

Chapter II

Exploring Rhizomic Becomings in Post Dot-Com Crash Networks: A Deleuzian Approach to Emergent Knowledge Dynamics

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Abstract

This chapter introduces the work of Deleuze and Guattari, particularly their notion of rhizomic becomings to the study of emergent knowledge dynamics in contexts of innovation. It shows how an analysis of rhizomic becomings can assist to explore new and emergent patterns, channelling interpretation toward the discovery of new combinations and creative assemblages in knowledge. This is exemplified by the example of a qualitative study exploring knowledge dynamics in e-business entrepreneurship since the dot-com crash. The results highlight the forging of the conditions for innovation in new combinations of lines of affect and lines of technology.

Introduction

The reader may engage with this chapter in two different modes. First, it can be approached in a social psychological mode as an exploration of the idea of networking in e-business entrepreneurship, especially of the idea of new forms of technological interaction in order to consider the issue of the emergence of new knowledge. Specifically, I have in mind the issue of networking amongst e-business entrepreneurs via communication technologies (predominantly the Internet), which specifically since the dot-com crash has brought forward new creative dynamics of interaction not captured in the ways in which knowledge dynamics is addressed in present studies. The aim is to get a better understanding of these dynamics in order to explain emergent conditions of innovation.

On a second level, the chapter speaks to a post-structuralist literature, in that it is an elaboration of the notion of knowledge dynamics as rhizomic becoming, adopting Deleuze and Guattari's ontology of non-dialectic, aconceptual difference. This elaboration moves toward a critique of the very ubiquity and endless utility of the dialectic idea as a way to address knowledge dynamics through the suggestion that its appeal may conceal moments and movements where more unexpected effects are taking place. Indeed, I suggest that there may be some twists in the knowledge dynamics of post dot-com crash networks, where some selected thoughts from a reading of Deleuze and Guattari specifically around the notions of "difference-in-itself" and "the rhizome," may lead one to read other stories than pre-offered through contemporary literature on networks and innovation.

Researching Knowledge Dynamics in E-Business Entrepreneurship

E-Business Entrepreneurship, Knowledge, and Innovation

Today, e-business entrepreneurship brings together two signs of change: advances in technological communication culture and changes in the organisation of business life centred on the management of knowledge. E-business entrepreneurship is a young business sector, roughly 10 years old. With the development of the World Wide Web¹ in the mid-1990s, new business opportunities emerged for selling products and services. The new ways to spread information

quickly in digital form around the globe led to an explosion in the number of small entrepreneurial businesses that focused on the use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) for business that is wholly or predominantly conducted through Web sites. Over a short period of time, this new “Internet-enabled business” (Whinston et al., 2001) emerged as a highly successful new business type. Especially in the latter half of the 1990s a high level of new business activity developed, a period that is often referred to as the “dot-com boom”²².

In this new business arena, knowledge is seen as one of the most significant levers of innovation and its effective management is seen as a route to successful innovation (Seely-Brown & Duguid, 2002). Internet-enabled business developed quickly into a “knowledge-based” business arena of innovation, with the majority of businesses concentrating on the selling and trading of services and solutions over the Web (Whinston et al., 2001). Business types include firms that focus on the provision of systems and solutions for infrastructure or service applications on the Internet, Web pages offering specific information content (content aggregators), Internet intermediaries such as consultancies through or about e-business, and firms concentrating on electronic commerce (business-to-business and retail) (Whinston et al., 2001).

The development of the new sector of e-business entrepreneurship co-exists with what is widely referred as the “dot-com crash,” a stockmarket crash in April 2000. What seemed to be an unstoppable growth of the e-business sector in the 1990s ended abruptly in April 2000 in a worldwide stockmarket collapse of high-tech firms’ values (Ellis, 2001). In the UK alone, hundreds of dot-com firms experienced bankruptcy (DTI, 2002). The dot-com crash meant a major turning point, and its aftermath has opened up a “start-from-scratch” scenario that has raised new questions as to how entrepreneurial innovation can be approached. It also has reinforced the general focus on the importance of knowledge and its management, both in business practice and policy.

Networking “Post Dot-Com”

In this chapter, I suggest that new theoretical flexibilities are required in response to the dynamics that emerge when attention is focused at the meeting point of communication technologies and business centred on knowledge. The network may indeed be the central dynamic at this meeting point. There is increasingly social scientific evidence that networks play an important role in the ways in which business is conducted (Agre, 1999; Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Castells, 1996). Wittel (2001), most notably, argues for a new network sociality, a new way of socialising via networking that is reshaping not only contemporary business life but also social life in general.

During the dot-com boom, new networking practices emerged, such as “First Tuesday” networking events where entrepreneurs and venture capitalists mingled every first Tuesday of a month at an informal face-to-face event. The aim was to bring people with business ideas together with people who could potentially fund such ideas. First Tuesday networking enjoyed great popularity nationwide and many similar but more locally focused e-business networking events mushroomed during the dot-com boom.

However, with the dot-com crash, these networks changed. While the focus on potential investors disappeared, the concept of networking has had a revival in the form of online networking that offers ways for entrepreneurs to place each other in contact in a combination of online introducer systems³ with face-to-face networking. In these networks, the scope of networking had been extended to a wider, seemingly more general theme: being connected. This is illustrated in the two networks that I will examine in this chapter. Web-based networking with integrated introducer systems have been highly successful in the UK with growing membership numbers in the past three years; several of them have membership numbers in the ten thousands and are expanding on an international level.

The question this chapter is concerned with is how we can better understand how these new and highly popular networks contribute to innovative dynamics in e-business entrepreneurship. When it comes to explaining innovation in knowledge-centred business, the predominant logic of thinking about knowledge dynamics adopted is the dialectic one. This is evident in several streams of research that focus on interaction and knowledge creation.

In organisation and management theory, for instance, knowledge dynamics in innovation are studied as the social creation of knowledge through social relations and social interaction (cf. Nonaka & Toyama, 2003; Nonaka, Toyama, & Konno, 2000; Von Krogh, Ichijo, & Nonaka, 2000; Wenger, 2000). This work emphasises social interaction as a key factor in knowledge emergence and bases recommendations for innovation management on it (Kenney, 2001). Interaction, crucially, is presumed to constitute innovation because of the dynamics of learning that the dialogue amongst proactive agents engenders (cf. Seely-Brown & Duguid, 1991). At the centre stands the assumption that it is mainly a dialectic dynamic that brings forward creativity and innovation (Chell, 2000; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003). Dialectics, in this context, is understood in a Hegelian way, meaning a progressive evolution of ideas in the interplay of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis (Hegel, 1977; Rosen, 1982).

The Hegelian stance of theorising dynamics is emblematic for a growing post-Cartesian literature that counters the classic individual-centred and static view on knowledge by Descartes, which separated knowledge from its embodiment and its social context (Hosking, Dachler, & Gergen, 1995). Most prominently,

Cook and Seely-Brown (1999) have drawn attention to the legacy of Cartesian epistemology for organisation theory and have argued that in order to go beyond the static Cartesian notion of knowledge units “possessed” by individuals, a dynamic epistemology grounded in interaction is necessary.

Social psychologists also have argued for dialectics with regard to explaining knowledge dynamics. They have shown how a dialectic perspective is useful to highlight the dynamics of knowledge transformation in the inter-subjective and mutual constitution of the social (Jovchelovitch, 2001; Marková, 2003; Moscovici, 2000). Consistently, authors seek to map out the knowledge relations that individuals create in communicative interaction and explain social change through the dialectic dynamics of social construction in everyday dialogues and argumentation (Moscovici, 2000; Howarth, 2002). Similarly to organisational theorists, the underpinning assumption is that new knowledge emerges from the evolutionary progression of ideas in controversial debate. Argument and counter-argument and the synthesis of different concepts is taken as the exclusive pattern to explain how new knowledge emerges.

Beyond Dialectics

In this chapter, I suggest that in order to capture and explore knowledge dynamics in the contemporary context of post dot-com-crash networks we need to leave behind certain assumptions about the nature of knowledge dynamics which we have tended to rely on to explain knowledge creation. Particularly, this concerns the dialectic model as a way of thinking about knowledge dynamics. Surely, there might be dialectic dynamics in network relationships engendering new understandings about networking. However, dialectics no longer suffices as the *exclusive* pattern through which we address the dynamics that networking engenders.

Two issues are at stake here. First, if we want to account for innovation in knowledge business, we need to be able to think about the *emergent* character of knowledge, that is, we need to be able to capture not merely how existent knowledge transforms but how new and *unprecedented* aspects arise that might lead to new knowledge. Typically, with innovation what emerges is a “something” (Wagner, 1998) that does not relate to any pre-existent socially mediated concept we might have in mind. Rather, this “something” forms a potentiality of a new concept being forged. Second, if we are to better understand the dynamics of such new and unprecedented aspects arising, we need to be able to think about the *creative patterns* that foster such a process of emergence. By creative, I mean patterns that might be different each time. Innovation can “happen” in various “different” ways; they do not follow a proven, routine pattern or procedure. Both aspects point to the *unpredictable* and *surprising* character

of innovation. While the dialectic perspective is useful to highlight how people collectively reconstruct *existent* meanings and identities (Steinberg, 2003), it, however, fails to address this precise aspect; the unpredictable and the new in emergent patterns cannot be addressed, as the dialectic logic directs attention predominantly to the realignment of a pre-existent, familiar concept or pattern with the novel.

Emergence as Rhizomic

Post-structuralist thinkers Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that emergent phenomena are part of a much larger, more diverse, and multiple becoming than is represented by an epistemic logic of dialectics (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987). Dialectics, they hold, subordinates our thinking about dynamics to *conceptual difference* (Lambert, 2002) which exclusively addresses differences between pre-existent concepts and directs attention to the emergence of the novel only *in relation to* pre-existent concepts. Deleuze and Guattari radically oppose dialectics and turn to an ontological notion of becoming that is continually engendered by the repetition of *difference-in-itself* (Deleuze, 1994). For Deleuze and Guattari, what *moves* a system forward is not conceptual difference, but rather a rich and multiple form of difference that bypasses the pre-existent because *it does not relate* to it. Difference-in-itself is a difference that is unprecedented, multiple, and, most importantly, one that “makes itself” (Deleuze, 1968).

This philosophy of becoming emphasises that the dialectic of thinking is not groundless. It depends upon an ontological work of dividing the world which ensures that it can visibly bear the marks that ongoing communicative interaction cuts into it. Deleuze and Guattari describe this work of dividing with the image of the *rhizome*. In their seminal work *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write:

Non-parallel evolutions, which do not proceed by differentiation, but which leap from one line to another, between completely heterogeneous beings; cracks, imperceptible ruptures, which break the lines even if they resume elsewhere, leaping over significant breaks The rhizome is all this. (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 26, emphasis added)

The rhizome challenges the notion of a unique direction of emergence; rather, it portrays a dynamic that grows in simultaneous, multiple ways (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Furthermore, the rhizome has no central or governing structure; it has neither beginning nor end. A rhizome spreads continuously without

beginning or ending and exists in a constant state of play. It does not conform to unidirectional or linearly progressive reasoning. This provides a stark contrast to the dialectic assumption that emergence progresses linearly in tree-like patterns of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

For the present purpose, the rhizome offers a logic of thinking about emergence as a series of combinations of different (in-themselves) streams of becoming. This is what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the emergence of new assemblages (Deleuze, 1990) through the crossing of different lines of becoming. Assemblages can be defined as “multiplicities”; they express the potentiality of multiple differences that are enmeshed variably and without a pre-existent fixed concept or pattern of how they should be linked. Following Deleuze (1987), all life consists of processes of assemblages, of new, unforeseen connections, patterned in rhizomic ways. Consistently, any human body or object is the result of a process of multiple connections (Colebrook, 2002).

Despite its appeal to address unforeseen connections and creative patterns of emergence, the advantage of the rhizome image also is its disadvantage, as Eco (1983, p. 57) points out, as the notion of connections and assemblages becomes easily limitless:

The rhizome is so constructed that every path can be connected with every other one. It has no center, no periphery, no exit, because it is potentially infinite. (Eco, 1983, p. 57)

Those within and those engaging with new connections, therefore, have to engage in forms of “cutting” that halt the flow of the rhizome in order to be able to *perceive* it and to *speak* about them (Strathern, 1996). Here it is important to bear in mind that Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy is an *ontology* of becoming (Hayden, 1998), which implies that we are concerned with flow and movement in the material and natural world rather than exclusively the meaningful world of social sense (the case of dialectics).

Deleuze (1968) emphasises that as human beings we are part and parcel of both worlds — the social world of understanding and the material and natural world. But in contrast to Hegel and other classic metaphysics, sense-making and understanding do not provide the main and superior faculty that orders all sense experiences in the material world (Bryant, 2000). Rather, Deleuze suggests a disjunctive rather than harmonious functioning of the faculties of human reception. This means that, different human faculties such as understanding or feeling are equally important in the creative process of movement. Different sense experiences consistently disrupt each other, with different faculties of reception being involved, such as intuition disrupting understanding.

Thus, a cutting of rhizomic becoming would mean its disruption by the faculty of understanding in order for it to become incorporated in the social world of meaning. The networks I explore next illustrate this: They enmesh contact and friendship with elements of technology in new ways, which emerges as a rhizomic dynamic that disrupts existent understandings of friendship and technology. What the interpretation then hones in on is how people's understanding of technology is variously cut by affect and how people's affect is variously cut by their understanding of technology.

In what follows, I illustrate the *notion of rhizomic becoming that is variously cut* at the example of an exploration of two post dot-com crash networks. Specifically, I present a new individuation that emerged from central cuttings of new connections amongst various lines of technology and lines of affect: the personal profile page.

The Study

An interpretative study was conducted exploring London's e-business networks using participant observation, interviews, and a focus group. The enquiry was conducted over a period of four months (September 2002 to December 2002) and featured 33 e-business entrepreneurs as well as seven e-business networks. At the time of the study, the business arena of e-business entrepreneurship was in a phase of reassessment of business after the dot-com crash. It was a time of radically new phenomena of interaction being shaped, which made it particularly relevant to an exploration of emergent knowledge dynamics.

In this chapter, I report a particular result from the participant observation, which surfaced when exploring rhizomic becomings in networks. Networks had emerged as the most important site for observation in the interviews. The course of observation was determined through a snowball process (Huck, 2000). This was a two-stage purposive sample that first turned to a social milieu that exposed the minimal criteria of the context in question (e-business entrepreneurship as defined by Whinston et al. (2001)), and second, was helped by respondents to complete the sample by pointing to further locations of observation.

Through snowballing, the natural context of social life in the context in question can be reproduced (Gaskell, 2000). This was a key aspect in establishing the quality and public accountability of this qualitative exploration. As Gaskell and Bauer (2000) have suggested, it is crucial for qualitative exploration to ensure the openness of the research for the discovery of local surprise and novelty, enabling the exploration to unfold according to the local context under study rather than

the expectations of the researcher. The snowball process addressed this successfully and yielded seven networks altogether; two of which I report here.

Deleuzian Analysis

The notion of rhizomic becomings by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) indicates an approach to analysis that lets us “think beyond dialectics” and that enables us to channel interpretation in such a way that it lets us surface the emergence of creative new assemblages. Essentially, Deleuze and Guattari introduce a new vocabulary to *think about* dynamics and emergence. Their philosophy animates analysis to “think otherwise,” which is in their sense to approach philosophy as a tool kit from which to draw selectively in order to think about becoming in the light of the analytical task at hand (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994).

Deleuze and Guattari were prolific inventors of concepts, to embrace this logic. Their work teems with such concepts as nomadology, deterritorialization, lines of escape, assemblage, intensity, rhizome, becoming, machinism, plateaus, heterogeneous series, body without organs, and plane of immanence, to name but a few. The Deleuzian approach is often loosely described as “artistic” by critics; yet, authors increasingly take notice of Deleuze’s approach because of his capacity to overturn taken-for-granted assumptions (Bogue, 1989).

In what follows, I employ particularly three notions which suit the present purpose of accounting for emergent knowledge dynamics in e-business entrepreneurship: lines, connections, and individuations. What lies behind this is not a desire to be trendy, but the realization that in order to account for the emergence of new concepts we need new words to express this — especially in an exploration of the dynamics of innovation.

To change my thinking to “rhizomic mode” when interpreting, I looked beyond the dialectic categories of similarity (with existent concepts) and opposition (to existent concepts) when interpreting. Rather, I wanted to highlight the various and startling phenomena I had come across in the observation, pointing me to events which did not translate into any pre-existent concepts about networking and to new connections that would seem counterintuitive to be working together (according to pre-existent categorisations of concepts), yet, nonetheless, worked extremely well together.

First, *lines* provide the main routes of the rhizome. Some such lines will cross over one another, others will merge, and yet others will proliferate chaotically. A rhizomic line is any non-attributable micro-becoming that we can follow and that proceeds *in-between points*. Lines are the routes that make a rhizome what it is: de-rooted. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe lines as follows.

These lines are constantly crossing, intersecting for a moment, following one another. ...it should be borne in mind that these lines mean nothing. It is an affair of cartography. They compose us, as they compose our map. They transform themselves and may even cross over into one another. Rhizome. It is certain that they have nothing to do with language; it is, on the contrary, language that must follow them, it is writing that must take substance from them, between its own lines. (p. 203)

Lines can connect to anything, yet can be broken at any instant, only to take off again in any direction. A line can be an event, a nonsense, a something, a movement. Importantly, in comparison to dialectic lines of progression, lines do not function in terms of lines with a beginning and an end. They do not translate into pre-existent concepts, but rather pass “in-between” (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987) them. As Ansell-Pearson (1997) puts it, “in rhizomatic-styled becomings, becoming denotes the movement by which the line frees itself from the point and renders points indiscernible” (p. 136). In my thinking when interpreting, lines were thus about attempting not to look for origins or destinations, but to focus on the “in-betweens,” that is, on those aspects that were ambivalent to existing evaluative dimensions such in the present networks which were breaking down existent categorisations of online versus off-line networking and of business versus private life.

Second, I focused on *connections*. Connections signify new combinations and assemblages arising from “lines twisting, converging, and crossing as well as diverging; not aborescent but rhizomaniac” (Mackay, 1997, p. 264). A connection can be a disruption, a rupture, a divergence, as well as a convergence. The important aspect about connections is that what is connected “functions well together” (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987) as this is what creates a dynamism of movement. Furthermore, connections are, similarly to lines, ambivalent to pre-existent categories. They are new, heterogeneous phenomena that do not allow an interpretation in terms of unity, resemblance, or contradiction, but bring forth new (non-dialectic) orderings. Hetherington (1997) has described a conceptual, non-dialectical ordering as an ordering through similitude:

Similitude, ... is all about an ordering that takes place through a juxtaposition of signs that culturally are not seen as going together, either because the relationship is new or because it is unexpected. What is being signified cannot easily be attached to a referent ... Similitude is constituted by an unexpected bricolage effect. (p. 9)

It is this unexpected bricolage effect that is at the centre of innovation — usually perceived only in hindsight. They are the new connections that do perhaps not make sense in terms of existing concepts or categorisations but nonetheless work well together.

Third, the analytical focus on ambivalent lines and non-dialectic connections let me concentrate the interpretation overall on the *cutting of becomings*, in the sense that I looked for emerging patterns that came close to what Deleuze and Guattari call “haecceity”:

There is a mode of individuation very different from that of a person, subject, thing, or substance. We reserve the name of haecceity for it. A season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have a perfect individuality lacking nothing, even though this individuality is different from that of a thing or a subject. They are haecceities in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect or be affected. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 261, emphasis in original)

A haecceity is an intensity and new ordering that is becoming a new concept, yet was not defined in its emergence through the relations to other pre-existent concepts. Rather, through individuating, it gradually intensifies the energy of lines running through it and enmeshes connections in new orderings to forge a dynamic that allows them to be grasped by the faculty of understanding — in that it can be named and interpreted in meaning.

In the following section, I concentrate on the particular example of such an individuation: the personal profile page. It came particularly close to forming a haecceity: It was an intensity that emerged from a rhizomic becoming of lines of affect and lines of technology that crossed and cut each other in new ways that were ambivalent to the existent dialectic between virtual versus real world and business vs. private life. These new cuttings worked extremely well together; the personal profile page was at the centre of a dynamic of movement that engendered new potentialities for interaction. To illuminate this, throughout the following, I include excerpts from traces of the dynamics of the personal profile page such as postings, visualisations and announcements on networking-sites, personal messages, guestbook entries, and other micro-events that I experienced when participating in networking.

Personal Profile Page and New Emergent Orderings in Networks

Amongst the seven networks that were sampled in the snowballing process two networks — Ecademy and Ryze — did not compare to the other networks. While most networks would use their Web site as an online space to inform about the network and advertise upcoming face-to-face networking events, the networking-sites of Ecademy and Ryze featured free *personal profile pages* for members — embedded in online introducer systems. The personal profile page was highly popular amongst entrepreneurs: Almost every respondent in the present study was a member of either one or both of the networks and had a personal profile page.

Ecademy was initiated in the UK in 1998. In 2002, it had 20,000 members, with a rising trend. Its mission reads as follows: "... to build the world's largest Trusted Business Network by connecting people to each other — enabling knowledge, contacts, and opportunities to be shared for World Wide Wealth." (Excerpt from Web site *Ecademy.com*, 2002). Ryze has existed since 1996, originated in California's Silicon Valley and had 80,000 members in 2002, also with a rising trend. Its mission was "Extending members' business networks" (excerpt from *Ryze.com* Web site, 2002). In addition to online networking, they both feature monthly face-to-face networking events for members. Ryze had its first face-to-face networking event in London in 2002.

In both networks, a membership is free and acquired via an online registration. Membership can be upgraded to an advanced service (providing special member search functions) for a monthly fee. Once one is registered, one gets assigned a personal Web page (the personal profile page) through which one can publish all kinds of information about oneself and one's business. Figure 1 shows the top section of a (randomly selected) personal profile page on Ryze.

Once one is present on the network with a personal profile page, one is connected to an online universe of personal profile pages and can browse the pages of other entrepreneurs in related business fields or sub-networks (called "tribes" on Ryze). Also, one's own page can be accessed by all other members of a network; it also is searchable via a search tool. Browsing through personal profile pages, one is presented with a rich and colourful range of "personal universes" of knowledge, ambition, and experience. Besides a small standardised part of the page (on Ryze, for instance, the top of the personal profile page features a pre-structured space where entrepreneurs list their "have's" and their "want's"), the larger part of the personal profile page is open to the content preferences of the entrepreneur. On the personal profile page, network members post their profiles,

biographies, and photos, list their vitals, favourite quotations, hobbies, previous jobs, and future career interests.

Members also have a range of profile and communication management tools at their disposal. Via these tools, entrepreneurs can “manage” their contacts and can track potential new network contacts. Examples are private messaging, a guestbook feature via which a member’s message is publicly displayed on the personal profile page of the addressee as well as the “list of friends.” To appear on the list of friends (also on the personal profile page) requires that both members have requested and confirmed their friendship online. Figure 2 shows

Figure 1. Randomly selected personal profile page on Ryze.com (2005)

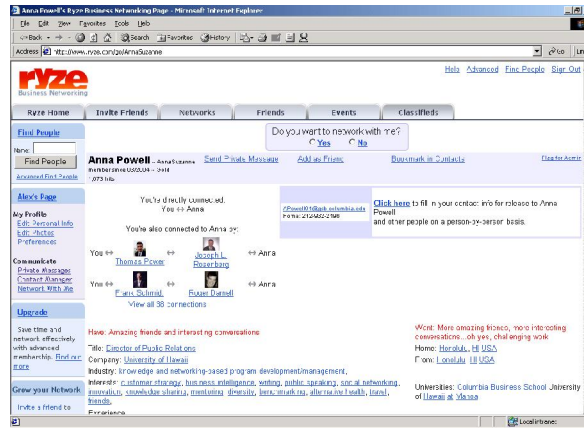


Figure 2. Cut-out from a personal profile page on Ryze.com — guestbook, networks, and list of friends

Guestbook for Friends Only	Networks
<p>Bill Vick, 09/01/04: Hi Thomas - like you I have not discovered SKYPE and what a neat communications tool. I'm Mac based and they (Skype) just released the Mac version. Very neat product.</p> <p>I know all is moving forward for you and Academy.</p> <p>Bill</p> <p>Tim McMahon, 06/17/04 Hi Thomas - saw you on Ryze and I just wanted to invite you to our new network, "The Great Sales Ideas Network" at http://greatsalesideas-network.ryze.com/. I hope you will take a look and join us for some great sales ideas and to share your experience.</p> <p>best regards, Tim</p> <p>Tim McMahon, 06/17/04: Hi Thomas - saw you on Ryze and I just wanted to invite you to our new network, "The Great Sales Ideas Network" at http://greatsalesideas-network.ryze.com/. I hope you will take a look and join us for some great sales ideas and to share your experience.</p>	<p>Marketing Channels/Partnership & Sales Events (mobility/wireless), Media Professionals, Bold/6 group, SF Bay Area Startup Companies, Ecadet CEO, Winning By Sharing, The End of Free, Mar</p> <p>Friends Add Friends Add Thomas as Friend</p> <p>Mark Neuburg, Alex Steinberg, Neil Shea, Allan Balkes, George Poy, Damon Oldcom, Eric Ross, Marshall, Brian Wang, David Sim, John Ginsberg, Krall, Donato, Neal Greenberg, Gary Katz, Jan Le Khoo, Ken Berger, Pankaj Lakhotia, Shannah, G Kenh Kamisugi, Phil Willson, Greville Seddon, O Krishnan, Uma - PritpalParodia.com, Francesco Lozanger, Hank Rotzschlanger, Jonathan Stewart Bharadwaj, Oil Barrett, Paul Makkaspece, Paola I Nimeth, Howard Elsey, Sunil Prabhu, Will Doolittle, Kristin Rochoco, Sanford Dickert, David Akhondjoren, Sullivan, Mark Aldenwickle, Curtis Nash, D Robert Lech, Katy Howell, Jeremy Swinben Green, Wisomus, Ekan Rudowsky, Leon Benjamin, https://www.linkedin.com/profile/jonathan_brooke Rai Taitor, Victor Chua, James Martin, Marc Nat</p>

a cut-out from the lower section of a randomly selected personal profile page, depicting the guestbook, next to the list of friends and a list of sub-networks that this member is involved in.

Hence, a common way of interacting was to contact other entrepreneurs by browsing personal profile pages, and subsequently by sending a guestbook note or personal message. As part of my own participation during the study, I would receive networking messages such as the example shown below.

Ryze Guestbook entries

Anurag Mehra, 12/10/02

Hi, Alex, I have just started an e-learning company myself. Do check it out. Let me know if you need anything.
Anurag

Karen Edelman, 10/25/02

Hi, Alex – Just dropping by to say hello. Your profile is very interesting. Stop by my site perhaps my services would be useful for you at some point.
Karen

Crucially, contacts acquired in this way were in-between business and private interaction as on the one hand, the contact in the network could be for any purpose or reason and had a feel of online chats to close friends to them, but at the same time usually involved some form of assertion that for future business opportunities one would keep each other in mind. This form of interaction was ambivalent to business versus private interaction, but also, as we shall see, to virtual versus real interaction.

The personal profile page brings together two lines of becoming: the technology-becoming of friendship and the friendship-becoming of technology, to phrase it in Deleuzian terms. This means that friendship becomes a technology of networking (technology-becoming of friendship), and technology becomes part of the entrepreneurs' socializing apparatus (friendship-becoming of technology). Both the lines of technology running through the various tools of contact and communication and the lines of affect emerging from the online communication crossed each other in new ways and became each other. Together, this lets the personal profile page emerge as a phenomenon that is "different-in itself" and that intensifies around a large amount of creative energy, given the sheer limitless ways in which technology and affect could intersect via this page.

The phenomenon of the personal profile pages is remarkably close to a "perfect individuality" in the sense of a Deleuzo-Guattarian haecceity as it has a capacity to affect others or to be affected by others (capacity to move and to bring forth dynamics). On the surface, it seemed to form a technology image, but, in fact,

it was far more multiple: Emerging from new connections of lines of affect and lines of technology, it created a dynamic in that "what" each becomes changes no less than "that which becomes" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 3). This means that both new crossovers of affect and technology emerged as well as rearrangements within each of these lines. The personal profile page emerged as an individuation from the various ways in which these lines cut each other; each of which ordered technology-becomings and affect-becomings in different ways, but highlighted the importance of their difference-in-themselves for the dynamics the personal profile page engendered.

Friendship as a Technology of Networking

The technology-becoming of friendship can be described as the dynamic engendered by two lines crossing. First, as the slogan from Ryze illuminates (Figure 3), there is the aspect of the sheer *limitless* potentiality of expansion of one's personal network via the technology of the personal profile page. At the same time and second, this potentiality of unlimited growth is variously cut by several tools that make one's contacts publicly *visible* on the personal profile page.

The list of friends is the tool at the centre of this becoming. As we have seen in Figure 2, it is featured on each personal profile page, embedded into an automatism that tracks online interaction. More precisely, the list of friends is a dedicated space on the personal profile page that is automatically generated; it adds the names of one's contacts to a list whenever a new friendship is confirmed. The list of friends opens up one's potentiality of interaction to an unlimited array of contacts. The list of friends can extend widely without any rules about where the lines of connection should stop and the boundaries of the personal circle of friends are defined. Consider the statement by the network user below.

"... 'If there's someone with whom I have common business interests, I add them to my list of friends, and then a link to their page appears on my page,'" explains Kaup's friend Anne Fitzpatrick, Executive Director of the Boston-based Rock & Roll Library and a Ryze user." *Excerpt from "The Press on Ryze," published on Ryze.com, 2002*

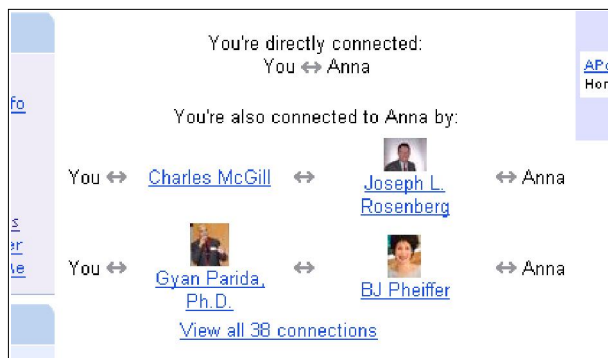
The statement also illustrates how friendship is not attributed via the notion of face-to-face interaction: This is the image of friendship qua network — it is also the image of friendship that becomes a tool, a technology.

This technology-becoming of friendship extends one's private network and despite the sheer limitless expansion of one's network, the crossing of lines of technology

Figure 3. Cut-out from Ryze

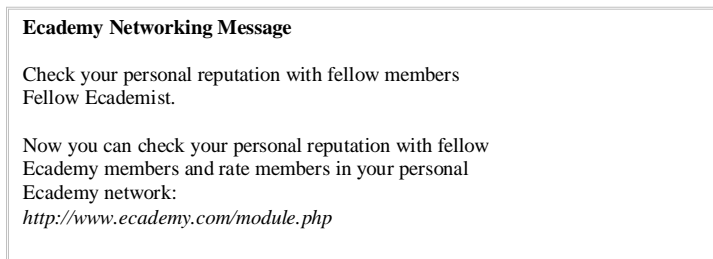


Figure 4. Cut-out from Ryze.com — visualisation of friendship



that made contacts visible cut the rhizomic growth of the network. On Ryze, for instance, in addition to the list of friends as a list of names, the entrepreneurs' ties to other network members also is depicted graphically on the personal profile page, featuring thumbnail photographs of one's contacts (Figure 4).

This feature in Ryze creates an image of the lines of connection running through the network, illustrating the chain of people via whom one is connected to other entrepreneurs. While, again, this feature invites one to make new contacts in order to become more connected to other entrepreneurs, the visibility is important as it cuts into the limitlessness of this line. Through the guestbook, the photographs, and the list of friends, the visibility of friendship became a technology that connected "making contacts online" with one's "real" reputation and thus enabled it to make sense in the "real world" of entrepreneurs. Consider the following excerpt from a networking message distributed to all members by Ecademy.



The visibility of one's friends creates a relationship of similitude, seen from the outside, "from the standpoint of another perspective" (Hetherington, 1997, p. 43); in other words, it creates an ordering of the lines of connection "established by their difference in a relationship between sites rather than their Otherness deriving from a site itself" (ibid, p. 43). In this way, the network becomes real for entrepreneurs in such a way that the technology of the network becomes part of one's socialising apparatus. This is the friendship-becoming of technology.

Technology as Part of Entrepreneurs' Social Life

The lines of technology that run through the network take another route of crossing lines of affect: The technology-becoming of friendship also is a friendship-becoming of technology. The technology of visualisation of one's acquaintances becomes part of one's *everyday way of* socialising with others.

I wrote that the ways of interaction via these networks are ambivalent to the concept of virtual (online) vs. real (off-line). There are various new tools that reinforced the "becoming entangled" of the technology with the daily life of entrepreneurs. An example is e-mail notifications informing the network member about a "movement" on one's personal profile page. This can be, for instance, a notification about a profile visit (see e-mail excerpt below), a guestbook entry, or a request for friendship.

```
Profile Visit
Alexandra,

Steve Collins has looked at your profile.
http://www.ecademy.com/
You can see who else has looked at your profile here:
http://www.ecademy.com//

Ecademy - Connecting Business People http://ecademy.com
```

Another example is a weekly summary e-mail of one's online activities in the form of statistics of visits and traffic on one's personal profile page.

```

email « Ryze stats »

HITS
Your Ryze page : 6* (cumulative)
Average Ryze home page : 91*
Average Ryze home page w/photo: 260*

To increase your hits, add a photo on your Ryze
homepage, at: http://www.ryze.org/photo.php?lr=weekly

FRIENDS & GUESTS
Friends you link to: 0
No Friends yet?? GET THE MOST VALUE or of RYZE by
leveraging your Friends' Networks:
http://www.ryze.org/invite.php?lr=weekly

Friends linked to you: 0
Guestbook entries: 0
Contacts: 0

```

The friendship-becoming of technology also is present in other ways. Entrepreneurs would often post photographs of friends on their personal profile pages. These photographs usually show friends and acquaintances in a leisurely setting such as in homes, holidays, restaurants, or occasionally, at weddings. The important aspect hereby is that these friends are mostly friends from the network shown *in* the private context of the entrepreneur: The friendship technology has begun to cross over affect in “real life” — there is no distinction into real or virtual.

As a newly-appointed CEO, I have special needs for business contacts. Thanks for creating Ryze! I've not only made many great business contacts, but also lots of personal ones! Great job.” Bob Glass, CEO, Creative Science Systems Excerpt from “Member Testimonial Section”. (published on Ryze.com, 2002)

While some authors have drawn attention to problems of establishing trust via online communication, focusing attention on the lamentable absence of proximity in online networking or “virtual networking” (cf. Lash, 2000; Rheingold, 1994; Tucker & Jones, 2000), I suggest that in the present networks the new ways in which lines of technology and lines of affect become enmeshed create conditions for rearrangements in lines of affect that depended *primarily* upon technologies rather than the face-to-face aspect of human interaction. The more a member can prove via the list of friends, guest-book sign-ins, and photographs that he or she “has” friends, the more this person is deemed trustable and successful.

Together, these new connections of business and private life, of real and virtual, forge the conditions for a new ordering of the network; it creates the conditions for new creative assemblages. The personal profile page generated new potentialities for “trusted” interaction and allowed lines of affect that are in-between the flow of the real life and the virtual, blending them together in a new, different, and innovative form of business-private interaction. This is an unprecedented form of interaction that has reinvented the concept of networking; as it creates new conditions for interaction, it presents in itself an innovative and different becoming.

Implications and Conclusion

In his reading of contemporary society as a highly technologically mediated network society, Manuel Castells suggests that in informational networks a culture of “real virtuality” emerges. This is a reality in which “appearances are not just on the screen through which experience is communicated, but they become the experience” (Castells, 1996, p. 373).

The findings presented in this chapter have shown a particular mode in which two post dot-com crash networks *become* such a real virtuality. The Deleuzian analysis uncovered the dynamics that make these networks a phenomenon of movement and creative energy. The personal profile page stands at the centre of it, ordering the experience of networked entrepreneurs in new ways. Entrepreneurs’ social lives are no longer connected mainly to a local community of businesses, but come via the list of friends and network messages; via lines of technology that get intermingled in new ways with friendship. Reputation and business credibility is no longer solely created in face-to-face relations.

These findings raise new questions about the future reverberations of these new connections. The rearrangements in lines of affect and lines of technology go beyond those potentially captured in dialectic relations between real and virtual and between business and private. They are different in-themselves, that is, they do not translate into a mere synthesis between these classic divisions. Rather, they are likely to forge new concepts, just like the personal profile page has emerged as a new concept of networking, assembling elements such as the guestbook, the list of friends, and photographs of close friends.

The Deleuzian analysis has been invaluable to recognise the personal profile page as an intensity of creative becomings as such; it has enabled me to single out the personal profile page as an individuation of a dynamic process of emergence in-the-making. This aids our analytical possibilities of distinguishing creative and emergent dynamics from other dynamics that might merely

reproduce and recreate existing concepts. It gives us a handle to describe the micro-cosmos of becomings, which might not be realised conceptually at the time but which bears first cuttings that allow us to “see” new emergent conditions for innovation.

The present analysis was only possible by keeping the analysis itself “in-between” — bypassing what Deleuze (1987) calls the “grille” of invested evaluative dimensions (such as online versus off-line or business versus private life) when interpreting. This mode of engaging with emergent dynamics does not dictate the story that emerges, and indeed, that has not been the objective. But in following these paths that the Deleuzian philosophy suggests, this chapter has promoted an exploration in the spirit of rhizomic connections in an attempt to estrange the conventional and taken-for-granted, while opening the interpretation up to the imagination of new emergent concepts.

This chapter has been an illustration of what could be developed into a new method of the explorative interpretation of conditions for innovation in knowledge-related contexts. Far from being complete, this chapter has merely presented a first attempt in this direction. Somewhere between the ethno-methodological and the sceptical, the social psychological and the ontological, this chapter has itself been something of a rhizomic journey connecting points of a story rarely narrated as such.

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Endnotes

¹ Graphical user interface of the Internet

² Since then, entrepreneurship in e-business is often referred to as “dot-com business.” The name derives from the “com” suffix of many business Web sites. A dot-com firm is one whose business is wholly or predominantly conducted through such a site, as opposed to traditional businesses which may be represented online but continue to operate primarily off-line.

³ An online introducer system is software that can be integrated into a Web site to support the registration and interaction management of an online community. It allows registered users to send messages to other registered users, to visualise their networking contacts, and to create links between other users.