent is not to comprehensively discuss the wealth of connections, allusions, and the play of secrecy and transparency that the show stages. Assuming an organizational perspective as outlined above is itself an ordering device. It yields a specific lens on how the exhibition thematizes organization, and how it is itself organized. In this sense, the exhibition’s objects and relations suggest three scripts of organization and media: secrecy, sensemaking, and entrepreneurship.

### **Organizational Secrecy**

The first script is connected to “the unlimited escalation of digital surveillance” (Galison 2016, 156). This is one effect of what Gallo-way and Thacker (2007) have called the “new physics of organiza-

tion” based on flat and distributed network technologies. However, as Denny’s installation insinuates, the new physics of organization can be closely intertwined with sovereign rule and bureaucratic control; networks have become a medium of sovereignty (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 20–21). In this sense, the exhibition pictures the way the globe is protocologically organized and policed through distributed networks. This logic of capture is at work both in state administrations and private corporations, which often actively cooperate, as Snowden revealed.

The server vitrines dedicated to material released by Snowden present an attempt to examine “the way the contemporary world is depicted in imagery used by the NSA” (Higgins 2015). They make visible a networked topology of control and intervention as imagined by the Five Eyes intelligence agencies. One focus is on Treasure Map, regarded as one of the more shocking of Snowden’s revelations. This initiative is designed to map, monitor, and intercept no less than the global data traffic, “which seeks to create a comprehensive world map of connected devices, with many layers of data and metadata” (Barr and Denny 2015, 97). Apart from turning the skull motif of the internal Treasure Map presentation into a sculptural piece of the iconic T-800 skull from *Terminator 2*, Denny both reproduces explanatory slides leaked by Snowden and illustrates the program’s operational logic through amplifying its infrastructural layers. Then there are exhibits from—and interpretations of—various, by-now infamous clandestine operations such as Fox Acid, Mystic and PoisonNut, designed to weaponize information technology. In assembling the Fox Acid material into a colorful and quite shocking mix of cartoons, crude jokes, explanatory tableaus, and infographics about network architectures, Denny emphasizes the operational setup for infiltrating personal computers through the back door of commercial internet providers (Kraus 2015, 23) in order to monitor and record all online activity, even to allow NSA operators to ghostwrite emails and social media postings “for” their victims, enabling a technologically advanced level of smear-campaigning.



[Figure 2.3]. Simon Denny, *Secret Power*, installation view, Marciana Library, 2015. Photograph by Jens Ziehe.

The script of organizational secrecy as presented by *Secret Power* inverts and turns on its head the popular discourse of “organizational transparency” enabled through digital media. Transparency here does not imply user knowledge of the system but rather user ignorance (Rouvroy 2011). Organizational transparency is not transparency “for” the public but transparency *of* citizens *for* state bureaucracies (and corporate players), which themselves operate clandestinely through means of protocological control and intervention. While a media history of organization could be written along different sociotechnical formations of secrecy and transparency (Beyes and Pias 2019)<sup>6</sup>—indeed, the function of pyramidal hierarchies might lie in determining and mediating formal points of exchange and a modicum of transparency, thereby cloaking the rest of organizational conduct in informality and secrecy—today’s technological apparatuses enable and help to produce, in Peter Galison’s words, “a form of secrecy with no end date, no limit of scope, and little access.” Protocological organization is based on “a

new ontology of hidden knowledge: multiple infinite secrets for a boundless conflict” (Galison 2010, 970). Arguably, it is this script of organization that, as Geert Lovink (2016, “Hermes on the Hudson”) wrote after the NSA scandal had broken, has “dashed to pieces” “the values of the internet generation,” which were predicated on “decentralization, peer-to-peer, rhizomes, networks.”

## Organizational Sensemaking

Yet *Secret Power* is not only about networks of secrecy and control as imagined by the Five Eyes. Alongside the depictions of mass-surveillance programs and the policing of the globe, the vitrines entail a montage of objects and elements related to the intelligence agencies’ internal operations. Thus a second script of organization and media manifests itself in the visual aesthetics of internal intelligence agency communication and the way these organizations make sense of their operations. Foreshadowing the (later) *Products for Organizing*, the focus here falls on a kind of management style: how such state bureaucracies imagine and render visible their tasks and processes. Steeped in geek-gamer tropes, internet memes, historical fantasies, and military and animal imagery, the way that cyberespionage operations are conveyed to the NSA’s employees and subcontractors is perhaps the viscerally most shocking experience of Denny’s handling and amplification of this material. As the Treasure Map and the FoxAcid iconography, as well as the maps, magicians, and soldiers that populate the slides leaked by Snowden, indicate, the myths, memes, and fantasies of the NSA itself come across as equally dark and brutal as they are childish, playful, and colorful—and, of course, heavily remediated. In Keller Easterling’s (2015, 182) words,

some of the most pervasive and under-examined aesthetic regimes successfully migrate across military and commercial environments as well as diametrically opposed political camps in ways that camouflage the real messages or actions of organisations. In these tableaux, the accoutrements of history often look like the middle-aged

mottos, pyramids and mandalas of managementese, mixed with the sort of drawings that can be found under the bed of a teenage boy.

Yet as Byrt (2016) argues, the visual references are far from accidental: "They are targeted, precise and extraordinarily readable for the young men and women charged with implementing and overseeing such an epic surveillance system." It is remarkable, moreover, how these figures and objects are partly at odds with and partly correspond to the allegorical Renaissance paintings in the library, establishing a strange iconographic dialogue of bearded men and fantastic, cartoonish animals as guardians and icons of power/knowledge.

In this sense, the tone of *some* of the allegorical depictions and *all* of the Five Eyes material is "unashamedly self-congratulatory" (Bennewith and Metahaven 2015, 27) and drenched in a kind of relentless optimism. It should give orthodox management theory pause—but I am afraid it won't—that the management and leadership models deployed within the NSA and the British Government Communications Headquarters (GHCQ), as far as I can see, quite faithfully resemble what students of business and management are confronted with. Perhaps the agencies are at the forefront of a certain kind of instrumental organizational thought, too. A model presented in the GHCQ's The Art of Deception program, also leaked by Snowden and remediated by Denny, is constructed around the notion of "sensemaking." The sensemaking approach is a prominent way of theorizing how organization works and how processes of organizing discursively unfold. Yet The Art of Deception bluntly shows what the field of organization studies, it seems, only recently discovered (Holt and Cornelissen 2013), namely, that the making of sense is aesthetically predicated on what can be sensed. As a dark art, it is prone to affective and atmospheric modulation. Such managerial reasoning, in other words, seems well aware that forces of organization increasingly work on the level of what N. Katherine Hayles (2006) called the "technological nonconscious." Today's atmospheric and immersive media are key

agents of “a new affective organization” of the social (Angerer 2015, 115). Intelligence agencies, or at least the Five Eyes of the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, one can surmise from *Secret Power*, know and work with this kind of knowledge to make sense of and enact networked conditions of control and deception.

## Entrepreneurs of Onflow

Apart from the invisible physics of organization and the internal organizational sensemaking and its aesthetics, there is a third script of organization and media at work in *Secret Power*. This script seems closely related to Denny's prior work on the digital economy, its processes, subjects, and hyperbolic claims. It pertains to the not so secret star of the show, whom Denny and Bennewith discovered in their research and subsequently turned into a centerpiece of the installation: the designer David Darchicourt. Now running his own firm based in Maryland, Darchicourt was a graphic designer for the NSA from 1996 to 2001 and its creative director of defense intelligence from 2001 to 2012, “creating original graphics for NSA top leadership,” according to his social media profile. The server racks on the right-hand side of the library assemble work that he has done for and within the agency, some pieces of his freelance work, exhibition designs for the NSA Cryptologic Museum at its headquarters in Fort Meade, and his LinkedIn profile. Furthermore, Darchicourt was commissioned by Denny to create graphic representations for what was labeled a New Zealand history project. The designer responded in style. Based on an iconic New Zealand reptile, he came up with a grinning cartoon lizard (or perhaps a lizard-eagle) with a camera-shaped eye apparatus, looking for prey—a kind of cyborg enhancement of the lizard.<sup>7</sup>

In the figure of Darchicourt, and through his design and his products, the installation presents a both comical and disturbing montage of the marriage of military gamer aesthetics, fantasy culture, disinformation, and libertarianism. It stages a meeting of surveillance and business that is conducted online, through platforms





[Figure 2.4]. Simon Denny, *Secret Power*, installation view, Marciana Library, 2015.  
Photograph by Jens Ziehe.

such as Behance, Freelancer, and Mechanical Turk—platforms that many (postdigital) artists use to commission material. Denny's ambivalent fascination with new media entrepreneurs here arguably takes on a critical spin. Through the persona of the designer and his works, the exhibition relates the dark operations and imageries of state intelligence agencies to digital culture's demand to become

entrepreneurial selves. One of the board games on display is called Positive Press—Darchicourt is at home in different genres, if always with full-spectrum colors. The board game seeks to lead its young users from the “Down and Out Dump” to “Upbeat City,” where “YOU report the news in a positive way!” In Kraus’s words, “*Positive Press* is a lurid, disturbing game, simultaneously promoting the libertarian notion of ‘wellness’ and ‘happiness’ as *healthy personal choices*, and instructing primary school children in the rewards and production of ‘spin-control’ disinformation” (Kraus 2015, 24, emphasis original). Also on display: through Lifeskills Cardgames, today’s Crypto-Kids, the “future codemakers and codebreakers,” learn to “Dive into Social Networking” to become “Smart Sharks.” As Nigel Thrift (2011, 16n29) has remarked, the effects of what he calls the “security–entertainment complex” are most visible in a media-savvy pedagogy that seeks to “prepare[] the child for a world in which they will need to be able to present publicly, seek out data, and produce new kinds of significance about what it means to be a subject. They need to be not so much learners of determinate knowledge as little entrepreneurs of onflow.”

## Organizing the Security–Entertainment Complex

If the kind of media-organizational nexus staged by *Secret Power* would need a speculative, generalized name, the one that comes to my mind is indeed the notion of the security–entertainment complex. It denotes, writes Thrift (2011, 11), “an era of permanent and pervasive war and permanent and pervasive entertainment, both sharing the linked values of paranoiac vigilance and the correct identification of the potential of each moment.” The principle of persistent consumer and citizen surveillance in the name of security and consumption would constitute “the heart of an authoritarian capitalism” that has emerged over the last twenty or thirty years (Thrift 2011, 12). This perpetual surveillance is closely connected to what, with Grégoire Chamayou’s (2015, 37–45) *Theory of the Drone*, can be called the principles of “data fusion” (merging different

46 layers of data into one form of information); of “the schematisation of forms of life” (a kind of cartography of life through data patterns and “pattern recognition”; see Apprigh et al. 2018); of creating a total “archive or film of everyone’s life” (with the technologies of football broadcasting, or so Chamayou reports, seen as forerunner); and of “preemptive anticipation,” according to which technology figures out what consumers want before they know they want it, or where potential perpetrators, whose data coalesce into the wrong patterns, are hunted down before any wrongdoing might or might not happen. In similar terms, Shoshana Zuboff (2015) has focused on Google to identify the outlines of what she calls *surveillance capitalism*, in which consumer anticipation is managed and modified by the predictive capacities of protocological control. This is what has turned Facebook “into the biggest surveillance-based enterprise in the history of mankind” (Lanchester 2017, 8).

Based on the ubiquity and availability of data as well as the means of information targeting and affective modulation, then, both security and entertainment sectors share the forms and outcomes of intelligence gathering, its research strategies and software codes. Agencies of state security and the behemoths of digital capitalism are the security–entertainment complex’s main organizational players. Yet the kind of organizational forces at play here work on different levels. The security–entertainment complex fuses different organizational scripts into an organizational complex. Expanding on my reading of *Products for Organizing* and *Secret Power’s* organizational scripts, I distinguish between the three modes of protocological, bureaucratic, and entrepreneurial ordering.

*First*, the secret generation, mapping, and analysis of data is part of a new physics of organization. The corresponding property of organization and its forms of control and entrainment is software protocols. “Protocological organization” (Galloway 2011, 95) is “as real as pyramidal hierarchy, corporate bureaucracy, representative democracy, sovereign fiat, or any other principle of social and political control” (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 29). Protocological organization constitutes processes of organizing beyond and

across the boundaries of organizational entities and below the threshold of human perception. The organized world is constructed here through distributed networks that continually and autonomously produce and relate data—put into the informational forms of observations, classifications, profiles, evaluations, and predictions—according to a set of parameters yet otherwise largely devoid of human interference. As Friedrich Kittler (2006, 49) wrote, it is now “media technologies constructed on the basis of formal languages” that “move the boundary between the possible and the impossible, the thinkable and the unthinkable.” The corresponding regime of visibility and intelligibility, and the distribution of what can be perceived and expressed, takes the form of statistical or “algorithmic governance” (Rouvroy 2011). This is indeed a media a priori of contemporary sociotechnical ordering, and it is “so obvious that it seems to have drifted into the realm of the collective unconscious” (Lovink and Rossiter 2011, 280). While this modality of organizing might operate “flatly” and be spread out horizontally, to use Latour’s terms, it is by no means a symmetrical script where nonhuman, automated algorithms would meet human bodies on equal footing, in a merry dance of agencies. Principles of targeting, permanent watch, schematization, and preemptive anticipation are coded into these organizational scripts. In the sphere of consumption, they help hold consumers “interidiotically stable” (Thrift 2008, 12). In the sphere of infotainment, “controlled by a handful of governments and corporations,” they train citizens to become “village idiots” (Foster 2017, 75). In the world of labor, they seek to ensure docile employees and workers (Irani 2015). And employed in the militarized arms of the security–entertainment complex, they have deadly consequences (Chamayou 2015).

*Second*, this does not imply that conventional organizational entities and management styles disappear or necessarily lose influence. While there is some compelling evidence for the demise of the corporate form and the rise of platform-based, decentralized, and project-based organizational formations (Davis 2013), the performativity of automated algorithms has become central for

48 bureaucratic rule, even a feature of bureaucratization (Totaro and Ninno 2014). Such analyses bolster David Graeber's claim that far from reducing bureaucratic ordering, new information technologies and their logics of mapping, graphs, and codes help enact a kind of merger of public and private bureaucracies, ushering in an "era of total bureaucratization" (Graeber 2015, "Introduction"). Initiatives of so-called marketization or decentralization invariably lead to the expansion of bureaucratic ordering. Thinking organizationally, it is thus far from clear that practices of the social have now shifted away from formal organizational contexts and established institutions. Rather, the bureaucratic apparatuses of state security have adopted the technologies and imageries of networked organization to their own ends of surveillance and control. Just like social networking sites and platforms, they rely on apparatuses of capture that afford, to requote Thrift (2011, 11), the "linked values of paranoid vigilance and the correct identification of the potential of each moment." And not unlike, for instance, Facebook,<sup>8</sup> the employment of such technologies can take on a particularly perverse spin in the case of the NSA and its allies. The bureaucratic potential of algorithmic control is married to a keen insight into such technologies' potential to enact and harness the deliberate modulation of affective states and the engineering of emotions. In this sense, bureaucratic forms like intelligence agencies have embraced the potential of new technologies without giving up on their *modus operandi*. They are turning into networked organizations so as to more pervasively perform "the multiple kinds of surveillance that populate everyday life" (Thrift 2011, 11).

*Third*, and following up on Graeber's thesis, such technological-bureaucratic ordering (of tasks, bodies, and affects) is entangled with, rather than opposed to, the rise of the entrepreneurial subject (Bröckling 2016). After all, if more and more technologically enabled work relations seem to resemble some forms or imaginaries of expressing one's creative self, then this kind of flexibilized labor in turn does not diminish but places a greater demand on bureaucratic overview and control (Beyes and Metelmann 2018;

Hall 2016). In *Secret Power*, the figure of Darchicourt and the crossover between militaristic and entertainment styles embody the role of organized networks as new agents of entertainment and entrainment in the security–entertainment complex. Based on the comparably horizontal practices of networked organizing, a kind of mobile and entrepreneurial network sociality has emerged (Wittel 2001). To some degree, relationships can be organized unconstrained from price mechanisms or “traditional hierarchical models of social and economic organization” (Benkler 2006, 8). In critical terms, though, “the new spirit of capitalism is found in brainwork, self-measurement and self-fashioning, perpetual critique and innovation, data creation and extraction” (Galloway 2014, 110). An entrepreneurialized subject or, as Denny’s installation seems to suggest, an artist of commodification is called forth. To some degree untied of the boundaries of conventional formal organizations, he or she combines work and play and aspires to be both individualistic and sociable, autonomous and embedded, responsible and adaptive, perpetually happy, target-driven, and, perhaps, deceitful (Gill 2011).<sup>9</sup>

Adopting yet slightly displacing Keller Easterling’s (2004) notion of “the new orgman,” it is tempting to read such a figure as the latest instantiation or an update of the “organization man,” William H. Whyte’s (1956) proverbial and stereotypical figure embedded in, and dutifully loyal to, the postwar corporation. In *Secret Power*, the designer and former NSA creative director cuts a both scary and comical figure, cheerfully overidentifying with the libertarian and cruel world of the security–entertainment complex, just as Whyte’s organization man presumably overidentified with the corporation. Yet in situating this figure as pivotal to the rise of the organizational complex that fed the military–industrial complex, indeed, as its cyborg, Reinhold Martin (2003) has shown how the organization man’s combined conformism and individuality as well as modularity and flexibility already helped prepare the ground for unfettered commercialization and consumption. If the entrepreneurial cyborg of the security–entertainment complex presents

50 an update, then this is not only because the “new orgman” trades in logistics, flogging styles of management and protocols for networking, as Easterling (2004) writes. In more general terms, the organization man’s “powers have multiplied even if [or just because] his ‘mind and soul’ is no longer exclusively beholden to the demands of The Organization” (Lovink and Rossiter 2011, 280). The Orgmen are embedded in and tied to the life of networks (and their modes of bureaucratic and affective control); they are molded and modulated by contemporary media technologies. They have partly been made redundant by protocological organizing and automated governance, and they increasingly embrace a datafied, platform-based version of acting “as if they were all entrepreneurs” (Denny and Obrist 2016).

In this sense, the security–entertainment complex brings with it its own updated organizational nexus. This nexus shapes and is shaped by pervasive and ubiquitous digital technologies. It is geared toward permanent surveillance of citizens and consumers and its corollaries of preemptive anticipation and affective modulation. It cannot be reduced to either a logic of entrepreneurialism, or one of bureaucratization, or one of purely algorithmic control. Rather, the organizational nexus of the security–entertainment complex coalesces around modes of protocological, bureaucratic, and entrepreneurial orderings and their entanglements.

## **The Undemocratic Surround**

As a way of pulling these strings together, I think that Denny’s immersive installation can also be understood as an inversion of what Fred Turner (2013) has called the “democratic surround”: the emergence of multimedia environments as forms of democratic communication in the United States. Developed during World War II by state agencies, intellectuals, and artists, the democratic surround was designed to support the molding of the “new man” as a democratic citizen who would weather the detrimental authoritarian effects of the mass media, as demonstrated in fascist

Germany. Supplementing the one-way, single-source channels of mass media with multimedia environments, or so it was hoped, would allow emancipated spectators to integrate a heterogeneous variety of sense perceptions into individual acts of sensemaking. Such immersive experience would resemble the political process of finding one's way in a diverse and complex society, and it would train the subject in partaking in it, even embracing it. Idea and practice of the democratic surround would later bleed into the counterculture and the multimedia utopianism of the 1960s and their experiments to expand human consciousness and foster a sense of belonging to human collectivity. In this sense, Turner (2013, 9) argues, "the democratic surround was not only a way of organizing images and sounds; it was a way of thinking about organizing society." As such, it not only represented a genuinely democratic impulse. It also came to be invested with what Turner calls a "managerial mode of a control: a mode in which people might be free to choose their experiences, but only from a menu written by experts" (6).

If this instrumental vision of expert control and leadership (of what the population should think and feel) has come to haunt contemporary sociotechnical life, as Turner suggests, then *Secret Power's* postdigital assemblage presents an update of the relation between art, organization, and social transformation. Yet any democratic or emancipatory vision seems to have been purged. In today's organizational complex, the democratic surround has become a security-entertainment surround, and the new man a new org(wo)man. This surround is produced through different modalities of organization: scripts of invisible protocological organizing that are built to identify, classify, and sometimes taint or destroy human beings; networked organizations and organized networks as transformed or new forms of organization that increasingly rely on technical media as means of modulation and control; and a networked, horizontal mode of organizing entrepreneurial subjects, little entrepreneurs of onflow.



## Can the Security–Entertainment Complex Be Represented?

The notion of surround also relates to the problem of how to research and represent today's invasive media and their partly invisible and partly preconscious—or nonconscious, to use Hayles's term—operations. How to render the organizational complex, if it is to some degree predicated on what seems beyond or before representation? How to write organization? On one hand, it seems a commonplace to point out that much of what was once regarded as the domain of social science, namely, generating and analyzing data, and thus an increasing part of the output of what was formerly carried out by social researchers—surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and so on—is now primarily in the hands of the security–entertainment complex, that is, agencies of state and, of course, Google, Facebook, and the like. In what amounts to a kind of perverse success story of scholarly inventions that have bypassed their inventors, we have arrived at a “new form of mediology in which the details of the everyday life of millions of people are . . . uploaded and analysed” (Thrift 2011, 10). Yet this kind of mediology is invisible to and unattainable for public scholarship. In a memorable turn of phrase, Galloway (2014, 127) has spoken of the subsequent emergence of “low-agency scholars,” researchers unable to make numerically valid statements extracted from adequate measurement devices and data sets.

On the other hand, there is the question of representation itself. In a text titled “Are Some Things Unrepresentable?,” Galloway (2011) has dwelled on Jacques Rancière's (2007) critique of the trope of unrepresentability in an earlier text of the same title. Because data have no visual form, Galloway argues, it is on the level of data's translation into information where visualization takes place. However, depictions of information networks would all look the same; they would adhere to a uniform set of aesthetic codes. There thus would not be a proper poetics of information networks able to render today's societies of control and its organizational forces.

I wonder, though, whether *Secret Power* does not offer a response to what low-agency scholars can do, and to representing contemporary social ordering. According to Anna Munster (2013), what in this text is called *protocological organization* works imminently or intensively beyond perception (through data fusion, data mining, and pattern recognition) and extensively through relations with other social and technical elements. The symbolic and representational level can therefore be seen as secondary, subordinated. In this sense, it is on this subordinate level where Denny's assemblage of hardware, images, objects, texts, and sculptural renderings cohere. These are thus works neither of media genealogy nor of media ecology (Kraus 2015, 20), nor are they experiments in "data undermining," to use Munster's (2013, "Data Undermining") term. Denny does not engage with, for instance, countermapping networks or writing "counterprotocological" code. As noted, he engages in a kind of anthropology of media culture that assembles, remediates, and reorganizes elements of orgware into the different context of art spaces. What appears is a mimesis of what is given to sensory perception in the form of *orgart*. And Denny becomes an artistic orgman, mimetically reproducing and amplifying issues of connectivity, networking protocols, and corresponding management styles. There thus is some ambivalence to Denny's work—perhaps a "strategic ambivalence" (Byrt 2016, "No Place to Hide") that itself becomes part of the artworks.<sup>10</sup> More than "just showing," Denny amplifies and reinterprets, connects and juxtaposes, the found material. It is thus a practice of "mimetic exacerbation" that can veer toward what Hal Foster (2017, 95), with a nod to the art of Jeff Koons, calls "an affirmation, even celebration, of the capitalist garbage bucket." Yet through its thematic, visual, and iconographic assembly, the work provokes reflections on the interrelations of what is on display—such as identifying different scripts of organizing. It is through gathering, alienating, and juxtaposing material into a different context, then, that different organizational scripts and their interrelations become manifest. It allows the visitor to think back, as it were, to the new physics of organization underneath of what is given to the human sensorium, to its

54 operative setup as well as to its intimate relation with bureaucratic ordering, affective control, and entrepreneurial selves.

The “undemocratic surround” of *Secret Power* also invites considerations of the practice of ordering and of tracing connections itself. It performs an act of “reverse espionage” (Higgins 2015), of intelligence gathering and data fusion. Consider the speculative portrait of Darchicourt constructed through the designer’s work, his traces online, and the leaked material as well as visually merging the designer’s freelance material with the visual language employed by the intelligence agencies. As a visitor, then, one engages in one’s very own, pedestrian, perhaps intelligence agency–like trawling through data and imagery, trying to connect dots and recognize patterns. It is a strangely seductive and uncanny exercise. Drifting through the exhibition, my experience was slowed down, rerouted, and opened to processes of association. This way, the imaginary, imagery, and styles of an organizational nexus that underpins the security–entertainment complex take on an evocative visibility and palpability.

Through an applied methodology of thinking organizationally, this kind of artistic research therefore posits a possible case of what the low-agency scholars, denuded of access to the data masses and the tools to analyze them, can do. Thrift (2011, 19) calls this the enactment of “cultural probes that can help people to rework the world by suggesting new unorientations rather than correctives”—a research labor of “suggestion, curiosity and wondering” (18). *Secret Power* posits organization as a preposition and urges the spectator to trace and connect scripts of organizing and being organized. In the wake of these scripts, to paraphrase Latour (2013a, 390), something of organization is left, and it does not look pretty.

## **In Conclusion: Speaking Organizationally**

This essay has dwelled on the question of thinking organizationally in the contemporary landscape of media-technological ordering. Intrigued by Simon Denny’s installations *Products for Organizing*

and *Secret Power* and their mimetic aggravations of orgware, I have discussed different modes of organization: protocological, bureaucratic, and entrepreneurial processes of ordering contemporary life. Yet these processes aren't mutually exclusive. They intermingle and cohere into a contemporary nexus of sociotechnical organization that can be understood as a manifestation and extension of the security–entertainment complex. For sure, there is no single logic governing the organizing of algorithms (Neyland 2015), just as there is no single mode of ordering in organizational settings. Consider for instance the financial markets and algorithmic or computerized high-frequency trading, the consequences of which might slip off the radar of the generalized notion of the security–entertainment complex. But then, tracing multiple scripts of organizing and the way they interrelate and might cohere is precisely what is required.

“Why do we still talk about organization in an era that seems to celebrate looseness and non-commitment?” Lovink and Rossiter (2011, 280) ask. Because the celebration of looseness and non-commitment does not equal the absence of organization but indicates the transformation of organizational scripts, perhaps the emergence of a new organizational complex. Lovink and Rossiter's focus falls on *orgnets*, organized networks and their potential to invent and establish new—emancipatory, progressive, transgressive—institutional forms. In similar terms, Rodrigo Nunes (2014) has outlined the notion of *network-movement* to think present-day organizing beyond formal organization—*The Organisation of the Organisationless* as not the absence of but a new mode of organization. After all, postdigital societies are not only a field of advanced techniques and strategies of manipulation, surveillance, and control. They still, one hopes, offer “plenty of opportunities for experimentation with political tactics and forms of organization” (Terranova 2004, 154).

However, it is not only net activism that “puts the Organization Question on the table” (Lovink 2016, “Occupy”). Another way of putting this is that networked forms of organizing are not the other

56 to management and managerial domination, as Denny, tongue perhaps firmly placed in cheek, demonstrates so well. They might be cut from the same media-technological cloth. Indeed, “everyone is organizing” (Lovink and Rossiter 2011, 281). But then, there is a mirror and equally valid apodictic claim: everyone is being organized. The very same technologies that enable or perhaps condition new forms of relating and cooperating, indeed, the same scripts of ordering enabled or conditioned by such technologies, now constitute the heart and the intelligence of a security–entertainment complex in thrall to paranoid watchfulness, to the surveillance, targeting, and affective control of consumers and citizens. In other words, contemporary organization is immanent to today’s media-technological apparatuses just as much as it is their driving force. This is what is at stake when the term *organize* is mobilized in search of media, and why it is again time to think and speak organizationally.

## Notes

- 1 In addition, *Secret Power* made use of a second venue: the arrivals lounge of Venice’s Marco Polo Airport on the mainland, a contemporary space of transit and global security, where travelers are processed and monitored so as to enter EU territory. Here two photographic reproductions of the Library’s ceiling and walls adorn the floor and the walls of the transit space. The juxtaposition of a “classic” site of power and knowledge with their contemporary manifestation is therefore inverted: a contemporary site of monitoring is invaded by depictions of Renaissance allegories. What might come across as a visual promotion for what’s on in the Library (and hence for the artwork itself) takes on further meanings only in relation to the installation at the Biblioteca. After all, as Chris Kraus remarks, Marco Polo Airport was the world’s first airport to employ digital surveillance and electronic access control (Kraus 2015), and Snowden stayed for forty days in the transit lounge of Moscow’s Sheremetyevo International Airport (where he read Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, or so it was reported; Luhn 2013).
- 2 Such works include *All You Need Is Data: The DLD Conference* (2012), a kind of twisted group portrait of movers and shakers of the digital economy; *The Personal Effects of Kim Dotcom* (2013), a re-creation and reimagining of the confiscated items of the notorious internet entrepreneur, which includes a collection of rather terrible works of art; *New Management* (2014), a study of Samsung manuals, training materials, and corporate reliquaries; *Disruptive Berlin* (2014),

- sculptural portraits of ten young media companies; *Products for Organising*, an inquiry into the organizational logics that drive hacker communities and “proper” formalized organizations (see later); and *Real Mass Entrepreneurship* (2017), based on an investigation of small-firm technology production as mass phenomenon in Shenzhen.
- 3 In this recursive sense, “media are not only the conditions of possibility for events—be they the transfer of a message, the emergence of a visual object, or the re-presentation of things past—but are in themselves events: assemblages or constellations of certain technologies, fields of knowledge, and social institutions” (Horn 2007a, 8).
  - 4 Latour endorses a “process-theoretical” approach to the study of organization. This entails a shift from understanding organizations as bounded, stable entities (the corporation, the nonprofit organization, etc.) and their presumed properties to a focus on the “goings-on” of organizing. Such adverbial or gerundial thinking of organizing seems especially pertinent to changing organizational constellations that are enabled by and accompany media-technological transformations (Beyes 2017).
  - 5 In this modified understanding, scripts resemble what fellow erstwhile ANT scholar John Law called “modes of ordering” (Law 1994). Latour’s theatrical notion of scripts emphasizes a kind of Goffmanesque role-shifting, as organizational actors are sequentially scripting and being scripted in different capacities and engagements. This resembles a primarily temporal description of organizational role-playing, which now includes the capacity to work on the script itself. As such, the concept remains aspatial and atechological (there seem to be no automated protocols in Latour’s scripts). Law’s notion of “modes of ordering” emphasizes the modes’ or scripts’ simultaneous multiplicity (and thus spatiality), their “strategic” effects (and thus power) as well as the technological configuration of these “material-semiotic” forces. It is in this sense that I first identify organizational scripts in Denny’s work, before turning to contemporary modes of sociotechnical ordering.
  - 6 As Georg Simmel pointed out, formal organization epitomizes the social form of the secret as “consciously willed concealment” (Simmel 1906, 449). In intelligence agencies, this willed concealment is doubled: a constitutive part of organizational life and the organizations’ *raison d’être* (Horn 2007b). And with regard to bureaucratic power, Max Weber argued that it is in the “material nature” of every bureaucracy to keep its knowledge and intentions secret (Weber 1946, 233).
  - 7 In a little scoop, a journalist from the *Guardian* contacted Darchicourt after she had interviewed Denny about the exhibition at the start of the Biennale: “While surprised, he was sanguine about the use of his work in the exhibition. ‘I sell my work and I tend not to keep track of it,’ he said. He added: ‘I view myself as an Eskimo. They’d do their drawings on pieces of bone, and leave them in their campsites when they left. That’s what I do. I was paid very well to do the work [for Venice] and David Bennewith was great to work with. As long as I have credit for my work I am happy” (Higgins 2015).

- 8 In 2014, a study on “Experimental Evidence of Massive-Scale Emotional Contagion through Social Networks” caused a minor scandal. Coauthored by a Facebook researcher, the study discussed an experiment on nearly seven hundred thousand Facebook users (without their awareness) that entailed the purposeful manipulation of newsfeeds to find out if and how moods are transferred and travel across social networks (Kramer et al. 2014). Facebook, after all, is primarily in the advertising and surveillance business, which in a postdigital world relies on algorithmic practices of targeting, permanent watch, schematization, preemptive anticipation—and the modulation of moods.
- 9 In his reflections on *The Uberfication of the University*, Gary Hall quotes a futurologist who nicely (if probably inadvertently) captures the security–entertainment complex at work organizationally: “You might be driving Uber part of the day, renting out your spare bedroom a little bit, renting out space in your closet as storage for Amazon or housing the drones that does [sic] delivery for Amazon” (Hall 2016, 9).
- 10 “Consequently, I have never been able to entirely figure out whether he is a critic of the corporate neoliberalism that provides him with so much of his subject matter, or an artist deeply embedded with, and beholden to, that system” (Byrt 2016, “No Place to Hide”). As Byrt shows, departing from a clear-cut opposition between critique and affirmation might be a flawed or nonproductive way to engage with this kind of work. It seems to make more sense to ponder *Secret Power’s* “mimetic exacerbation” (Foster 2017, 95) in terms of its potential as immanent critique of, in my reading, the security–entertainment complex.

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