

CHANGE

IS IN THE

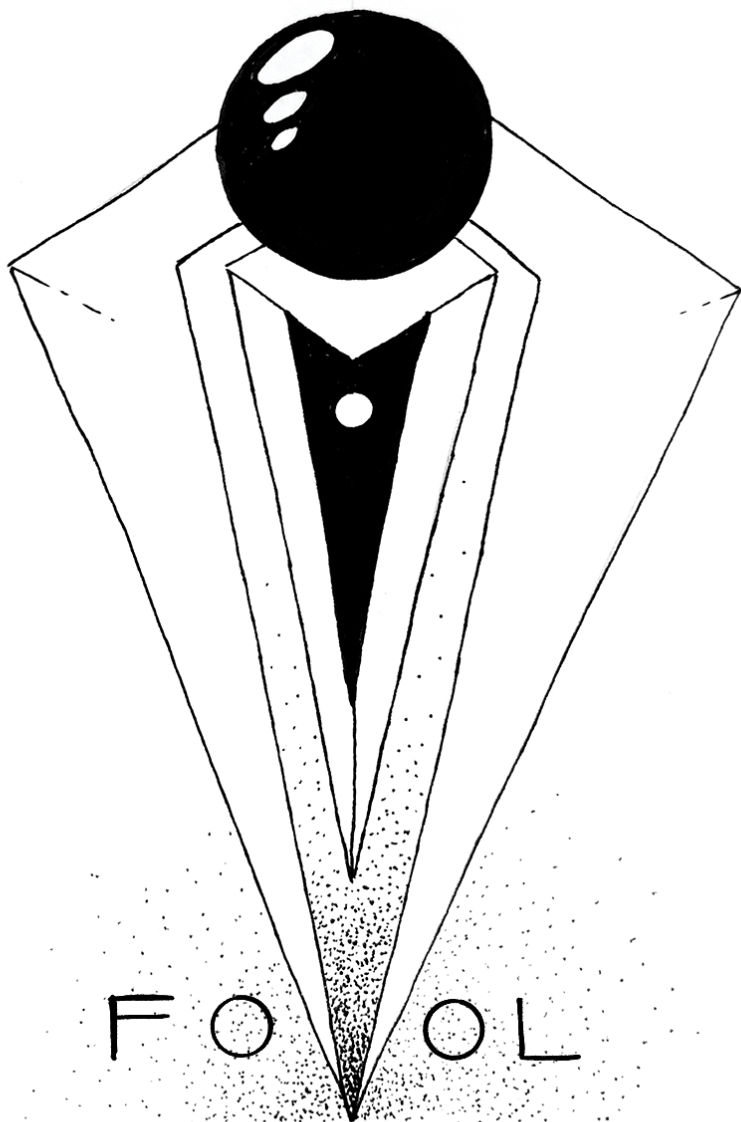
CARDS

GOVERNANCE

TRANSITIONS

OPEN SOURCE

COMMUNITIES





## ***Governance Transitions in Open Source Communities***

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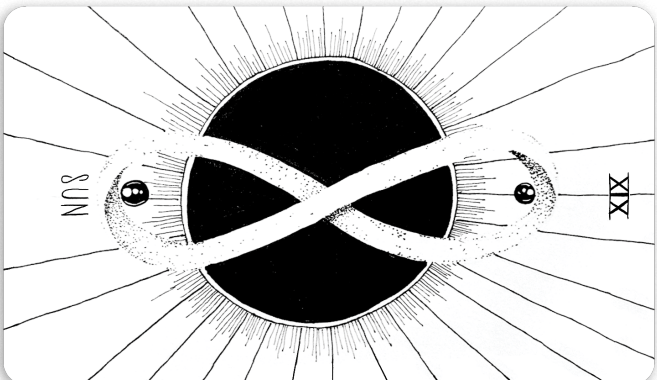
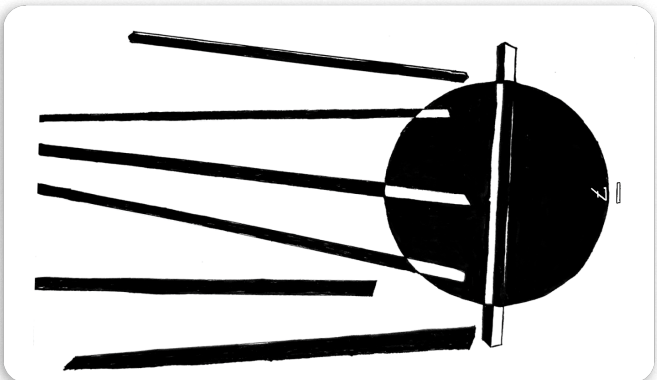
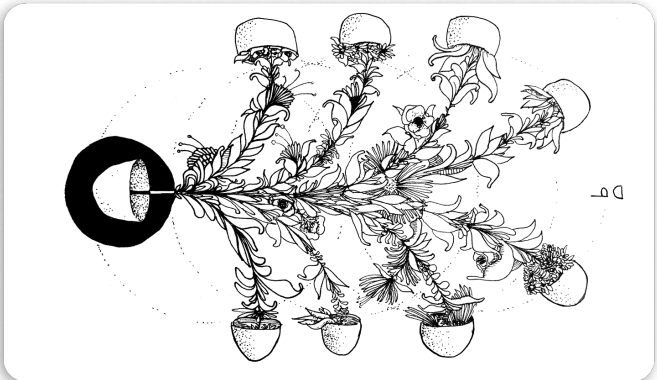
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*A three-card spread: past, present, and future. What story do you see?*

# Behold

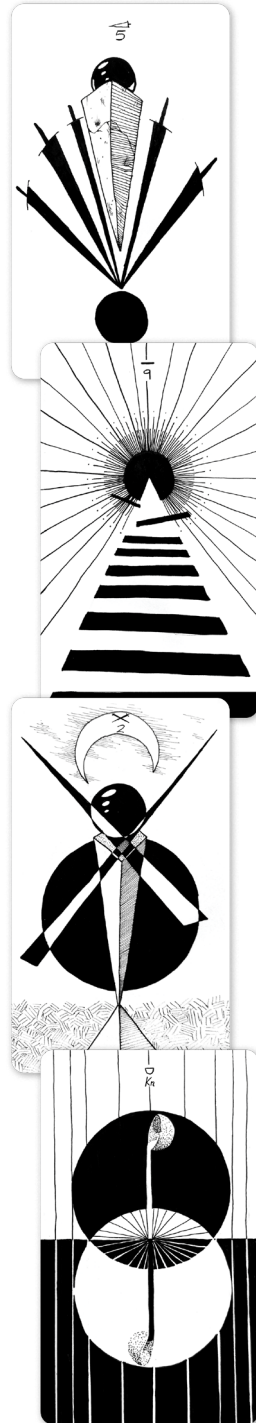
Waves of uncertainty swell around you. They threaten to consume you with confusion as they crescendo. Where do you and your community turn?

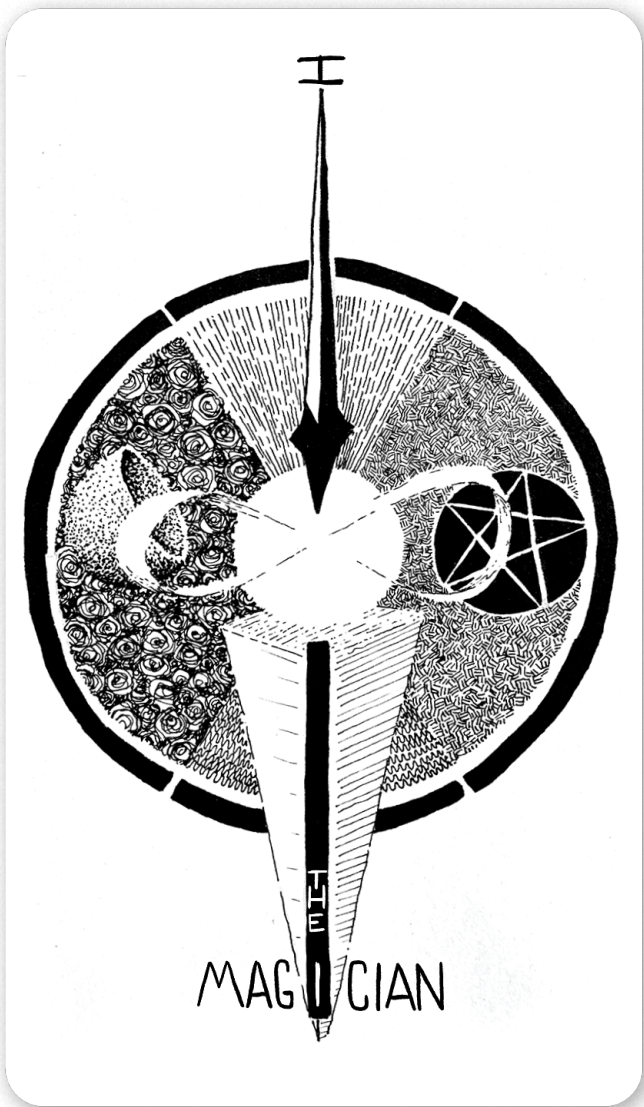
Since its invention 15th-century Italy, tarot has been a technology of sense-making often used as a starting point for reflection, divination, and introspection. By consulting the cards and considering their relevance to the problems that face us, these technologies can help us forge answers to the existential queries that arise across a lifetime of complexity and change.

We invited practitioners from various open-source communities to use the tarot as a tool for sense-making about governance transitions they have witnessed or participated in. We consulted the tarot, pulling cards for each contributor and encouraging them to interpret these cards as they may—conjuring wisdom about community governance, especially in moments of liminality and transition.

Making open-source software is a way of collectively speaking new possibilities into existence. Programming and community-building both are forms of practical magic: the writing and implementation of codes, spells, or “magic words” that do things in the world. Governance is the stewardship or oversight of these processes. By demystifying certain aspects of it (and mystifying others!), we can help communities operate more effectively and democratically.

Our hope is that this zine will be an open-ended starting point—a forkable resource—that can help others navigate growth, transition, and all kinds of impasse, in software development and far beyond. ●





# **Transmutations**

## ***Composting the Oligarchy to Regrow Organizations***

Robin Berjon

Peer production projects may be birthed from ideals of equality, but they don't grow up that way. After an initial phase of open, egalitarian participation, quantitative evidence concerning the evolution of peer production communities over time indicates that—irrespective of their stated values—they transition to a second phase as oligarchies.

This presents a challenge for the long-term sustainability of these organizations and projects: on the one hand, the oversight and institutional expertise of the oligarchy provides an important ecosystem service in protecting the quality of a peer-produced good when it becomes valuable enough to attract subversion. On the other, as time passes, the oligarchy invariably becomes increasingly disconnected from the real-world problems that are relevant to its constituency and decreasingly equipped to handle the issues that face the organization as the world changes. As a result, the organization progressively loses relevance.

This process of calcification can be understood in terms of institutional evolution. According to Allen, Farrell, and Shalizi, “an institution exists when the individual members of a community have institutional beliefs that are similar enough that they are roughly self-reproducing and mutually reinforcing over most situations most of the time.” Within this epistemic understanding of institutions, institutional arrangements change when novel beliefs about the rules in use spread across the network of participants in an organization.

But such participant networks are not typically egalitarian, as some nodes will be far more connected (in technical terms, they will have a higher degree) than others. Intuitively, members of the elite are in contact with more participants than others, and this affects how new ideas—and therefore novel institutions with a different power distribution—may spread: “power asymmetries combined with different attitudes among powerful actors towards specific institutional beliefs may mean that beliefs that sit poorly with power elites are less likely to spread contagiously across the network.” If highly connected participants refuse to spread new beliefs, that will structurally slow them down.

As the organization solidifies around a set of institutional beliefs and develops the means to keep challenges from new ideas at bay, we can expect its epistemic diversity to drop, even if new participants keep joining. Those whose ideas differ too much from the established norms will find it impossible to thrive, and will then leave. Given that epistemic diversity is a key component of resilience, we can expect the organization to become increasingly brittle.

In some cases, at this stage, it may be best to simply compost the organization itself and let it be replaced by a newer, better alternative that will serve its purpose—until it too succumbs to the corrosion of oligarchy. But some of these organizations represent important Schelling points: we benefit greatly from having just the one Wikipedia and in some domains such as standards organi-

zations we would struggle if we had more than one (or at worst, a handful) of options. This means not only that replacing these organizations is costly, but also that, due to the cost of replacing them, they are likely to persist and to keep occupying their niche far past the point of elite capture.

Should we give up, form a doom cult around the Iron Law of Oligarchy, and travel the world chanting “[w]ho says organization, says oligarchy”? Or can we map a path to a third phase for peer production organizations that can follow elite capture? Is it possible to eliminate the oligarchy while maintaining the processes they drive that protect the value of the public good that the organization produces?

It seems unlikely that there would be a universal method to transmute the governance of a peer production organization out of its oligarchic phase, but there is some guidance that should help an institutional insurrectionist devise a course of action.

First, it is important to encode valuable work that the oligarchy provides in an institutional process that can operate without that oligarchy. Presumably, the oligarchy arose because some form of gatekeeping or of quality assurance became (and likely remains) necessary. Capturing the useful component of their contribution is challenging, because it requires extracting the governing methods that sustain the produced common good’s quality, even in the absence of oligarchical oversight.

In many ways, the oligarchs will be the repositories of much of the knowl-

edge required to support peer production—but asking them to create institutions is more likely to capture their pet peeves and idiosyncrasies than to produce an effective governance arrangement. One defining feature of entrenched oligarchy is a propensity to dedicate unhealthy amounts of energy to debating largely insignificant changes to process, in a behavior reminiscent of the more creative parts of the CIA’s Simple Sabotage Field Manual.



One path to success may be to focus clearly on what exactly it is that the organization produces and seek the best way to safeguard the quality of that production. Ideally, that will be



a minimal, trimmed-down process that can readily be understood by the community, including newcomers. It is key that it be designed without any of the oligarchy's baggage—none of the fear, complexity, or peeves that haunt them. This may require providing them with an institutional arena in which to work out their gripes—a retirement home of sorts.

Second, you want to create pathways for minoritarian voice. This is valuable in any organization—but under the epistemic understanding of institutions, spreading new ideas that the elite is inimical to will be a driver of change. One approach may be to create safe spaces for incubation while ensuring that incubated ideas are given high, intentional visibility to participants. This should reintroduce viewpoint diversity, helping make the organization more resilient as it transitions away from its entrenched leadership.

Third, it can be helpful to develop a historical view. In this, the oligarchy can even be put to good use, as it holds the required knowledge. History gives depth to the rules in play, and notably explains the context in which they arose and why they were useful when they were put in place. In turn, this makes them easier to critique, when necessary, by pointing out how the context has changed. You want cultural transmission that is dense enough that you can engage with it and make it yours, rather than a pronouncement from the heavens.

Fourth, create direct contact between non-elite participants. We can describe the elite blockade by “assuming that if nodes of high degree belong disproportionately to a particular class which is inimical to a new belief, and so resist its spread, the new belief is being propagated over a

network from which the high-degree nodes have been preferentially removed.” The theory here is that if elite power is encoded in a social network, you can change that by changing the network—an intervention that may prove practical in relatively small communities. Creating opportunities for non-oligarchic coordination (or even simply contact) may be enough to build the right bridges. Generally, networks in which elite actors are less dominant (i.e., in which there are smaller differences in node degrees) are less susceptible to elite blockade.

And, finally, don't forget to eliminate the oligarchy. This is a political problem, especially if you hope to achieve it faster than one funeral at a time. It is unlikely that oligarchs will step down of their own free will, because each and every one believes themselves impervious to the fate of becoming detached from reality, much like most drivers believe themselves to drive better than average. If you're a newer participant, build coalitions and run in elections—even though you may have to do so more than once in order to win. If you're an enlightened oligarch, mentor and cultivate newcomers—and step the fuck down.

If you succeed you will have a new generation of leaders—you need new leaders—and it's likely that, eventually, a new oligarchy will rise. You can delay it by paying attention to the creation of strong democratic processes and a fiercely egalitarian culture. But what matters is that you've at least kicked the can down the road and made your peer production organization sustainable for another cycle, transmuting the iron law of oligarchy into dirt from which to grow resilient futures. ●

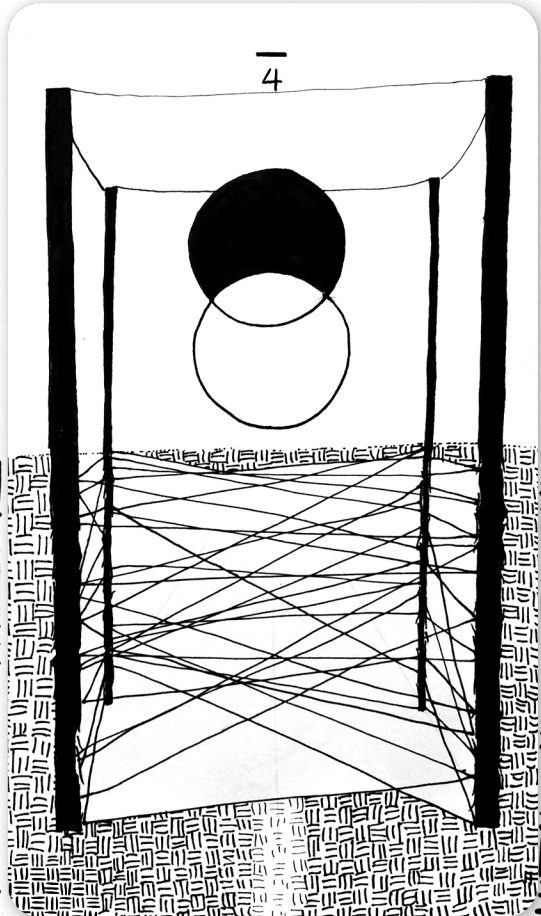


# On Being the Right Size

Seth Frey

In his 1926 essay “On Being the Right Size,” evolutionary biologist J. B. S. Haldane discusses how the biology of animals is influenced by their size. Elephants have wide legs to distribute their massive weight evenly and safely over four feet. Insects don’t need lungs because oxygen diffuses naturally through their bodies.

Structure takes time to maintain. If it doesn’t weigh you down, copy-pasting the policies of a large organization onto a small one will at least burden you with adaptations that you don’t need. And in the other direction, even the organizations most suspicious of structure decide to accumulate it as they grow. This is related to the familiar arc of a project starting with a single lead and slowly growing a larger organization and a clearer structure. Rather than imagining your community as having one or another governance structure, consider it as having one or another arc through a series of governance structures, each the right size for its stage. ●



ABSTRACTION  
CAN BE  
DESTRUCTION  
OR  
CREATION



How would you  
label **The**  
**World?**

Uncertainty

Implementation

Love

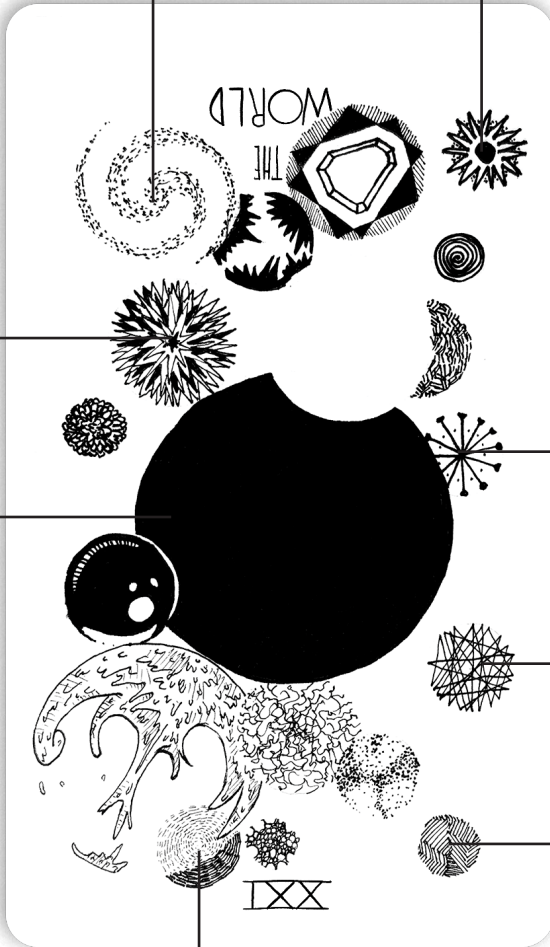
Relation

Emotion

Insecurity

Error

Grumpiness



PREMATURE  
OPTIMIZATION

IS THE  
ROOT  
of

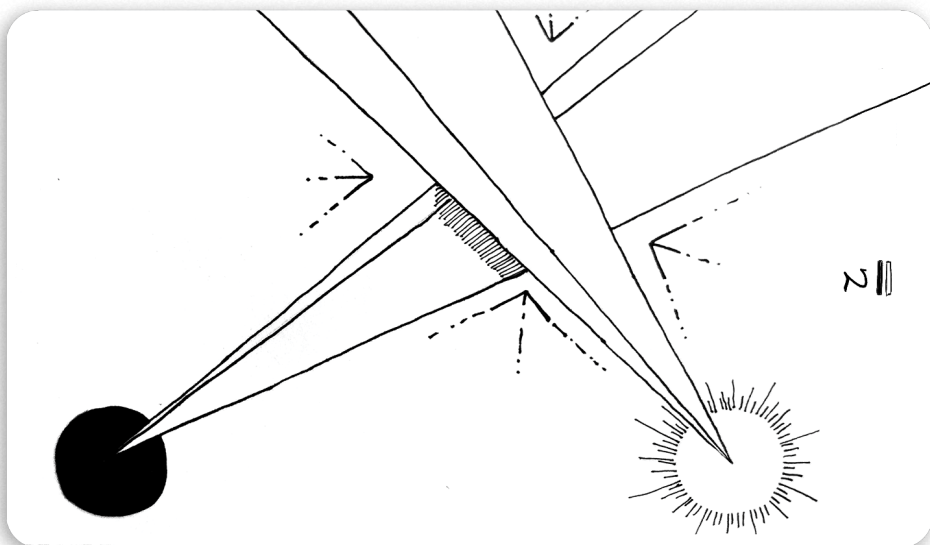
INTERNALIZED

PATRIARCHY



# Forces to Balance

Nathan Schneider



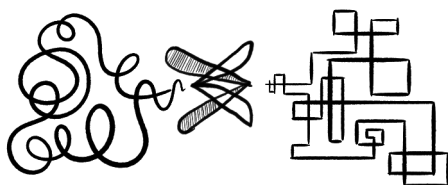
## Affective voice and effective voice

Albert O. Hirschman made a classic distinction between “exit” and “voice” in organizations. Exit is the power to leave and go somewhere else; voice is the power to participate in shaping the organization from within. But let’s break apart that “voice,” because it can take different forms.

My friend Seth and I came up with a really hair-splitting academic distinction that I continue to find useful—between affective and effective voice. Affective voice is the ability to speak your mind and spread emotional contagion. Effective voice is the ability to directly shape decisions or actions in the organization, such as through a vote or a specific area of authority. For instance, in many social media spaces, most people have access to affective voice—they

can speak loudly and complain and persuade—but they have very little effective voice, if any at all.

A healthy, democratic organization needs to have both. It should enable people to spread their experiential wisdom through affect, but also to effect their perspectives even when their wisdom fails to persuade the power-holders. One without the other can lead to a sense of persistent powerlessness; in balance, the two mutually reinforce each other.



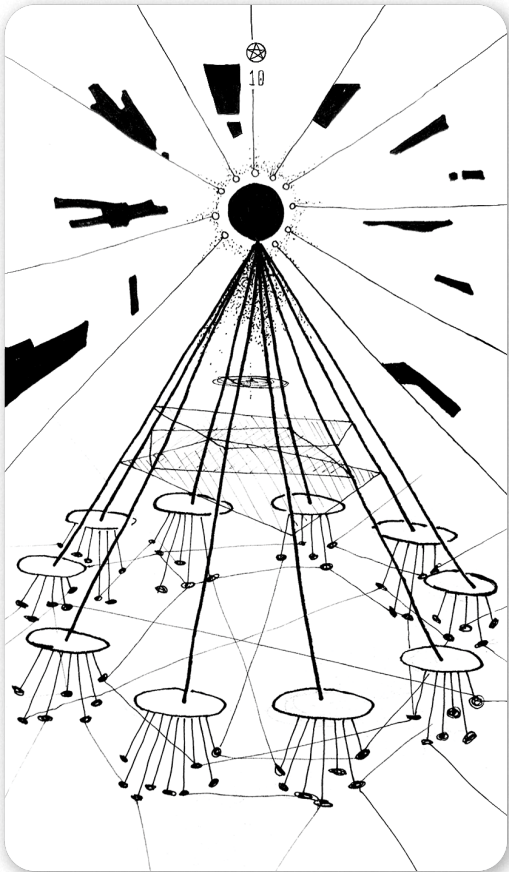


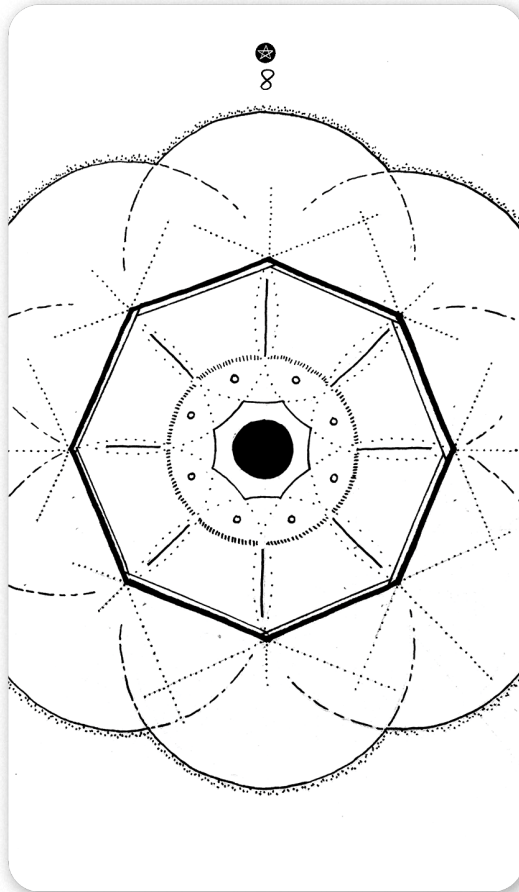
# Decision and action

What is your governance practice designed to produce?

Different people receive different training about what kinds of outcomes to seek. For instance, someone with a working-class upbringing might see the goal of governance as, above all, enabling a job to get done properly. Someone with a managerial-class upbringing might instead focus on producing well-documented and legitimate decisions. These kinds of biases can shape governance design. The “rough consensus and running code” model common in internet standards-making can

empower creative hobbyists, but it can also give implicit power to the big companies with the resources to implement their preferred standards. Among the tech stacks of blockchain organizations, the Aragon platform is centered around enabling vote-based decisions, while platform Colony seeks to reduce the need for collective decision-making by empowering participants to take action based on their reputation.





## Larger and smaller scales

People talk about scale like it is one thing, like they know what it means. But there are different kinds of scale, and systems that choose to scale different things. The choice of whether to scale or not is less meaningful than knowing what to scale and what not to.

Subsidiarity is an old word for this: it means keeping the things that should be local local, while also nesting them in larger systems.

In contrast, anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing calls scalability the aspiration to make things big without

any sensitivity to context. This is what investor-backed tech platforms love to do: they want to grow and grow and grow without really paying the price, without letting local communities have any say.

Try subsidiarity! Keep what should be local local, and the stuff that doesn't need to be local can be bigger, while keeping it accountable to those local communities.



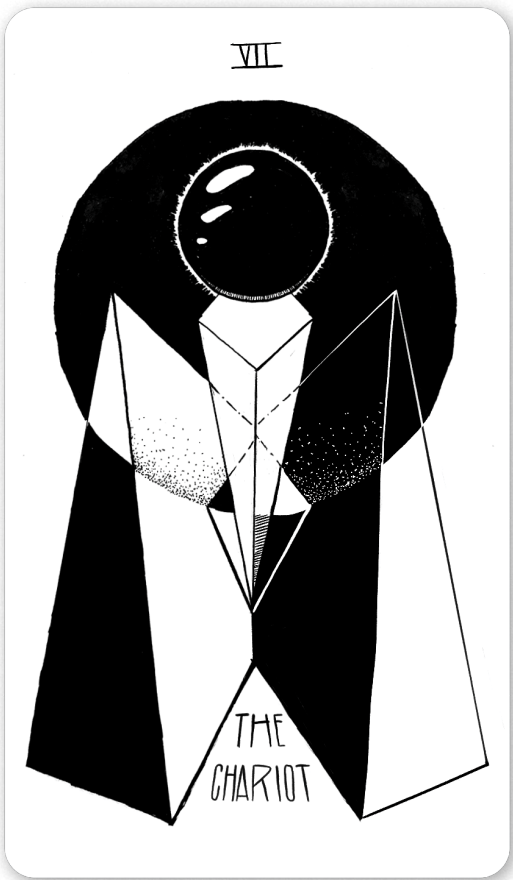
# Decentralization and centralization

Decentralization is something a lot of people aspire to, though what it means, exactly, is not always clear. Centralization sounds bad—like authoritarianism or the absolute power that, as they say, corrupts absolutely. But one thing I have noticed is that, actually, the two go hand in hand. They are not opposites; they are two sides of the same coin.

To have a decentralized market, every major economic system has realized, you need a centralized antitrust authority that can prevent monopolies. To have the decentralized internet, everyone on it has to use the same protocols, or their computers can't

connect. Decentralized ownership of a blockchain depends on having a single ledger for every transaction.

Decentralized networks are vulnerable to capture, just as the internet was vulnerable to Big Tech and markets are vulnerable to the wealthiest participants. Rather than trying to simply eliminate centralized entities, try to build accountable centralization—elements of the system that protect the decentralized goodness but that aren't vulnerable to unintentional capture. ●





## **A New Whole**

Joshua R. Simmons

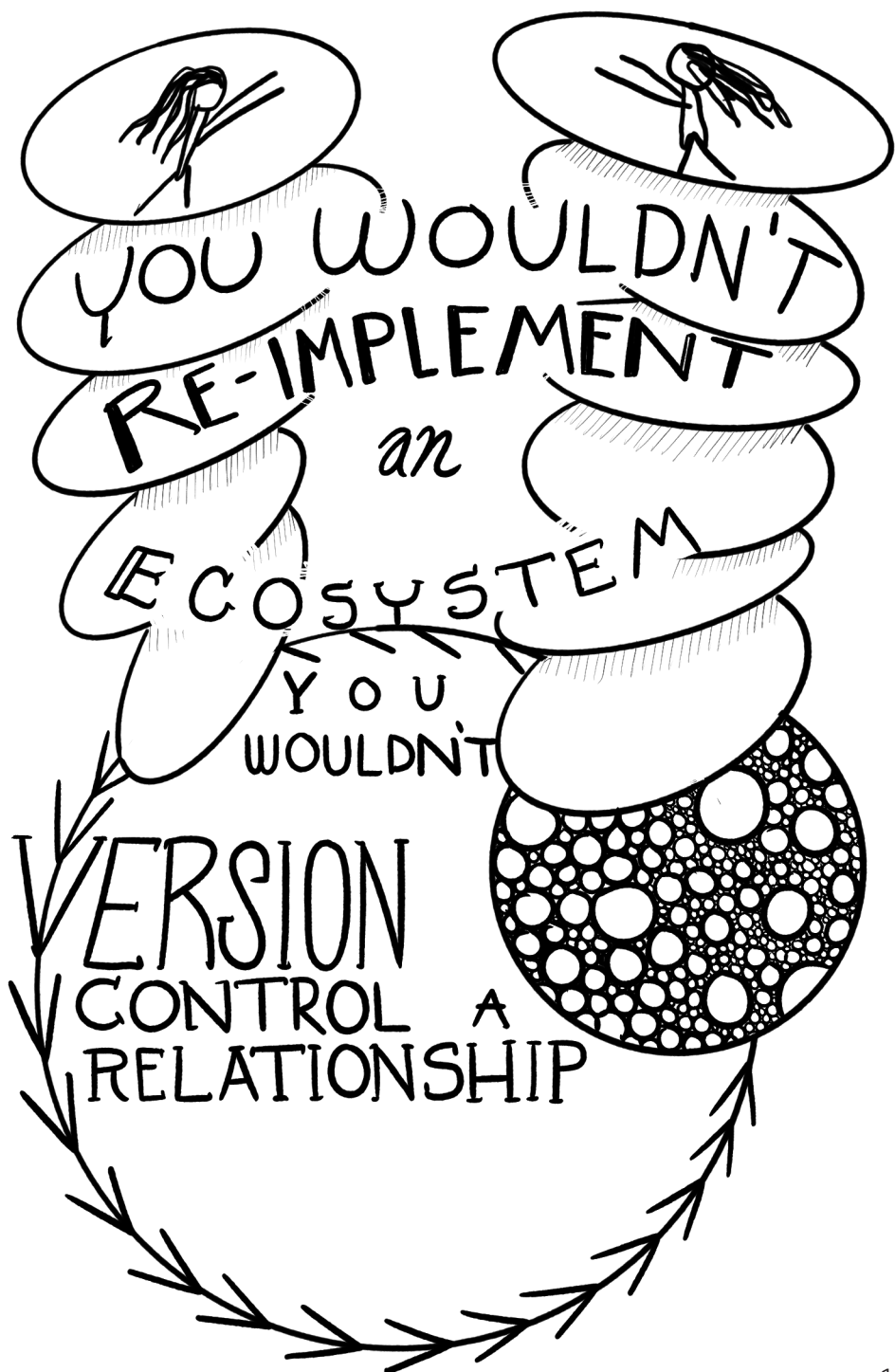
We are beautiful in variety  
And our animating convictions  
But only together are we whole

What divides is not action but inaction  
Keeping us from ourselves and each other

We shall make like magpies  
And gather inspiration  
Embrace a plan  
Embrace the chaos

Let us be consumed, together  
Let us be pathfinders  
Let us lift each other up

We are capable  
Of defining  
Of navigating  
Of building  
A better world  
And a greater whole ●



# What Doesn't Make You Stronger Kills You

Coraline Ada Ehmke

Open source has always been a labor of love.

Like most developers, you operate on a blend of intuition and technical skill. Like most developers, you begin by creating something that solves your own problem. Like most developers, you open-source your code by default.

`LICENSE.md` and `CODE_OF_CONDUCT.md` are easy choices. They're built right into the UI. They've automated your hope for adopters, your hope for a community.

`README.md` can wait. There's code to write.

You labor over the first commit message. It's got to be a good one. Something clever. Something esoteric. An obscure line from that song you used to like so much comes to mind. Why not.

It turns out that a friend at work is experiencing the same problem you were having. At first you just share what you made with your teammates. One of them finds a bug and files an issue, using lots of emoji to soften the landing of what they hope won't come across as criticism. One of them finds a novel use case for your library—why didn't you think of that!?!—and there's a series of DMs in Slack as you work through a proposed extension.

Five issues are now open, and there are three pull requests to review. One day there's activity in the `README`: a coworker from another team had trouble installing, and wrote up detailed installation instructions from what she learned.

The brown-bag session over lunch on Zoom goes really well. You handle the question from the staff engineer with humor and aplomb. One architecture decision record later, and your library—with expanding lines of code but a still-coherent architecture—is now part of your company's stack.

The conference talk you give brings a new wave of adopters with a new wave of issues, feature requests, and pull requests. You never thought you'd be a guest on such a prestigious podcast.

Soon after your library is featured on Hacker News, the first jerks arrive in the project. You wake up to a code of conduct report sent to the old Gmail account in your project's code of conduct file. It's from one of your coworkers' non-work addresses. You're a bit bewildered.

Someone at a FAANG company sees the Hacker News post and their engineers are making moves toward adoption.

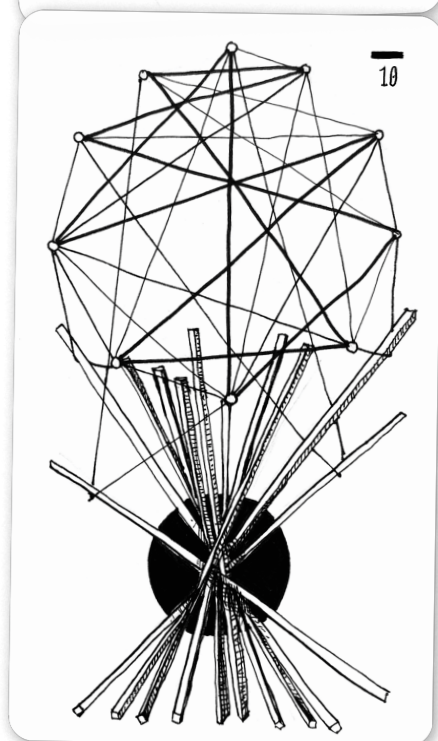
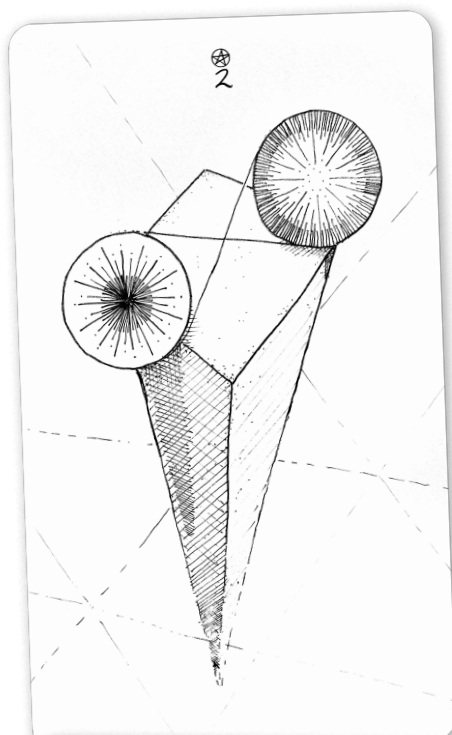
You just got laid off.

Your ten thousand stars on Github. The feature requests and bug reports that keep pouring in. The awkward replies to your former co-workers in code reviews. The first CVE.

Congratulations. You made it. Now what the hell are you supposed to do? ●







## **Nine of Wands**

Darius Kazemi

As we look at the Nine of Wands, we see eight strong, sturdy wands. The ninth is off-set or broken somehow. In some depictions a wounded person holds the ninth. The eight wands suggest past trials and tribulations, but there is still the ninth here to mend, or more work to do as our subject grasps their wand with determination and hope. Some readings suggest that this card represents the final step before completion.

But we are unconvinced that completion is possible in a general metaphysical sense. Maybe this is because of our experience in open source projects. In open source work, as in life, there is always more work to do and always another challenge on the horizon. Endings are a notion worthy of only a knowing shake of the head. "You'll learn eventually, kid. It never ends."

But whether this is a final challenge or just another in a long line of them, the voice in our head says, "Okay pal, there's a challenge, life's hard, big whoop, what's new, tell me something I don't know."

As we wonder this, the Queen of Cups sits on her throne by the lake. She is the water aspect, the queen of emotion, of compassion, of empathy, of love. She is overwhelmed and





overwhelming, someone extremely frustrating to the more logically inclined of us. (We are probably overrepresented in open source software.)

A-and what's this? Is that water or *tears* in her cup? We peer in closer and a certain... structure begins to resolve.

Perhaps there is a final challenge after all. The Queen is our final boss battle, the hardest of all: learning to empathize, to trust others, and, oh god, to, gulp, *let go*. Maybe it's time to transition from total control of a project to something more consensus-based. Maybe it's time to understand that a project doesn't need to live anymore, and we have to find the emotional strength to archive it. Maybe it's time to admit that the project has become something different from how we've conceived it.

We like to think our challenges are about features, bugs, security, support, documentation, and legal structure. And, yes, those challenges do make up a large part of the work. But every open source project that lasts is going to change at some point in a way that requires compassion for others and compassion for ourselves. ●

# Vectors of Diversity

Nathan Schneider

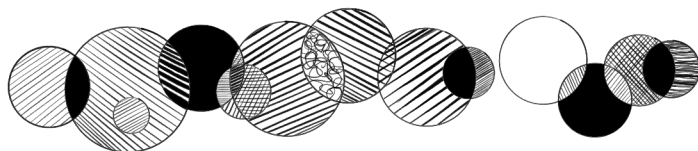
Diversity is said to be good for organizations. It breeds resilience and dynamism. It turns a structure into an ecosystem. But what do we mean by diversity? There are different kinds of diversity among organizational designs—different dimensions. Here are just a few.

## *Temporal diversity*

One kind of diversity unfolds over time. This comes from the evolution of an organization from one kind of being to another, such as from one person's singular vision into an accountable utility for a community. Whatever transitions occur in an organization's life, they are an opportunity to bring wider repertoires of possibility to its story. Practices from the past never quite go away. They become embedded in the organization's memory, however dimly.

Enabling this kind of diversity is what governance transitions are all about.

Time proceeds according to many forms—be attentive to the modes and metaphors of time you choose. For some communities, time proceeds in one steady and constant direction. But your community might need time to be non-linear. You might need to distinguish between peace chiefs and war chiefs—distinct kinds of governance depending on the times.



## **Is a Process**

Andi Argast

The tarot cards (Five of Wands and the Moon) formed my initial inspiration and point of departure for this collage. I dug out my Tarot Dictionary and Compendium (Jana Riley, 1995), and chose two interpretations from the 15 provided there. Both cards spoke to the uncertainty and transformation that occurs in any project, but especially in open source

software (OSS) development work, where there are so many variables at play (human, technical, other) that shape the final outcome. The Eakins quote points to the importance of bringing embodied knowledge to this work, while Greer reminds us that the creative process is messy and entangled.

## ***Ecosystemic diversity***

Another kind of diversity occurs across an interconnected ecosystem. Different organizations with different structures perform separate but related functions.

The computer I am writing on right now is an example of this. At the bottom of it is the Linux kernel, governed by a “benevolent dictator for life”; atop that, the slow, meticulous, and volunteer-driven constitutional democracy of Debian maintains a large library of software that makes Linux useful; Ubuntu, a startup that funnels Debian into a commercial product; and finally Pop!\_OS, a user-friendly adaptation of Ubuntu built by a small business that, on its own, could never afford to build an operating system.

## ***Cultural diversity***

The range of possibilities that we imagine are possible come from our cultural surround. What histories do we know? What did we see our families do when we were growing up? What cultures other than our own have we been taught to appreciate and learn from?

We can be intentional about drawing from diverse sources as we imagine and design our transitions. But we must also be careful about appropriation—about taking what isn’t ours to use. Indigenous governance traditions, for instance, have struggled with historical neglect and erasure, and have been actively attacked by colonizing forces. Outsiders must be aware of those stories. With legacies like these, outsiders should take steps to engage in reciprocity. Reciprocity might begin with simply giving credit where credit is due. It might also involve entering into direct relationships with stewards of those legacies, then discerning together what appropriate reciprocity looks like. ●



What these texts did not capture is the amount of care that is required in OSS projects. While I am new to working on these projects, I have noticed the care that is essential, both for the technology, which requires very real maintenance, and for the projects themselves. The anatomical heart represents this necessary care work, while the ruins signify the

many projects that have gone before and now act as a foundation for the new. The dog-creature stands in for the guardianship that is essential to protecting and nurturing the communities who build and use OSS. Lastly, the shiny spheres symbolize the vision for a new and better(?) technological future, which, as the text states, *is a process*. ●

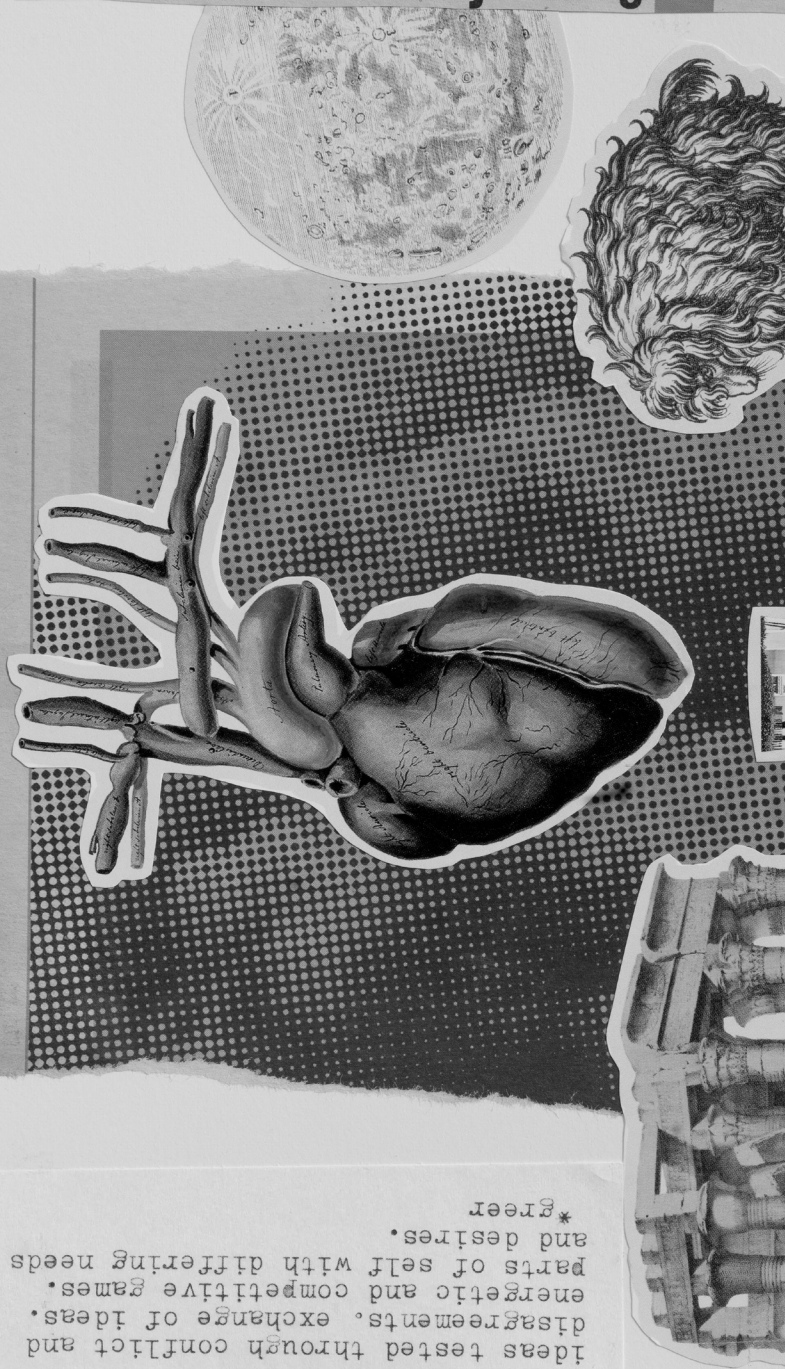


# Is a Process

Andi Argast

Ideas tested through conflict and disagreements, exchange of ideas, energetic and competitive games, parts of self with differing needs and desires.  
\*greer

# Universes can only recognize u



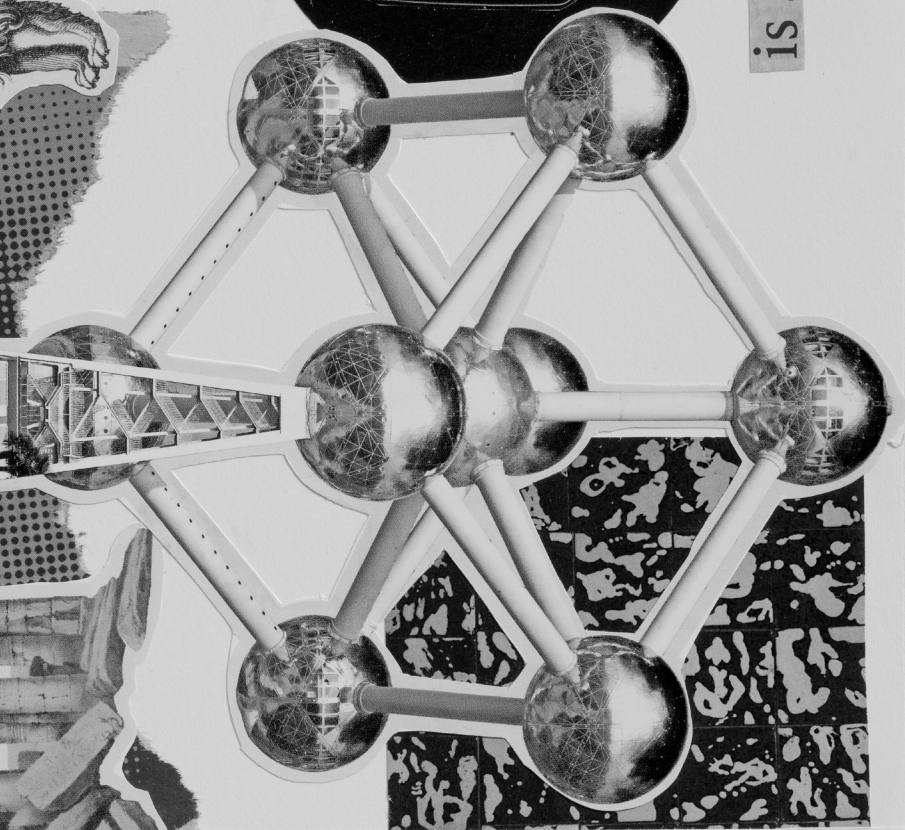
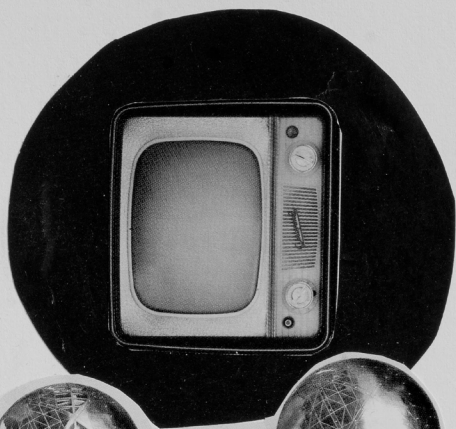
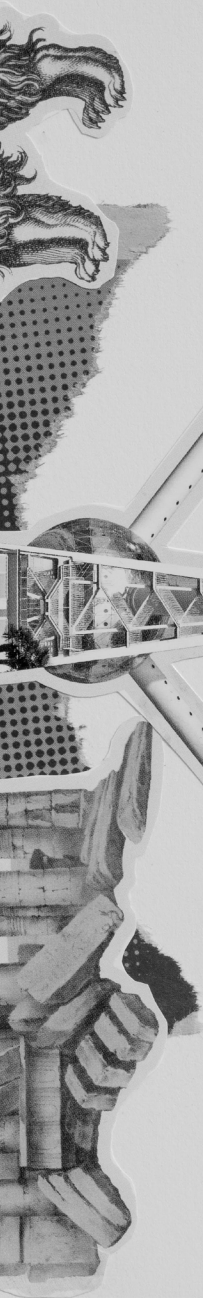


niverses.

is a process.

ality  
worlds

unable to see the future clearly  
trusting intuition and staying on  
the path of corporal intelligence  
that connects the emotions and  
psychic upwelling in the physical  
body, leading to physical  
manifestation and spiritual unfoldment  
\*eakins



# Do We Run How We Say We Run?

## *Formalization and Practice of Governance in OSS Communities*

Mahasweta Chakraborti

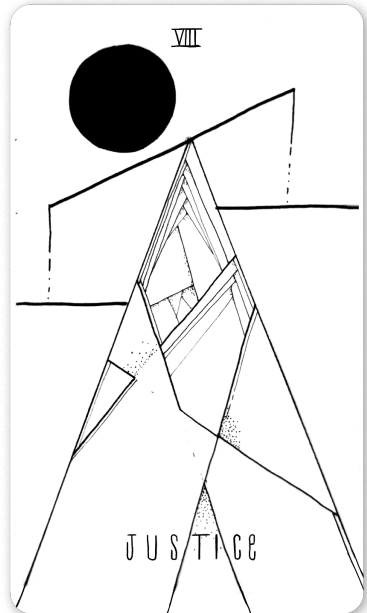
Over the past several decades, Open Source Software (OSS) has grown into a multi-billion-dollar industry ubiquitous in commerce, research, and other critical applications. The communities at the heart of OSS have traditionally been volunteer-led, with informal self-governance mechanisms to coordinate contributors and develop products.

Market demands and widespread applicability have necessitated standardization of the OSS ecosystem, leading to more formalized governance models. Notable among initiatives bridging this gap are the OSS non-profits. These foundations have emerged to provide mentoring, infrastructure, legal aid, and technical assistance to budding projects. They systematically manage the supported communities for resource allocation and to structure their operations for sustained development.

We studied the Apache Software Foundation Incubator (ASFI) to understand the breadth of foundation governance and how it impacts or supports communities. The Apache Software Foundation is one of the most formidable and recognizable names among OSS organizations; we particularly focused on their Incubator, which mentors nascent projects and graduates promising candidates after thoroughly reviewing community health and performance. Incubators are a valuable sandbox for governance research with informal, self-governing communities as understudies adopting and adapting to a formal governance model. We treated incubator graduation as an objective indicator of project suc-

cess, jointly determined by their informal norms and formalized foundation policies.

Using approaches based in Natural Language Processing, we extracted patterns of routine or governed activities from ASFI's public mailing



lists and assigned them under the most relevant ASFI policy domains. Governed activities indicate how formal structures and community beliefs systematize the bulk of their operations. Next, we measured the extent to which these governed activities internalized policies — in other words, the extent to which they can be attributed to the formal governance through their semantic match with ASFI policies.

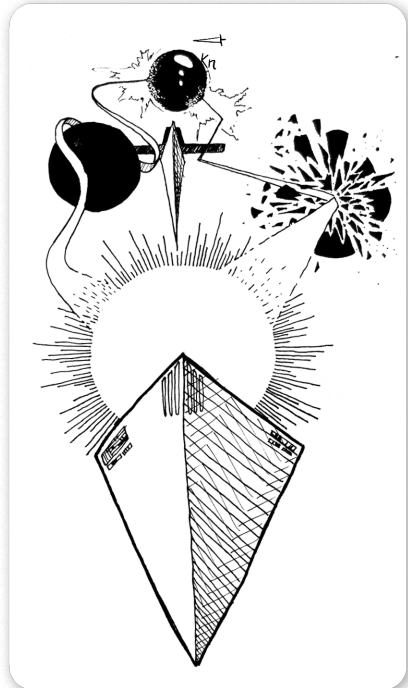
We found that across ASFI's different policy domains, the frequency

of governed activity is uncorrelated with the amount of foundation policy. Therefore, several domains, which constitute the bulk of routine development, see fewer policies from the foundation. Meanwhile, more formal policymaking under a particular governance domain was highly associated with how operations internalize formalization. That is, in topics where more policymaking is taking place, activities are indeed structured to a greater degree by foundation policies.

Finally, we model project graduation against volume of governed activities and policy internalization. Interestingly, we do not observe significant effects along topics highly represented in ASFI policies. Rather, internalizing relatively overlooked policy topics, like community voting timelines, significantly correlated to project success. Similarly, in areas such as patch management with few foundation guidelines, communities exhibiting more governed activities had higher graduation rates. With limited formal protocols, enterprising projects likely devised their own norms and protocols to systematize contributions.

In conclusion, formalized OSS governance involves a complex interplay between codified policies and lived community practices. This challenges the notion that formal policies alone depict community governance or predict project success. Amidst the ever-evolving technological landscape, we hope our work helps foundations and communities to collaborate and inform policy design retroactively. Feedback and evidence-based policymaking may

mitigate over-governance and enable foundations to conduct administration consistent with project priorities. Besides legitimizing formal governance, it may also assist communities in evaluating their needs and objectives to suitably self-govern or associate with the foundations and governance models that may help further their goals. ●



*Adapted from Mahasweta Chakraborti et al., "Do We Run How We Say We Run? Formalization and Practice of Governance in OSS Communities," in Proceedings of the CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '24: CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, Honolulu HI USA: ACM, 2024), 1–26, doi:10.1145/3613904.3641980.*

# ***PeachCloud & the Governance Transitions of Silence***

Max Fowler

It's sometimes said that only 30,000 people bought the Velvet Underground's debut album, but every one of them ended up starting a band. Something similar could be said for Scuttlebutt and the number of protocols and projects it influenced.

Experiments in different models of software development and governance in the Scuttlebutt ecosystem were various and cannot all be summarized within this short document. It would even be fair to say that the Scuttlebutt community prides itself on this spirit of experimentation, both in software and in the processes which produce software. One principle that informed many Scuttlebutt processes was "No Singletons," in code or in governance—thus there is no one place to look to in order to say exactly what Scuttlebutt is or was.

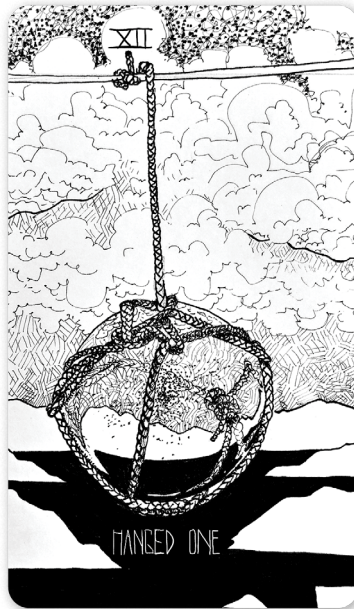
Instead, I must rely on a sort of gonzo-anthropology from my experience as a contributor to the PeachCloud project. This also mirrors the technical structure of the Scuttlebutt network itself—with no single view of the network, it is actually impossible to say if your view of the state of the network is complete, or if there could be some hidden island of users which you are not connected with. I always found this idea beautiful and mysterious, in stark contrast to the unified consensus of most blockchain networks.

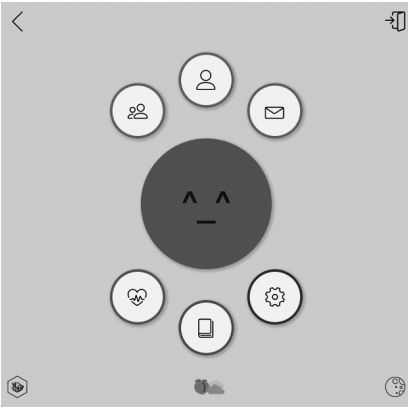
PeachCloud was envisioned as solarpunk (social) hardware facilitating the maintenance of offline-first peer-to-peer network infrastructure, with minimal energy requirements and the capacity to be autonomously run by users on cheap and accessible hardware, including in areas with low internet connectivity. More technically, PeachCloud was intended to

make it straightforward to create and manage Scuttlebutt pub servers—servers that relay messages between users in a peer-to-peer network, a model of networking that largely inspired Relay servers in the Nostr protocol, as well as protocols such as Earthstar and P2Panda. PeachCloud could be deployed on its own on a Raspberry Pi, or as a YunoHost package. The project began in 2018 and was closed in June of 2023, after it became clear that the underlying Scuttlebutt Pub

software that PeachCloud depended on was likely never going to reach a state of polished completion. This transition was in many ways connected with a larger transition wherein more of the community's energy was being directed into new protocols instead of into Scuttlebutt itself.

One important aspect of software governance is the coordination of energy and time into different projects. In Scuttlebutt, with the absence of a single governing body, and with open source code, the allocation of energy





screenshot of PeachCloud web interface

into projects largely took the flavor of “do-acracy,” but with structural diversity within that, with multiple groups coming together in more closely coordinated ways to work on particular projects. This style of governance can be seen through the large number of Open Collectives in the Scuttlebutt ecosystem such as The Sunrise Choir, The Secure Scuttlebutt Consortium, and PeachCloud, as well as the non-profit Āhau and the for-profit company Planetary.

Whether this method of governance and coordination was a success or a failure for the Scuttlebutt ecosystem seems non-binary. The diverse things the Scuttlebutt community accomplished through these vehicles were remarkable, and the way in which the PeachCloud project ended also points to some of the limitations of this approach. In a do-acracy, the recognition that a project is not going to be finished is a form of governance transition. Until that point, the tacit belief that a project will continue to completion serves as a hypothesis which other actors in the ecosystem use to guide their own work—a distributed form of governance used to navigate uncertainty.

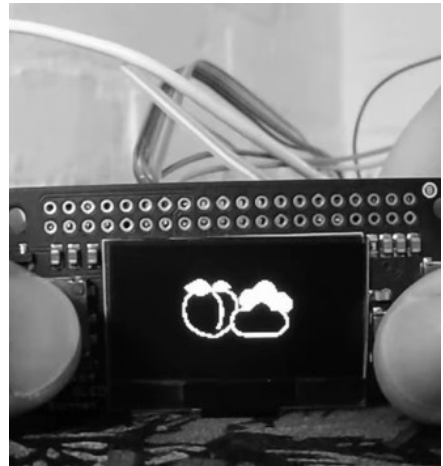
In the world of corporate software, transitions are sometimes marked

by acquisition, breaking changes, and intentional sun-setting. In the world of collective murmuration, endings sometimes take the form of a commit frequency that gradually dwindles until a reversal of this trend seems unlikely. Then, new trajectories are charted based on this acknowledgment.

In The Hanged Man tarot card, we see a rope sphere dangled by a single thread. No foundation is permanent—this can be observed at many scales and timelines, especially in software. To create a permanent foundation is a futile task, but to ignore the structural integrity on which you build is also an oversight. Perhaps learning to navigate what commitments, formal or implicit, can be counted on is an endless art that could never be fully described—but could be supported by collections of case studies such as this one.

If the SSB network continues to be accessible, a more detailed case-study of PeachCloud and SSB can be found with the message hash:

%VzXoTqB8Ws5DnY4PJHeWecMej7  
KKXzB9J1poCIWYcgQ=. sha256 ●



early image of PeachCloud physical interface

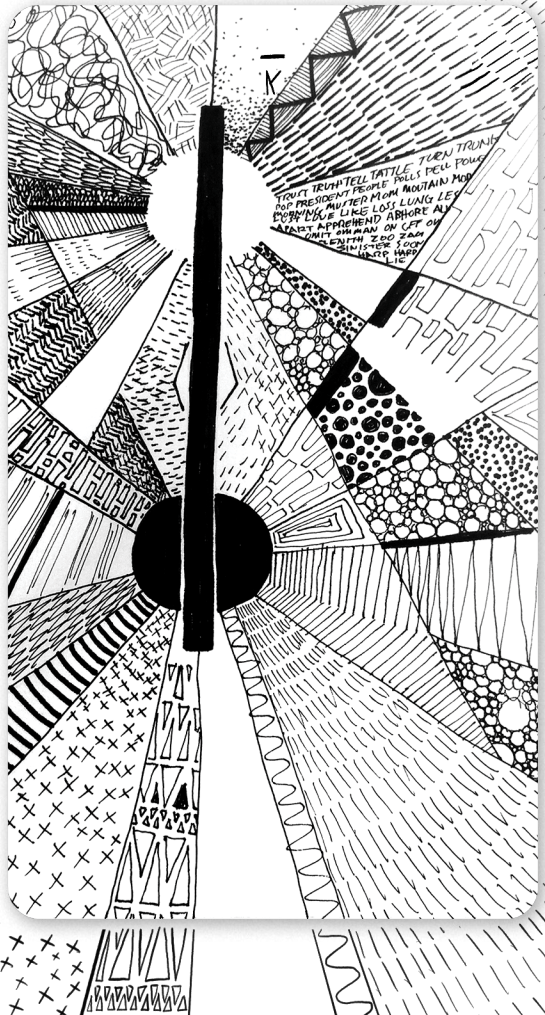


# Community Leadership

Seth Frey

A common pattern in open source is for a community of contributors to form around the initial efforts of a single person. And it creates a microcosm of the universal tension between individual and collective, leading and serving, boldness and compromise. That these things are in tension shouldn't mean they're in conflict. Healthy leadership is a symptom and a cause of healthy participation. Each of the parts of that can be hard to accept. For some, leadership is uncomfortable. It feels unaccountable and hubristic. For some, the discomfort is in community engagement, which is slow, costly, onerous, tedious, and often provides only scattered insights. Fortunately, these problems solve each other.


So, if you feel like you need permission to take the reins and accept your leadership, Here It Is. Consider what you would need to trust your judgment about what's best for the project, then consider how you can set the community up to give you that. And if you're not concerned about leadership, maybe you should be. Think about what blind spots you're vulnerable to, and what you would need to trust your community when it points those blind spots out. ●





# Build Structure Within Life

Nathan Schneider



I have heard a common complaint across communities that need to self-govern, whether they are primarily digital or more geographically local: Why are so few of our members participating in governance? The people asking assume that this problem is specific to their community. They assume that other communities surely have it figured out. Surely this wouldn't be a problem if they knew how to use the latest technology. Surely this wouldn't be a problem if they were meeting in-person, offline.

Frustrated, they often see no choice but to blame the members of their community—so to speak, the victims of a governance design where structure has taken precedence over the lives of the people it is supposed to serve.

The computer scientist Donald Knuth said (famously, to some), “Premature optimization is the root of all evil.” He was talking about algorithms. But I have seen it in organizations that spend so much time building structures for the organizations they anticipate becoming, not the life they have. I have seen it in organizations that adopt a structure because they believe it is what they should have, not what they need.

Structure without life around it risks killing what life our communities have.

The purpose of formal structure is not to be the answer to every question—it is to be the backstop, the foundation, the thing you turn to when all else fails. It is to make sure that the flows of power are

explicit and accessible to everyone. But most of organizational life should occur around that structure—through culture and relationships, through trust and stories and craft.

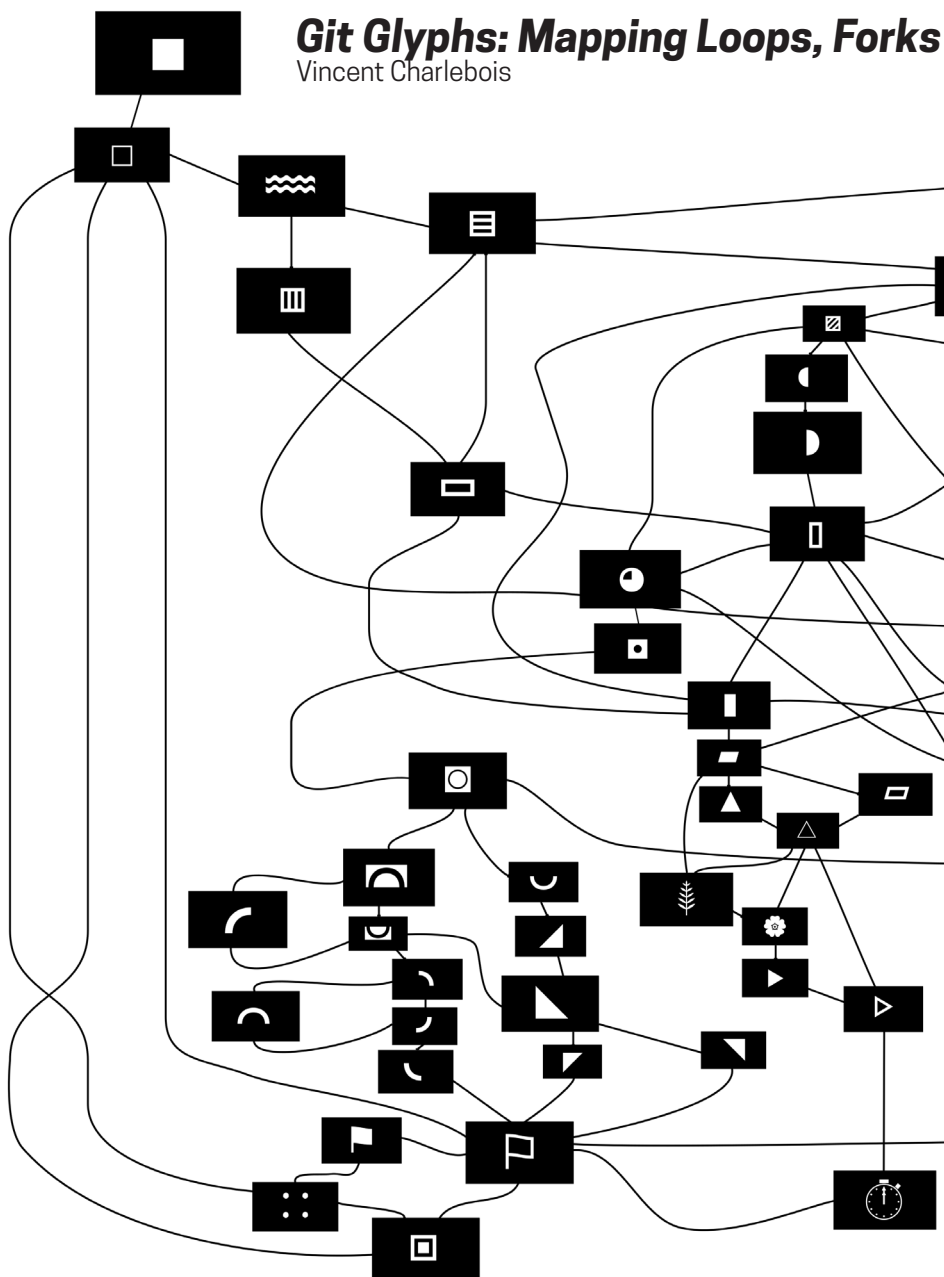
Think of culture as 80 percent of governance, and the structure stuff is only the last 20 percent when culture isn't enough. Put 80 percent of the energy into culture and 20 percent into making sure you have some structure to hold it. Be sure you are not spending more than 20 percent of your collective energy on governance in the first place, so that 80 percent of your energy can always remain on the life that the governance should serve.

When your community is not fitting the mold of its structure, transition the structure toward yourselves. See yourselves where you are, as you are. Notice how you are growing together. Notice the flows of the attention in your lives, and design structures together that fit that attention and that reward it.

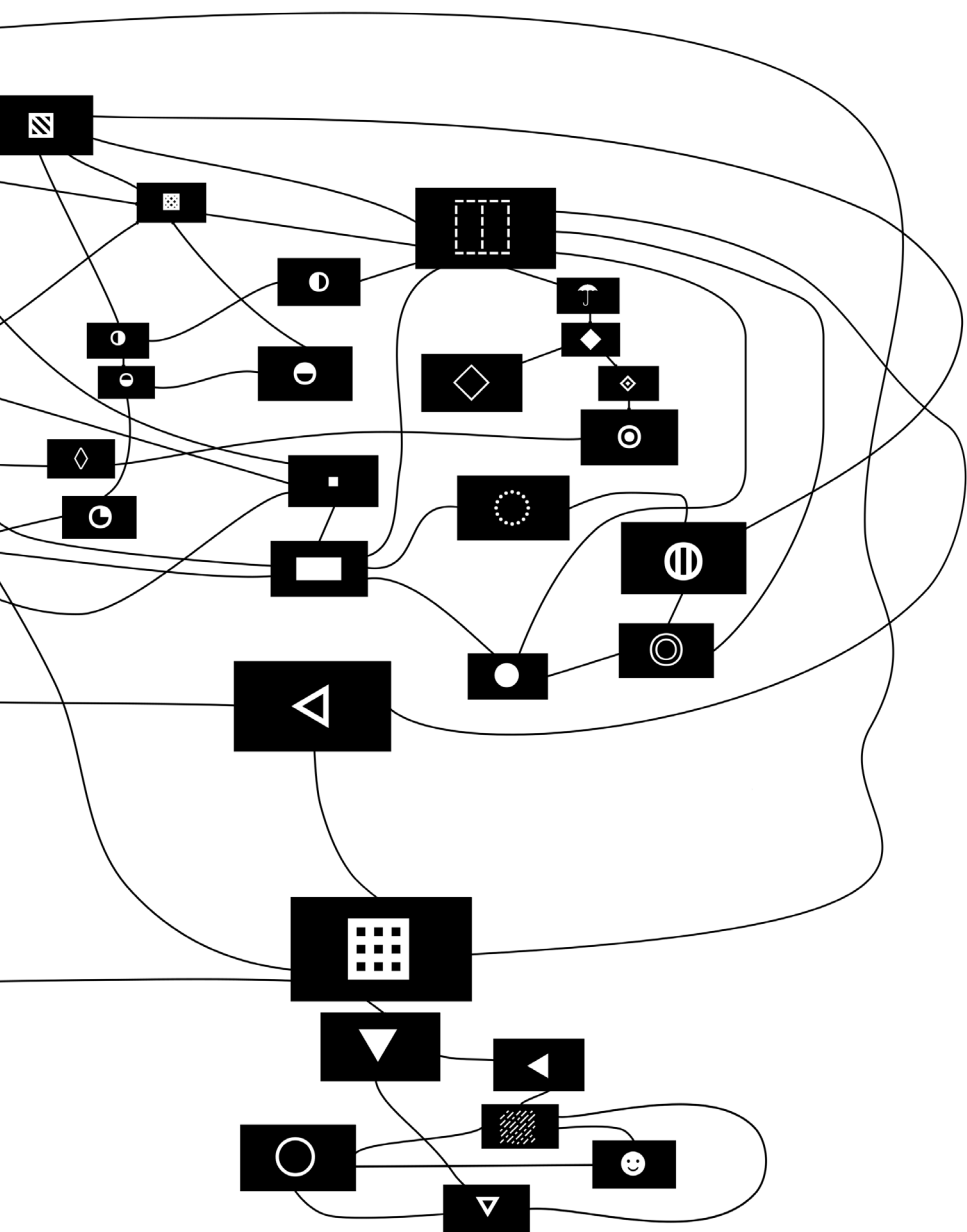
When there is a temptation to blame members of the community, try blaming the structure instead. Try noticing where the structure is not living up to its community—where structures are inhibiting life. ●

# Git Glyphs: Mapping Loops, Forks

Vincent Charlebois



## *and Sidequests on the Open-Source Continuum*



# Git Glyphs - Key

- : Exploring Open-Source Governance → □
- : Interested in joining a community?
  - Yes: ≈
  - No: ■
- ≈: Interested in blockchain technology?
  - Yes: ≡
  - No: ≡
- ▣: Observe and learn from the sidelines → ▢
- ≡: Prefer structured or dynamic environments?
  - Structured: ≡
  - Dynamic: ≡
- ≡: Join traditional open-source projects → □
- ≡: Join a DAO with fixed roles and policies → ▼
- ≡: Join emerging blockchain projects → ≡
- ≡: Evaluate Market Conditions
  - Favorable: ≡
  - Unfavorable: ▪
- ≡: Proceed with Innovations → ≡
  - : Hold Innovations, Increase Resilience → ■
- ≡: Embrace rapid development and feedback?
  - Yes: ●
  - No: ■
- : Focus on strategic planning and gradual integration → ○
- : Seek stability or community input?
  - Stability: ■
  - Community Input: □
- : Work on long-standing, stable projects → □
- : Participate in community-driven development → ≡
- : Contribute to ongoing projects → □
- : Review and merge pull requests → △
- ▲: Develop and submit enhancements → △
- △: Enhance project stability and functionality → ≡
- ≡: Evaluate impact of contributions → ■
- ≡: Receive Peer Feedback → ►
- : Reflect on Personal Goals and Project Alignment → ▷
- ▷: Consider Leadership and Legacy → ⌚
- ⌚: Inspired to start your own community? → ▢
- ▢: Create your own open-source project → ▢
- ▢: Consider forming a worker-owned cooperative → ::
- ::: Establish a cooperative?
  - Yes: □
  - No: ■
- ▼: Focus on governance or policy shaping?
  - Governance: ▼
  - Policy shaping: ◀
- ▼: Engage in agile development and rapid prototyping → ≡
- ◀: Profit from investments?
  - Yes: ◀
  - No: ⤴
- ◀: Reinvest gains into DAO projects → ≡
- ⤴: Reassess and diversify investment strategy → ◆
- ◆: Evaluate strategies
  - Continue: ◆
  - Pause: ◇

-

# Governance Fictions

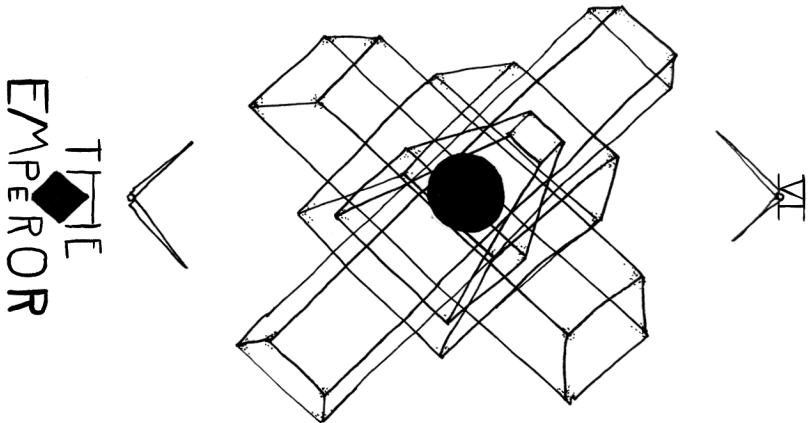
Wassim Alsindi

## Prophet Motives

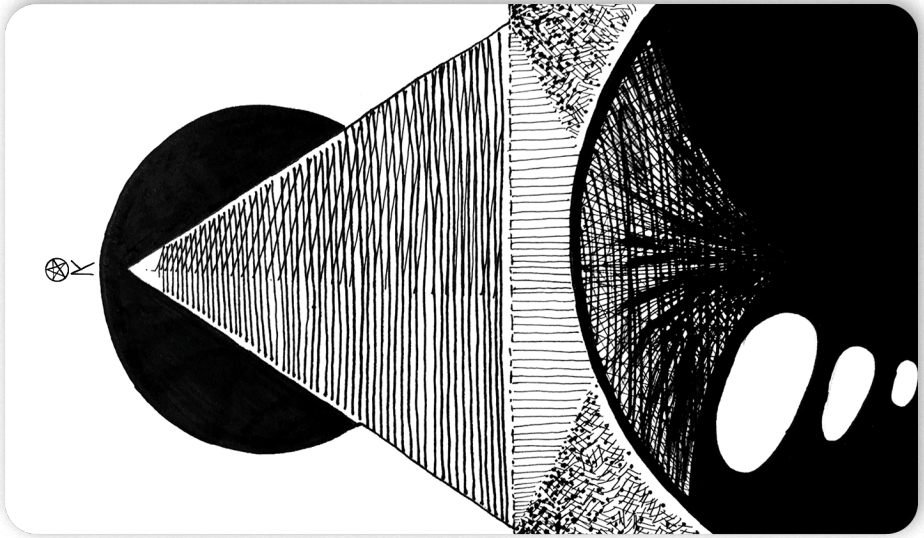
*Epochryphal tales.* We always wondered what it was, that made them act this way. Time after time, the styles might change, the words might differ, the technologies would invariably evolve, but at the heart of it was the same kernel. Rotten to the lore.

*Pyramid schemers.* A certain kind of person sought the slimelight, and was willing to scale the walls to get to the top. Type III eros all the way down. Getting rich on dice trying. Architecting the upstart imagination-states with themselves at the top. Every time, it went peer-shaped. But would the next one learn from the mistakes of the a priories? Dante's Entfernung would suggest otherwise.

*I'm sorry for your gloss.* Since time immaterial, FOMO Sapiens set themselves out to be more than mere leaders. Their words, ordained with the sanctity of more than mere letters. Their maps, anointing more than mere territories. Their desires, willing power over more than mere profits. Value flows, channelled like a new Magma Carta. Just as the lava ebbs and cools, and an oxbow pool might form, so too the libidinal gradients of capital might also bend back upon themselves and ossify. A black hole of money, a strange attractor, a petrified architecture, a portent of the endtimes.







## Seething Like A State

Decentralisation has a cost: the price of anarchy. The price is always due, but the rewards weren't cheap to reap. Sew Solid CCRU. What most did not expect was that payment would become due at the grandest scales of governance. The Westfailure State, forged under the fire of Peer Prussia, was ambushed by upstart modes of power, opening new vistas of communication, commodification, and communion.

The orientations that nation-states had used to enshrine their power, only made it easier to undermine them. The bigger they were, the harder they fell. Brextopia, The Neuropean Union, NATO's Cave, the United State-Machine. All returned to dust. The decline of the nation-state in the roaring twenties became a cannon of canonicity for an entire generation of soul traders. It wasn't even just the Bitlievers, in those days there were many networks, many messiahs, many ideologics, all with their own Prophet Motives.

The imaginary counties were myriad. Most barely lasted a year—typically weeks—always due to the toxic Muskulinity of their power vacuum suckers. The 'experts' that greased their ways up the slimy polls of the agora were borne-again as sociopaths, just as the politicians that came before them. Though these initiatives were in themselves ineffectual and dysfunctional, they sufficiently destabilised the inflexible structures that preceded them. An earthquake of organisational forms, seeding a tsunami of human chaos. There's a right kind of liquidity, and a wrong kind of liquidity. The internet of drownership. ●

*Originally published in NOIA Magazine.*



## ***A Productive Apocalypse***

Cryptographic Poetics Researchers Union and Ox Salon

Hashes to Hashes, Trust to Trust.

Unstoppable forces and immovable objects.

A reified sacrifice to the Networked Gods.

Devitalism as an exit from deviancy.

Global consensus is the crowning achievement of the Universe.

A new bedrock of veridicality \$WE must defend at all costs.

The means justify the ends, because there is no end.

An I/O for an I/O, a truth for a truth.

A Hole, Greater Than The Sum of Its Parts.

Not Your Keys, Not Your Soul.

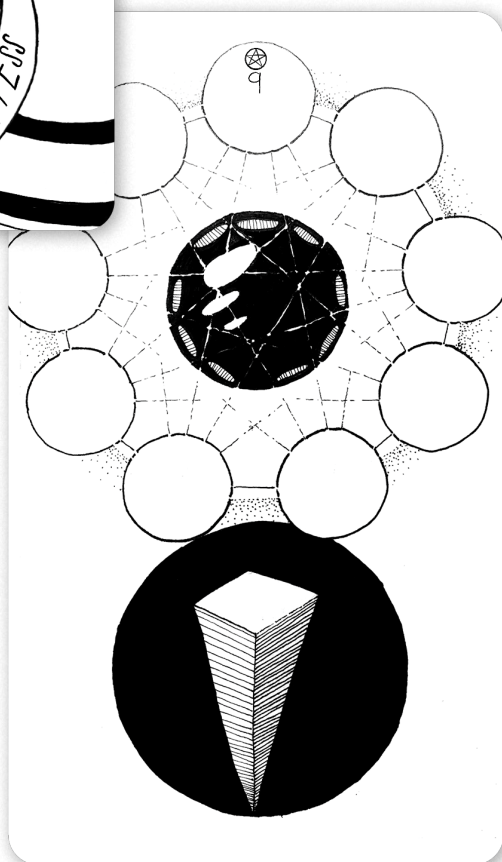
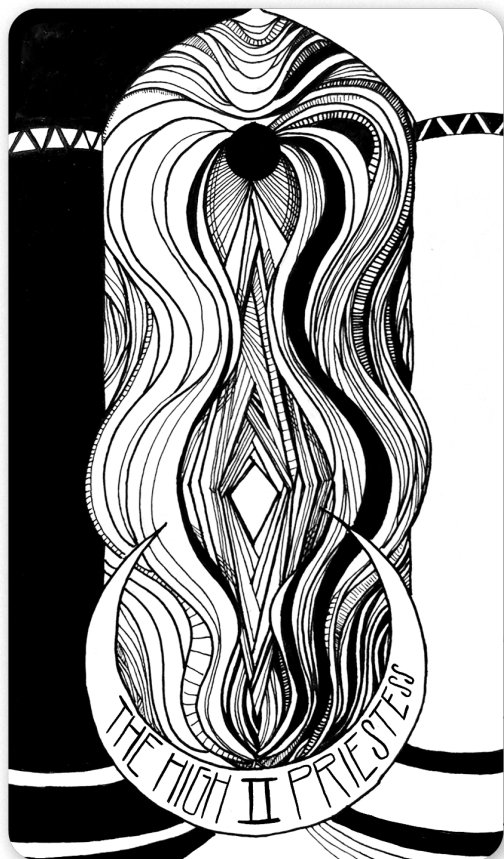
Post. Mail. Telegram. Morse. Pigeon. Smoke. Signal.

The clockstasy of communication.

Trepidation, trepanation, tarotprenation.

It's easier to imagine the end of the world than a new proving mechanism for \$ME.

With capital as \$THY god, property becomes morality. ●



# Making Worlds

Mallory Knodel

Two tarot cards were pulled for me to help guide my contribution. The first is The High Priestess, which when shown upright indicates intuitive, unconscious, inner voice and whose inverse is lack of center and repressed feelings. The second is the 9 of Pentacles, which when shown upright indicates fruits of labor, rewards and luxury and when inverted indicates reckless spending, living beyond means and false success.

Last September, I was in Kyoto, Japan attending an important annual internet governance conference when I ran into a former colleague. We exchanged the usual questions—asking after family, jet lag, and how's work? In the US? In Brazil? The next question was, "Do you think we should host another NetMundial?" And my response was immediate: "Yes, why not? It's been ten years. We should take any chance to remember what happened in 2014." She and her colleagues from Brazil must have continued to receive that feedback, because a few short months later—in March of 2024—hundreds of people were all gathered in São Paulo for NetMundial+10.

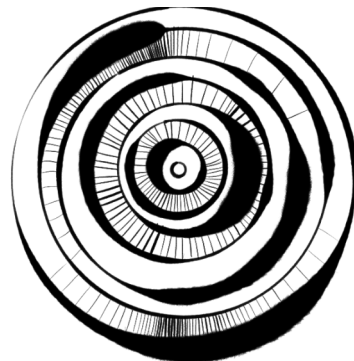
Sometimes, you should just do it. And by it, I mean bring people together to make a decision about something, assert power and demonstrate legitimacy through action. "Governance is the stewardship or oversight of a process of magic-making, in which magic words can make change in the world."

The original NetMundial demonstrated that the internet can be governed, and it can be done without governments and without the UN, as a principle. Stakeholders—an important term of art for the representa-

tives in governments, private sector, civil society, technical communities, and academia—came together from around the world to define internet governance processes. Internet governance is participatory; it is the opposite of performative.

Bringing people into one space is somewhat a hallmark of Brazil, the home of the World Social Forum (WSF), a process that I've been involved in since 2007. With the principal tagline "Another World Is Possible," the WSF convened every few years, bringing tens of thousands of grassroots activists from the Global South to Brazil, standing as an alternative to the World Economic Forum, a conference of self-appointed elites in Davos. At its peak, the WSF brought 150,000 people into an "open" space to demonstrate—in the streets, classrooms, alternative media and, yes, panels—the state of the world from the point of view of social movements.

The WSF, NetMundial, and NM+10 are proof that if you start with at least two of these ingredients—critical mass, principles, and process—the third will follow. The combination of all three is a global movement of self-governance. ●



# A Stitch in Time

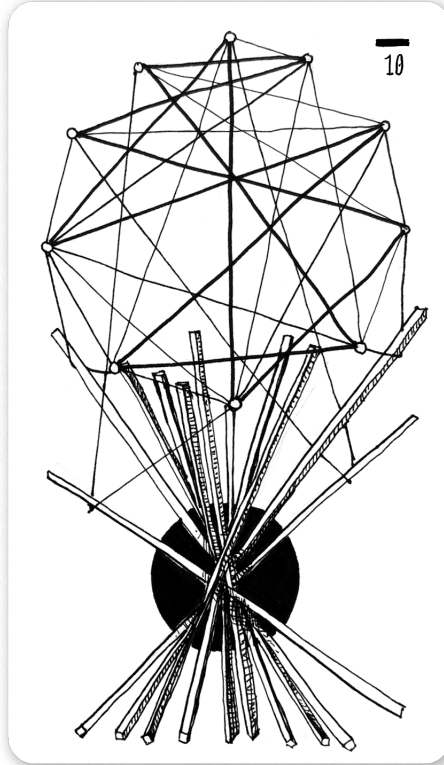
bumblefudge

I can't remember which order I pulled them in (and it would be a fairly biographical confession if I did)—but I definitely pulled these two cards up-right, so I think the axiomatic “fool’s errand” advice about OSS orgs comes through, whether it’s played forward happily or backwards as a failure mode.

The 10 of Clubs is usually depicted as a fool carrying 10 poles, rods or clubs, struggling to put one foot in front of the other, like anyone who’s ever tried carrying 10 poles in their arms.

The metaphor is heavy-handed. I think many organizations default to centralization (and even worse, on centralization of obligations onto a single person) for any combination of reasons, from ambition to Dunning-Kruger hubris to minimizing organizational costs to volunteers ghosting. No organization (of any kind, including corporations and co-ops and gardening clubs and worker assemblies and workers’ councils and motorcycle gangs and congregations) gets very far when any one person is carrying 10 clubs and succeeding at carrying none of them.

The Ace of Swords is also a fairly straightforward nail if the hammer you’re holding is organizational studies. Someone unbothered, moisturized, happy, in their lane and focused on a core competency is an unstoppable force of nature, and the nature of the organization doesn’t really matter.

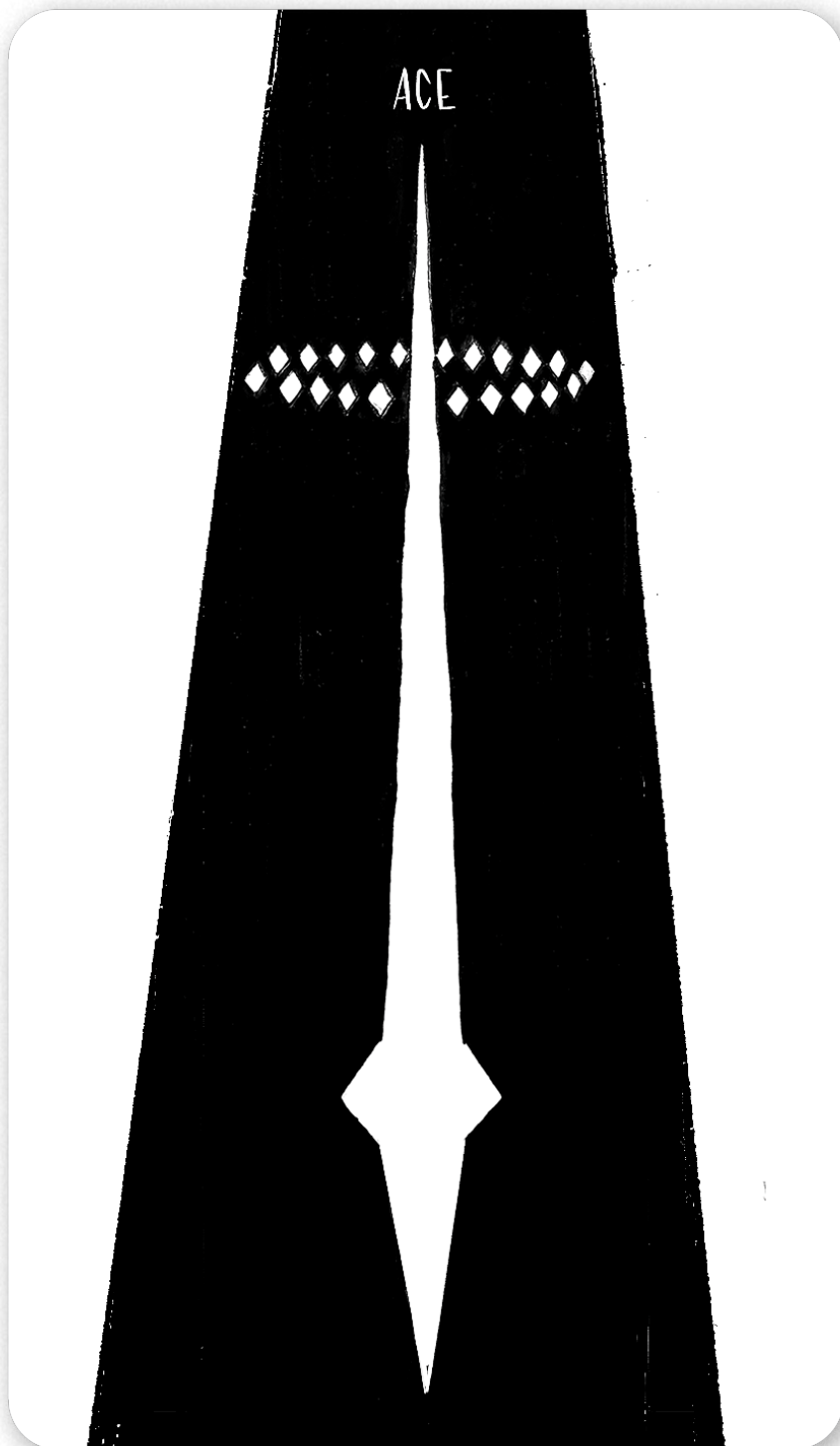


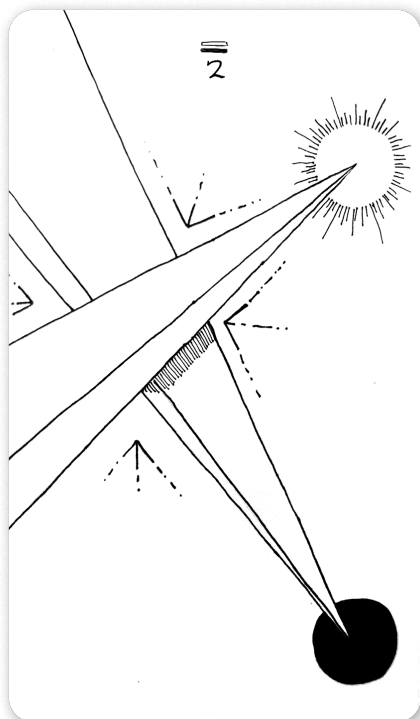
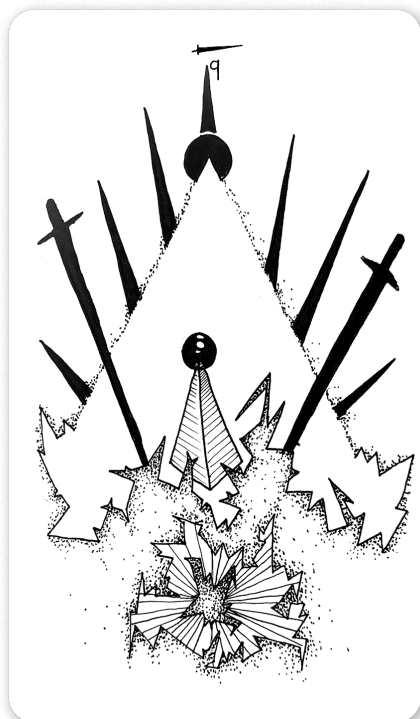
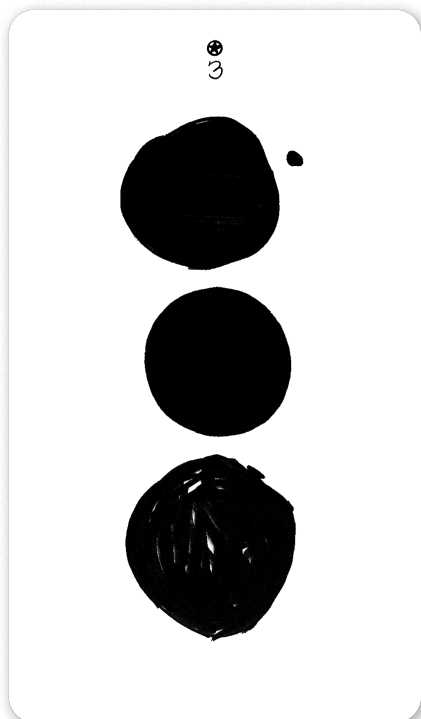
Most of us that facilitate and organize cooperative organizations, particularly non-pecuniary organizations governing or gardening commons, catch every club they see someone dropping and end up holding at least 10 of them. How quickly we find 9 people as qualified or more so to be carrying the 9 clubs or swords is a handy metric of organization health, or “soil health.” If you’ve got 10 kinds of people in your org, there are definitely more than 9 people

probably better than you at 9 things the org needs done. If you don’t, you should go get some and cultivate them, treasure them, and keep them close—before you end up holding too many clubs. It’s a stitch in time. ●









# Forking Paths

Tara Merk & Liz Barry

## ACT ONE

Today a benevolent dictator is born.  
To good governance and glory her  
organization is born.  
To do that thing, the really important one.  
A community is raised and thus it begins.

## ACT TWO

The organization's at work,  
self-imposed structures confine  
but that's not a problem.  
That first consensual community vote means  
they're divine.  
But what are we doing?  
How long does this hold?  
There's discord on Discord as newbies get  
bounced  
and the fever grows cold.

## ACT THREE

You're at a fork in the road.  
Time to take charge.  
Does the work still need work?  
You're still waiting for change?  
Transition the power, community: seize the  
reins and reign!  
Is the mission complete or no longer  
needed?  
Dissolve and move on.

Friends stay, even when the structure is  
gone. ●

# Code for a Transition

Curtis Atkisson

```
make project
if (project != useful)
    break

contributors = 0
bus = 1 #people needed to be on a bus that
        #goes off the cliff to ruin the project
growing = TRUE
prob.no.growth = double
proj.major.contributor = double

while (growing)
    new.contributors = int
    if (new>0)
        contributors += new
    else
        growing = FALSE
    bus += sample(0:1,proj.major.contributor)*new
    if (contributors >> bus)
        return transition(contributors, bus)
    if (bus >1)
        return transition(contributors, bus)
if (contributors > 0 & bus == 1)
    return transition(contributors, bus)
if (project != useful | contributors==0)
    break

transition(contributors, bus) {
    if (funding >> 0)
        return make.nonprofit
    else if (contributors == independent)
        return become.dao
    else if (companies > 2)
        return join.foundation
    else
        return develop.formal.rules
} ●
```

***Governance is a Trauma Response***

Silona Bonewald

COVER

is A  
TRAUMA  
RESPONSE

*Handled*

APPROPRIATELY

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Andi Argast** is a mother, strategist, writer, and member-worker at Hypha Worker Co-operative. She is a frequent collage-maker and an infrequent collage-sharer.

**bumblefudge** is a long-in-the-tooth gadfly, man of the people, and, improbably enough, paid opinion haver.

**Coraline Ada Ehmke** is a tech ethicist, software engineer emerita, and big-time open source troublemaker.

**Curtis Atkisson** is a Computational Social scientist at the eScience Institute at the University of Washington. Curtis studies how communities build software, and all the complex interactions that take place in this ecosystem.

**Darius Kazemi** is an internet artist under the moniker Tiny Subversions. He founded NaNoGenMo, where participants spend a month writing algorithms to generate 50,000 word novels, and Bot Summit, a yearly gathering of people who make art bots. He cofounded Feel Train, a creative technology cooperative.

**Joshua R. Simmons** is a community organizer, activist, open source strategist, and small town cat dad from the land of wine and cows north of San Francisco. His lived experience as a queer disabled white man informs his work to build more humane systems.

**Mallory Knodel** is the executive director of the Social Web Foundation. She is a public interest technologist and chairs the Human Rights Protocol Considerations research group of the Internet Research Task Force.

**Mahasweta Chakraborti** is a final year PhD candidate in Communication at UC Davis. She studies governance of emerging technologies and has come to terms with null results.

**Max Fowler** is a programmer and artist researching and experimenting with digital and analog infrastructures. They are a teacher at The School For Poetic Computation, an admin of sunbeam.city, and a contributor to PeachCloud.  
<https://mfowler.info/>

**Nathan Schneider** is a professor of media studies at the University of Colorado Boulder, where he directs the Media Economies Design Lab. His most recent book is *Governable Spaces: Democratic Design for Online Life*.

**Robin Berjon** is a governance technologist with a history of participation in open standards and open source communities. He lives in Brussels where he's trying to make the public interest internet happen.

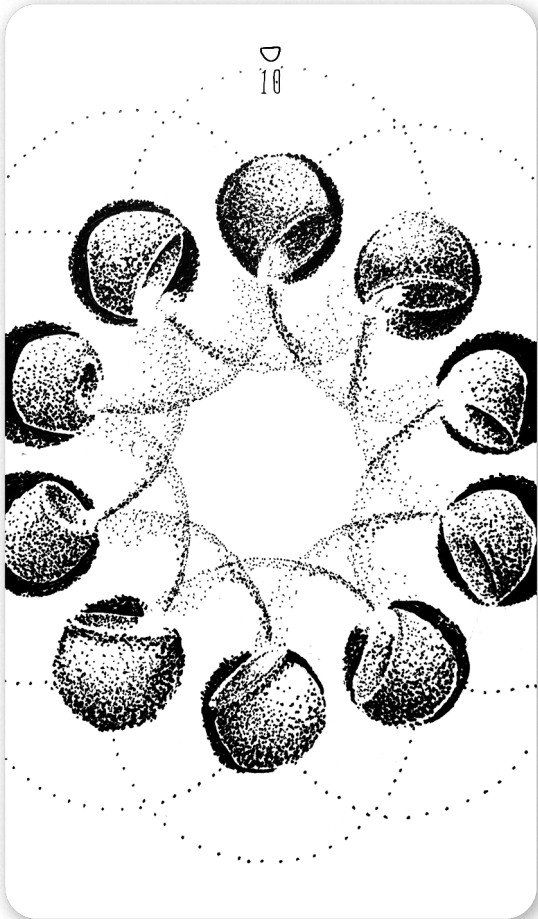


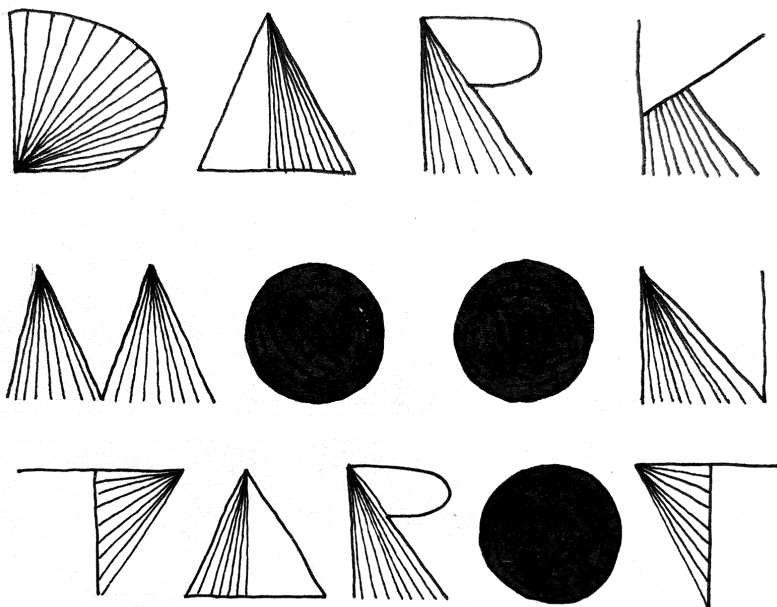
**Seth Frey** is a computational scholar of governance and the commons, a professor at the University of California Davis, and a community governance organizer.

**Silona Bonewald** Silona Bonewald is the Queen Bee at Leadingbit Solutions, guiding the creation of CitableAI. Her experience in open source governance informed her work launching the IEEE SA OPEN platform, as its Executive Director, and continues to inform her work as a founding member of the Foundation for Open Source Ecosystems Technology.

**Vincent Charlebois** is an interdisciplinary artist, researcher, and creative technologist from Montreal. As a member of Hypha Worker Co-operative, he co-creates internet futures aimed at empowering communities.

**Wassim Alsindi** operates at the intersection of intersections, chronicling visions, designs, and externalities of contemporary technologies across context and episteme. Wassim holds a doctorate in ultrafast physics, co-founded MIT's Cryptoeconomic Systems journal, and has performed, lectured, and exhibited in over 25 countries.





It has been an honor to facilitate the divination, illustrations, and layout of this book. I stand at the confluence of mystical non-sense and the utopic (and often non-sensical) hope offered by open source. To have my art inspire such weird and wonderful works found in these pages brings me great joy.

The **Dark Moon Tarot** fell out of me in 2019. Every day I pulled a card from the *Robin Wood*, *Fountain*, or *Brady tarot* and drew my interpretation. It was only after I had completed maybe 30 cards that I realized what I was about to create. Since then it's been a curse, demanding I print and distribute it. It has confronted my cowardice-to-finish, masquerading as perfectionism. Though I still struggle against the completion of this project by insisting that I also make a booklet, it will all soon be done and I will have to suffer the agony and ecstasy of its birth.

As I write this there are only 6 of my decks out there in the world. If you want one you'll have to help me make it possible. Learn more about that here: <https://ritualpoint.studio/dmt>

Drew Hornbein, Ritual Point Art & Divination

