

Seed 0. Meshdia, an introduction

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Activist artists and makers are frequently toolmakers, committed to sharing their know-how. Their most appropriate textual genre may not be the manifesto but the manual
- David Garcia¹

Meshdia researches, designs, and prototypes new circulations for cultural work(s). Meshdia conceives media as networks and networks as media.

Meshdia moves in two directions: creating bottom-up and plural counter-infrastructures that open up new spaces within society, and intertwining game design, philosophy, legal, and technological imagination to grow new branches of culture.

This text is Seed #0 from the first Meshdia Research & Experiment Arc born in collaboration with UNITED SCREENS. Together, we are working towards the creation of a social protocol to foster alternative circuits for cinema circulation, outside the zones of mainstream distribution.

¹ David Garcia, "The Politics of Making, Effective Artistic Tools," *Open No. 13: The Rise of the Informal Media* (2007): 80-91.

On United Screens

UNITED SCREENS² is a long-term research, networking, and exhibition project conceived in 2018 by SAVVY Contemporary - The Laboratory of Form Ideas (Berlin), intending to create an alliance of community cinema programmers, both loving independent film and sharing realities of political and economic fragility. Through this project, United Screens aims to critically examine and reimagine technologies, methodologies, value metrics, and network logic for community cinema to circulate alternative films and video art across the South.



Group picture from UNITED SCREENS' latest gathering Think Well 4³

Drawing lessons from the combined spirit of the anti-neocolonial Third Cinema proposition of South America, film cooperatives of South Asia, avant-garde movements of Eastern Europe, as well as decolonial resistances of the African continent, United Screens aspires to be a decentralized, peer-promoted think-well on film culture. UNITED SCREENS' endeavor wants to tackle the limits of contemporary international film circulation that prevent amazing films from reaching a significant audience due to high degrees of centralization and the prominent role of gatekeepers.

After four gatherings around the globe, UNITED SCREENS' hopes and critiques, desires, and ideas coalesced in a new infrastructural proposition. The idea of prototyping an alternative system spawn from the desire to constitute a counter-power to the hegemonic forces of cinema circulation. A social infrastructure can "makes certain things possible and other things impossible"⁴, equipping our

² Savvy Contemporary. "Think Well 4." Accessed April 9, 2024. <https://savvy-contemporary.com/en/events/2023/think-well-4/>.

³ Savvy Contemporary. "United Screens." Accessed April 9, 2024. <https://savvy-contemporary.com/en/projects/2024/united-screens/>

⁴ Easterling, Keller. *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space*. London: Verso, 2014.

network and peers with a new playground to organize and act according to our own rules.

Designing this protocol is a political proposal for Meshdia, one guided by our collective beliefs and aspirations and oriented towards different future(s) for cinema circulation. We call this the Possible Cinema Protocol (PCP), resonating with the spirit of Infrastructural Praxis⁵.

⁵ Ivanova, Victoria "Infrastructural Praxis: Planetary Stakes, Situated Traction." Presented at TechPark Lithuania on the invitation of Rupert, May 22, 2019. Vilnius, Lithuania.

To what rhythm does this protocol move?

Meshdia's research and design will unfold as a collective social process, emphasizing that infrastructural development is not solely determined by technical factors. It also builds on dynamics such as relational experiences, negotiation, power struggles, and the interpretation and reappropriation of technology's meaning.

This approach stands in opposition to the *modus operandi* of the platform economy. In the context of cinema, for example, Netflix and similar platforms have fundamentally altered the landscape of filmmaking affecting thousands of lives, without granting film professionals even the slightest opportunity to voice their concerns or opinions on how their system functions. Importing 'universal' standards for production and aesthetics to local film industries, the "role of Netflix commissioners and executives in shaping productions and the precarity of creatives (related to IP, residuals, data, etc.) introduced new power asymmetries."⁶

Secondly, Meshdia diverges from what the Belarusian sociologist Morozov famously criticized as techno-solutionism⁷: the idea that complex challenges can be tackled just by deploying more effective technological systems. This mindset is predicated on the belief that given solutions are scalable and applicable across vastly different contexts, without regard for their differences. This mindset is predicated on the belief that given solutions are scalable and applicable across vastly different contexts, without regard for their differences. In the pursuit of "efficiency," the proposed solutions often exacerbate the imperialistic character of technology. Rather than "competing" with existing systems, we prefer to generate new spaces of possibility corresponding with undervalued social desires.

⁶ Rena Idiz, Daphne. "Local Production for Global Streamers: How Netflix Shapes European Production Cultures." *International Journal of Communication* 18 (2024): 2129-2148

⁷ Morozov, Evgeny. *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2013.



Still from *The Color of Pomegranates* by Sergej Iosifovič Paradžanov

Meshdia is imbued with South-to-South relationships and cultures of solidarity. More than global, this network is trans-local: an interconnected hodgepodge of realities coming from different backgrounds that do not conform to a singular standard but instead embrace their inherent heterogeneity. Our friend and co-conspirator Juan Pablo García Sossa⁸ offers some beautiful reflections to overcome techno-solutionism through a plural approach to design:

“Diversity [...] is rather an actual survival strategy. When we look at plantations and monoculture projects, we would notice that viruses spread easily because they don’t need to decipher the DNA code of the other beings: it is the same. [...] This is not so different from digital monoculture where the homogenizing force of globalism promises to connect us through viral content. We are seeing the effects by now of solutionism and computational thinking. Meanwhile, in permaculture projects, viruses find it harder to spread between beings because they need to decipher the DNA code of each being. The diversity present in such LANscapes has nourished soil, making them more fertile.”

Meshdia designs towards “a world where many worlds can fit”⁹ starting from the idea of Possible Cinema Protocol as a social architecture.

A protocol can be defined as a set of rules governing the behavior and interactions of networked systems and their participant. Protocols are “[...] meant to demonstrate the nonmetaphorical quality of networks”, explains Eugene Thacker¹⁰ offering us a striking image of the power of this idea. PCP is a weave vivifying the relationality of the United Screens’ network (and beyond), allowing new modes of coordination and

⁸ García Sossa, Juan Pablo. "More-than-Binary Computing." COUNTER-N, 2024.

⁹ Escobar, Arturo. *Designs for the Pluriverse*. Duke University Press, 2018

¹⁰ Thacker, Eugene. Foreword to *Protocol*, by Alexander R. Galloway. MIT Press, 2006.

action. Akin to an archipelagic mindset, Meshdia exists as a fluid and elastic infrastructure moving along the contours and tracing shapeshifting connections. The protocol form allows us to imagine and design PCP while intentionally preserving its technological neutrality. Despite having ideas for potential implementations, such as incorporating the Interplanetary File System (IPFS) for hosting movies, Meshdia remains agnostic in its approach.

Meshdia aims to mediate interactions on two different surfaces. Firstly, as said, the protocol will be a coordination medium for the different cinematographic realities in the network to establish an alternative system of circulation. To reach this ambitious goal, Meshdia will protocolize new interaction modes with films, playing with different ways of engagement between the viewer and the moving image.

But how do we define the potential instructions and interactions? Based on the idea of playtesting, we invented a game, designed to explore novel models of ownership and organization. The game will shepherd us through an arc of exploration potentially leading to the definition of a novel license system.

In our perspective, licenses are not only official enablers of behaviors (buying, owning, reproducing, etc.). They are powerful organizational media, opening possibilities that go beyond the questions of ownership. To reappropriate license tools means to open interstices in the social body. In these interspaces, at the crossroads of cinema, play, and legal imagination, Meshdia broadens traditional understanding of cinema circulation, allowing finally for new forms to emerge.

This is the introductory Seed to Meshdia's first Research and Design Arc. The following Seeds will expand on the topic from a variety of perspectives. We'll start with Laura Kloeckner exploring the issues of cinema circulation.

References

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