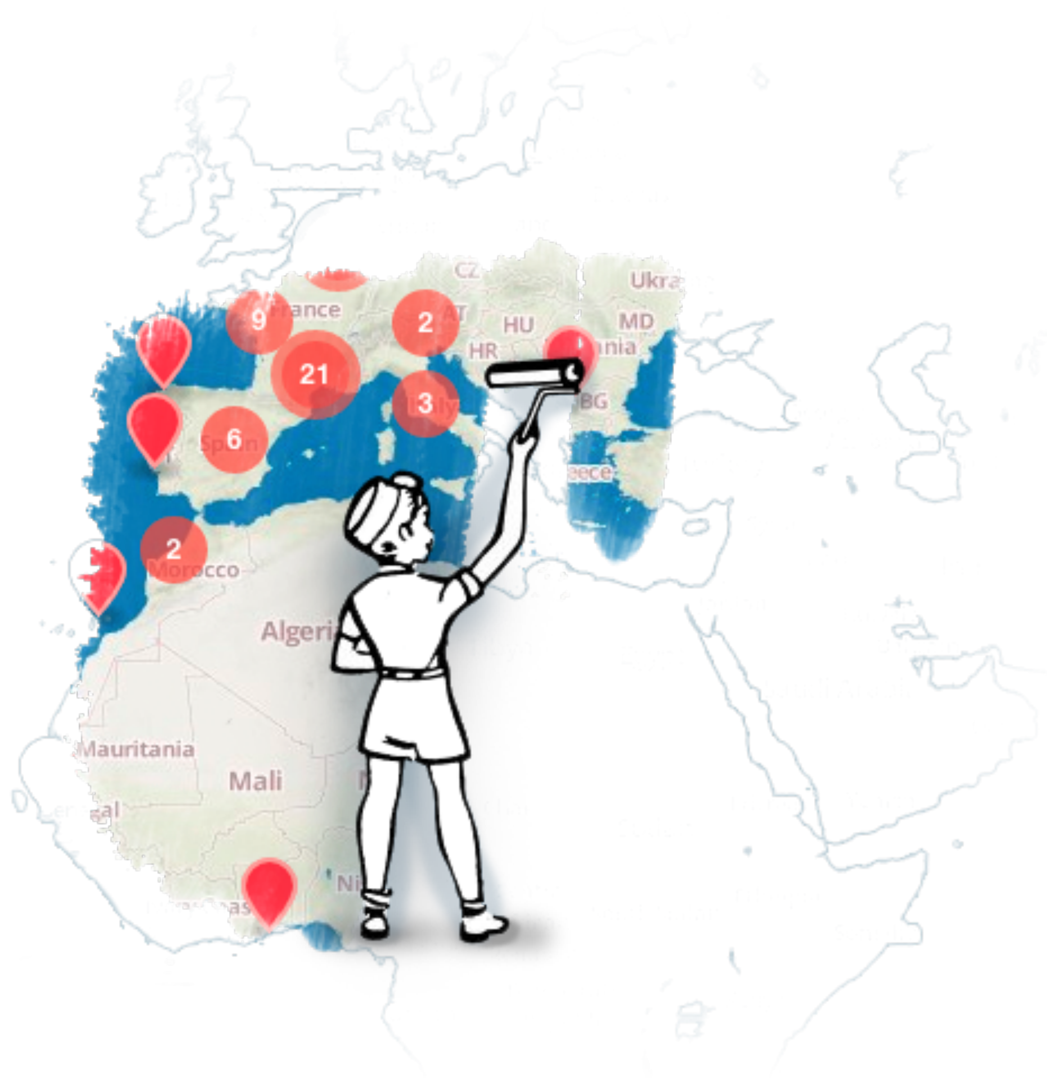
ONE STARTUP'S DREAM

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF A VISION



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ABSTRACT

This is the story of how four people invented a whole new world and way of life—and how they attempted to establish it across the globe. Copass, a Parisian startup consisting of four cofounders, aimed to connect hundreds of the world's shared workspaces under their new global federation. But the main objective of this startup, in contrast to most, was not to build capital. It was to build a universe: a future where white-collar workers would be liberated from the shackles of office life to work anywhere in the world, to meet exciting people and to have amazing experiences. Here, workdays were permanently mixed with holidays. Work was fun, workplaces were play-places and workers were adventurers. The ambition of these four cofounders was to turn the way they wanted things to be for them into the way things ought to be for everyone else. To turn their desired lifestyle into a global social movement that enrolled, as they saw it, hundreds of cities and thousands, tens of thousands, even millions of people. In short, they created a company to fulfil a dream. This is an ethnography of that one startup's dream, analysed at length to demonstrate innovative ways of worldmaking employed by an ambitious tech company seeking success. A company dissatisfied with the world that, instead of changing it, decided to create a new one.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface — A Second Extraordinary Voyage 1

Introduction — The Startup as a Worldmaking Enterprise 11

1 — Three Dreamers of Dwellings 64

2 — A Sociological Enlightenment 118

3 — From Humans to Heroes 144

4 — Orchestrating Discovery in the Age of Fact-Checking 172

5 — Forcefields for the Comfort Zone 198

6 — The Infantile Passion of Enclosure 217

7 — Lifestyle Porn, an Arms Race for the New Aristocrats 246

8 — One Global Dwelling, the Pop-Up Society 277

Conclusion — A Modern Social Movement 303

References 340

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permitting an American to join this French initiative for a year travelling the world—hospitality that I could only describe as being 'totally awesome.' Furthermore, I would like to thank Stefano for permitting me to use photos posted on the company's Facebook page throughout this work.

This project has had a number of advisors and readers, without whom it could not have been achieved. My supervisor, David Zeitlyn, has been a mentor not only in the editorial process, but in helping me to question, to further investigate, and above all to find moments and scenes from my fieldwork not just interesting but anthropologically fascinating. Pushing me beyond my comfort zone and beyond my familiarity of modern technology and organisational routines, he encouraged me to constantly make the familiar exotic in an examination of entrepreneurs doing things that many people might find, at first glance, completely trivial. Instrumental to my writing-up, and post-fieldwork research was Fabian Muniesa. Not only for providing crucial feedback on my work, but for kindly inviting me to the Centre de Sociologie de l'Innovation (CSI) of the École des Mines de Paris as a visiting PhD student for two years. He and Antoine Hennion served as first-rate mentors during my stay, especially in guiding the riveting departmental seminars. Beyond the classroom, my CSI colleagues also provided wonderful discussions that helped crystallise my ideas, including Basak Saraç-Lesavre and Flavien Renaud. I would like to offer a special thanks to Alexandre Violle and Marie Alauzen, for their feedback on early parts of this text—their enthusiasm and intellectual acumen inspired me to continue to push myself in developing the themes of this project.

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to imagine, helped me keep a flame alive over the course of a year of writing, to provide a small light on one small startup with a big dream.

There were many other influential people with whom I discussed my ideas, before, during and after my fieldwork, who have all contributed to the work that follows. While I was in the field, I had many fascinating conversations, exchanges and debates with friends and colleagues in many places: Paris, Brussels, London, Edinburgh, St Andrews, Lisbon, Sofia, Prague, San Francisco, New York City, the Canary Islands and Île d'Yeu. Although I felt it was impossible for me to anonymise the startup I worked at and the identities of the cofounders who brought it to life, other interlocutors I met in the field are anonymised. I have made sure to anonymise those who have not given explicit permission for me to use their names or who have not gone on-record through online publication—thus citations of blog articles that are published and publicly available online are listed with correct author names and are cited in the bibliography. The coworking spaces I visited on Copass are not anonymised because of how integral they were to the startup's product and my work experience, but I have made sure that all names mentioned of workers or mangers in them are anonymous. This was not an impediment to my account of this startup, because so much of what follows emanates from the life and labour of the cofounders. This is an ethnography about their world, about the good they wanted to bring with it and the strategies deployed to make it possible. It is precisely in this sense that what follows could be considered an ethnography of a vision.

Etonnants voyageurs ! quelles nobles histoires
Nous lisons dans vos yeux profonds comme les mers !
Montrez-nous les écrins de vos riches mémoires,
Ces bijoux merveilleux, faits d’astres et d’éthers.

Nous voulons voyager sans vapeur et sans voile !
Faites, pour égayer l’ennui de nos prisons,
Passer sur nos esprits, tendus comme une toile,
Vos souvenirs avec leurs cadres d’horizons.

Dites, qu’avez-vous vu?

— — —

Fascinating travellers! What noble stories
we read in your eyes deep like the seas!
Show us inside the precious cases of your rich memories,
such marvellous jewels, made from stars and ethers!

We want to travel without steam and without sail!
To brighten up the boredom of our prisons,
Pass over our minds, tight like a sail,
your memories with their framed horizons.

Tell us, what have you seen?

—Charles Baudelaire, *Le Voyage* (1861: 186, my translation)

Preface

A SECOND EXTRAORDINARY VOYAGE

In this volume, I have gathered the entirety of my notes taken day by day during our voyage around the world, paying particular attention to the part of this voyage where we visited the lesser-known islands of the Pacific. I have done my utmost to present to the public a precise document whilst avoiding observations of a purely technical nature, and my goal is simply to try to interest readers, giving them a taste of voyages in Ethnology.

—Charles Van Den Broek d’Obrenan (1939, my translation)

Sitting in the living room, “California Girls” by the Beach Boys played from the sound system. The afternoon sun shone brightly through the windows, with a door wide open letting in the summery ocean air. Eric—the president of Copass—and some others had just stepped out to the beach for a suntan. We were staying at his family home on Ile d’Yeu, for a week of summer holidays with them and a group of friends I met during my year of fieldwork in France. After our year of working together in Copass, this was a welcome break where we could be together not strictly as Copass employees, but as friends. Tonight, it was my turn to cook dinner for the group, and at this moment the house was silent, except the beach breeze and the gentle groove of the Beach Boys. Sitting on the couch, I leaned over to the coffee table and flicked through the stack of magazines and papers. An old green leather-bound book fell out of the pile, and picking it up, I read the title: *Le Voyage de La Korrigane.* The cover image was a drawing of an impressive wood boat with tall sails. I recognised the book immediately: it was the chronicle of Eric’s great-uncle, that I had heard about back in the coworking spaces of Paris. Seeing it here, I opened the cover and flipped through its yellowing pages. I sat back in the sunlight and read the introduction.

The voyage around the world of Charles Van Den Broek d’Obrenan lasted from May 1934 to June 1936. During this trip, under the command of Comte Etienne de Ganay, d’Obrenan chronicled the story of five young French researchers aboard the SS Korrigane: a mid-size two-hundred tonne Icelandic sailing vessel sent from Marseille to Polynesia to collect new objects for Paris’s *Musée de l’Homme* [Museum of Man]. D’Obrenan was the chronicler of the exhibition, travelling with his wife, Régine Van Den Broek, and he published an account of the ship’s travels in a book entitled, *Le Voyage de La Korrigane,* printed in 1939. He recounts an intimate collection of observations from their journey, beginning in the Marquise Islands, passing to Tahiti, New Zealand, Fiji, New

Caledonia, the New Hebrides, the Salomon Islands, the Admiralty Islands, Papua New Guinea and Bali. Reading the book, one encounters page after page of 'precise documentation' of daily trials and tribulations that long sea voyages entail, of the quaint exoticisms of cultures he encounters, and of the dramas and dialogues of the crew with local people in colonial outposts, fishing villages, restaurants, churches and tribal huts. Through these experiences, d'Obrenan recounts how the SS Korrigane brought back an astounding 2,500 objects from its island tour to be displayed at the inauguration of the newly constructed *Musée de l'Homme* for a 1938 exhibition.

D'Obrenan's story recounts the last sea voyage that would bring such a complete range of objects to France, marking a significant moment in the country's history through his touching collection of personal anecdotes and narrative vignettes. Paul Valéry, of the *Académie Française*, provided a laudatory preface for the original publication, congratulating the author on his 'clarity of expression' and absence of 'poetic elaboration' in a 'precise description of scenes' from which the process of amassing the museum's new collection could be contextualised. Valéry writes on the importance of the Korrigane's voyage in terms of the increasing globalisation of the early 20th century:

> The turbulence of the civilised is rapidly taking over the entire globe, exploiting it, equipping it and unifying it. Upon contact with our ways of acting, of feeling or of producing, and under the powerful influence of our methods and our well-armed wills, customs and tastes are changing; singularities are being erased; beings themselves are being degraded and resist poorly the temptations and the poisons that we deliver them,

> because we are to them, in all truth, no matter the intention, dangerous germ carriers.
> (1939: 5, my translation)

Valéry's nostalgic claim regarding the decreasing diversity of world culture was the motive for the Korrigane's voyage in the first place: to buy objects from indigenous communities that could be preserved forever in a museum gallery, to safeguard the colour and brilliance of peoples slowly losing out to the poisons and temptations of the civilised. But today, reading d'Obrenan's account, one finds quite different sentiments than those of Valéry. What feels lost is not necessarily the diversity of cultures that the ship was sent to capture, but the marvel and wonder with which the author describes his experiences. The most moving passages of the book recount his fear and reverence, his curiosity and confusion, his doubt and bewilderment. Encountering a female priest in the Marquise Islands (who according to the author was considered 'a saint or sorceress depending on who you ask'), d'Obrenan describes how despite her 'not being quite to the bishop's tastes,' she reigned in her own beautifully decorated chapel, with saints that had 'undergone transformations,' such as Joan of Arc who 'was wearing a beautiful beard added with pencil.' He remarks in an amused tone: 'what do you want, Madame Joseph wants it like that!' At a later moment 'with the headhunters of the Sepik' in Papua New Guinea, local rivers 'exhaled a violent perfume of spiced flowers and humid earth' as he and the crew battled the buzzing 'music' of mosquitos in the thousands. 'How,' he asks the reader, 'are we going to get through the night?'

Eighty years later, this thesis recounts the voyage around the world of yet another Van Den Broek—Eric—the grandnephew of d'Obrenan. Born into a family of sailors and sea-fascinated voyagers,

Eric decided to strike out and make a world voyage of his own. In 2012 he founded a startup called Copass: an updated version of its hereditary predecessor, the SS Korrigane. But Copass was not a boat. It was an internet service that enabled new kinds of globetrotting voyages for new kinds of voyagers: educated, affluent European coworkers. In this case, the term ‘coworkers’ does not refer to its typical usage as employees working for the same company. The term could be thought of as *co-workers:* independent workers who chose to share a workspace with other independent workers, each financially and practically independent aside from the fact of renting a shared environment generally speaking from 9-to-5, Monday-to-Friday. These environments were owned and managed as independent establishments, called *coworking spaces.* Coworkers included a variety of professions where business is managed and conducted online, including consultants, programmers, designers, translators, photographers, event planners and small business owners. They also included small teams of employees who worked for startups themselves. These startups preferred not to invest in purchasing or leasing a workplace, instead integrating directly into a physical ecosystem of potential clients and partners.

Building on innovations in travel and communications technologies of the 21st century, Copass offered its paying members access to a worldwide federation of independent coworking spaces. Signing up, customers could interact with a world map enabling them to discover and work in coworking spaces in more than seventy countries—indeed, a great many more destinations than the SS Korrigane was ever capable of. Like his ancestor, Eric set out on this voyage with a small crew of likeminded cohorts: Sophie, Stefano and Augustin. Their mission was not to collect objects and preserve cultures, but quite the opposite. Eric and his crew recognised, in contrast to Paul Valéry, that preservation was no longer an option for people from around the world against the fast-rising

tides of technological globalism. The best response one could give would be not just to accept that globalisation was happening, but instead to globalise on one's own terms. To challenge the inevitability of a globalising world and the doom that it represented by globalising differently.

One could call both d'Obrenan's trip aboard the SS Korrigane, and Eric's trip with Copass, extraordinary voyages of 'heroic' individuals because *they were both projects of society-making.* For d'Obrenan, it was to render old societies visible in a major collection displayed in the museum cases of the *Musée de l'Homme*. For Eric, it was to render a new society visible on the startup's world map: by designing, engineering, programming and uploading a new map-tool to the Copass website that users could interact with. A digital map that would open new forms of easy access to new places, that had the potential to instantly connect people from different corners of the world. Rendering this new society visible started there, but continued in all the work projects of the startup. Sewing and wearing unique brand costumes, fabricating a brand currency, hosting branded events in many countries and capturing images of the world in branded photographs were all strategies to put a new society in view of all onlookers. The team's goal was to take the fragmented, partisan and unevenly distributed world of coworkers and coworking spaces, and to turn it into a universal vision that covered the globe evenly. It was a chance to dream up a global image not of what coworking actually was, but of everything it could be. It was an opportunity to fashion a brand with the hope of launching a new world.

Much like the mission of the SS Korrigane was to capture an old world and present it to 'the civilised' in Paris, the mission of Copass was to capture a new one and present it to civilised urban coworkers. It was an attempt to enrol the entire planet and to redesign it in comfortable, delightful

packaging, where inside, the problems that coworkers faced on a daily basis would cease to exist. It is important to recognise that both of these extraordinary voyages came from a desire to make the world a better place. For d'Obrenan and his crew, it was a wish to escape from the dramas of high civilisation and industrialising circumstances, to connect with exotic and primitively beautiful ways of life and to represent that beauty in a museum where civilised people could reflect. For Eric and his team, it was a wish to escape from the normalised precarity of being a coworker, to connect with exotic and marvellous places around the world, and to represent that beauty in a brand where people could purchase access to those experiences. Despite their affluence, coworkers tended to live precarious lives with financial difficulties, problems of loneliness and existential doubts about working independently. Copass was a potential solution to those problems, much like a stroll through the 1930s *Musée de l'Homme* might have been to doubts of industrial globalisation. It was a sanctuary built around noble principles and exotic ways of life, it was a bulwark against wider social and economic trends that seemed unstoppable.

In both cases, one could see a divergence of worlds in these two projects of society-making. Eric, Sophie, Stefano and Augustin were firm believers in the society they saw themselves in bringing about. Rather than trying to change the world through politics or a formal labour movement, they spent their efforts much like d'Obrenan did, *in stockpiling beautiful objects*. Copass tried to picture a new world in all of its delight and bright potential, then sold it to customers looking to live in a world such as that. Like the *Musée de l'Homme*, Copass presented a showcase of a better world for those who might be fed up with their actual one. It provided a source of imagination for something different that could inspire and push people towards something better, when faced with what seemed to be insurmountable odds of improving the current society. This is a story of modern city-

dwelling digital workers who tried to inspire the arrival of a better world through their visualisation of it.

In what follows, I recount the story of my voyage around the world with Copass, from May 2014 to July 2015. I have taken on a role similar to that of Charles Van Den Broek d'Obrenan aboard the SS Korrigane: I have become the chronicler of events onboard the Copass network, and of encounters with indigenous locals. Like d'Obrenan, who tasked himself with telling the tale of five young French researchers onboard, I would like to recount the story of four young French and Italian entrepreneurs who took on the roles of captain and crew on the high seas of the European startup scene. Together, our journey began and ended in Paris, but together we traversed France, England, Scotland, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Bulgaria and the United States during the year I worked with them. We visited over fifty coworking spaces, and partook in coworking conferences on two continents (one in Brussels, the other in San Francisco). Always orienting ourselves back to the Copass website and its impressive world map, we used many vehicles to move around, from airplanes to subways, off-road cars to catamarans, city trams to racing bikes, white water rafts to high-speed trains and sailboats to Über rides. We interacted with locals and travellers alike in shared offices, public parks, seedy bars, beautiful beaches, mountain ridges, presentation halls, rural campsites and even on a trampoline dodgeball court.

What I hope to convey in this text is a sense of life that I lived in the day-to-day during our voyage around the world. My role in Copass, officially, was 'Chief of Communications.' I was hired after an online application to work with them for one year, and it was during this time that I collected field notes and wrote detailed ethnographic observations after-hours. I have worked, like

d'Obrenan, 'to present to the public a precise documentation, doing everything to avoid the observations of a purely technical character.' The tone of voice of the following chapters has been carefully crafted to convey not just the events that happened on our Copass adventure, but to convey them in terms befitting the startup experience. Because, similar to d'Obrenan's account of the Korrigane, my goal was not to capture the intricacies of a startup in a dry, abstract way, but rather to present the voyage with all of the humour, happiness and optimism that came with living it. To capture the wonder and fascination of an entrepreneurial crew today that, in looking back from the future, captures not just a series of events but *an orientation to the world and its inhabitants* at one moment in time, representative of a particular zeitgeist with its peculiar concerns and ambitions.

In the text that follows, I sought to recreate the conditions of the voyage in the terms of Copass itself, and by doing this, to drag them to their furthest logical conclusions that furnish, in them, their own critiques. This form of auto-critique was an exercise working from the inside-out to understand Copass so well, and the vision of its cofounders so clearly, that through simple a description of events its limitations would become visible at each step of the way. In other words, what follows is an exercise of taking a startup and the vision of its cofounders seriously, from an anthropological perspective. I hope that you will take away something from what's to come, and that in some small way, it (as Eric once put it) 'tickles and excites you' about the potential for changing the world that new technologies have enabled. Above all else, the point of what's to come—like the lasting wish of d'Obrenan for his account—is that my retelling will interest readers curious about one modest-made-magnificent globalising Parisian startup. I hope to offer, as d'Obrenan put it in his own words, 'a taste of voyages in Ethnology' of startups by describing a story of one startup's world

voyage today, that could be considered a second extraordinary voyage of excitement and of exploitation, the sequel to another one made eighty years prior.

Introduction

THE STARTUP AS A WORLDMAKING ENTERPRISE

How does a 'startup' get started? Speaking with my informants, the answer often had to do with the impetus of a new idea, the motivation of some particular vision for how the world could be better, improved, more efficient, more valuable. Peter Thiel, renowned American entrepreneur who cofounded the 1998 startup, Confinity (later renamed PayPal), suggests that 'positively defined, a startup is the largest group of people you can convince of a plan to build a different future' (2014: 10). While these are go-to answers for many practising entrepreneurs, I suggest the answer is much less idealistic: startups start from problems. They begin not in hopes, but in failures, irritations, resentments, grievances, annoyances. Hopeful futures come much less from inspired individuals

who take up the role of blueprinting a plan for ‘a different future,’ and much more from people who are fed up and tired of the way things are. So, instead of beginning with the hopes, here I would like to start with the wider problems in the coworking world that motivated the foundation of Copass, the startup I worked at and studied for one year in 2014-5. What I found interesting about the problems of independent workers in coworking spaces, was that for many others they were often considered banal. Speaking with people outside of my fieldwork, I often heard remarks that such affluent workers don’t have ‘real’ problems, compared to refugees, the homeless, child soldiers or drug addicts. Those who have an education, who have enough money to buy Apple products, who have enough security to risk not having stable monthly income, surely aren’t interesting research subjects because despite shortcomings, their life must be a good life.

Of course in one sense these criticisms are not incorrect. The level of severity of problems that led to the foundation of Copass were much lower than other startups who might be founded to provide safe drinking water for rural communities, to develop handheld devices that detect landmines, or to create cheaper technologies for a wider access to maternity care. But there was something that always bothered me about these conversations: many times, it was as if people were not willing to take seriously what they saw as the lighthearted romps of post-university dreamers who had not yet learned how to take themselves seriously. From the beginning of my writing-up, I was motivated to write earnestly about the problems these workers experienced, and to study how these problems led to a desire for a better world and just what all of that meant to them. Their problems were silent ones, and not many outsiders were willing to listen, to reflect or to consider them as legitimate. But this was not necessarily an outsider’s fault. If anything, one of the biggest surprises I learned in the world of coworking was the two-faced nature of this culture. From the outside looking in,

independent digital workers seemed to be having the time of their life: going to work at whatever hour of the day might suit them, wearing flip-flops, not having a boss, spending work hours on social media, drinking coffee and gossiping, being able to travel easily and on a whim.

This was the stereotype I had in the back of my mind when I arrived in the field. During my first days visiting coworking spaces, I witnessed what I was prepared to see: places where work came after play, where relaxation took precedence over productivity. The argument of coworkers was always that, if work was more fun, it was possible to be more productive. But after one year in these environments, I learned that these were facades covering a complicated series of hidden problems. Hidden because nobody in the field liked to talk about them, and hidden because nobody outside of their communities seriously considered the kinds of problems they were living with. The source of both of these turns away from problems come from, in my view, the overly optimistic attitudes of Silicon Valley that pervaded every aspect of coworking life. Inside coworking spaces, everyone was driven to be the best version of themselves at every moment (because the alternative would be a personal disappointment), where the future was never decided but entirely in the hands of each worker. This was supposed to offer an incredible liberation from corporate life as a ‘cog in the machine,' but instead I found it often caused people to bury doubts deep inside themselves, and to present a facade where everything was under control. And on the outside of coworking spaces was an air of seriousness, where it was easy to see these places as infantile playhouses, full of young adults playing at work instead of finally growing up to wear a suit and tie.

In this context, while it may seem a small dare to take seriously the problems of these workers, I find it an important intellectual project because these problems, in the context of relatively wealthy

and generally affluent white Europeans, are rarely taken with intellectual gravity given to other more sobering subjects. This text is an exercise *in lifting a veil of optimism off of this world of work,* for both insiders (coworkers) and curious onlookers, *to study what problems these people actually faced and how they tried to resolve them*. The findings to come are intriguing because of the immense amount of effort that one startup brought to fix some of these problems, and how their efforts often made problems worse for everyone, not better. That is why I was motivated to write this story, because it presents a call and response which is not often analysed: the problems which motivate entrepreneurial action, as well as solutions to those problems presented in one startup that, though well-intentioned, carried those problems to a higher level and made them more ambiguous and more difficult to conceptualise. And what made this dynamic particularly captivating in the case of Copass, was that the startup itself did not become an enormous success, as independent workers were taught to hope for, and I present the impact this lacklustre growth had on the resolution of those problems.

But if the problems that motivated the founding of Copass were banal, what were they? They can be considered in three themes: an increasing unpredictability experienced in life, an increasing powerlessness in a fast moving world and an increasing difficulty to afford the life one wants to have. In an effort to take these problems seriously, my analysis of them similarly corresponds to three areas of anthropological interest: *precarity*, *globalisation* and *new work transformations*. These three domains cover the life I lived with my informants on a daily basis as we travelled around the world organising events, planning product updates and developing our web platform. While these domains of course overlap with one another, I take a specific position on each. For research on precarity, I explore ‘precarity of the soul’ among affluent workers by illustrating their

Myself (right) with two of the Copass cofounders in San Francisco, preparing to attend a coworking conference in the startup's uniforms (Copass 2017f).

attempt *to conquer it* with a technological vision. For literature on globalisation, I take the case of the four startup cofounders who hoped *to implement their own programme of globalisation* through ambition afforded to them by their web-based product. And for discussions of new work transformations, I discuss how this startup represented *a new 'Lifestyle' class:* people suffering from economic incertitude but working to introduce a world where that would no longer be a problem. In each of these cases, what I found was that instead of directly solving these problems, the startup did something unusual: *they attempted to simply design a new world that was very similar to the current one, except it omitted these problematic aspects.*

At Copass, I witnessed something which I suggest is at the heart of many startups: a desire to make the world a better place because of frustrations in everyday life, by designing a new one, then seeking out others who would believe in it (by buying into it) to make that world *the future.* A simple form of problem-solving, this was at the core of Copass, where rather than a desire to make a business, the cofounders followed their desire to create a new world that, somehow, with the belief and participation of others, might just be able to come into existence and solve those problems once and for all. The core theoretical contribution of this thesis is the effort to take seriously this startup and its cofounders' vision as an example of worldmaking. Beyond the spectacle of Copass, this contribution has a wide reach as it touches on the practices of all startups as worldmaking enterprises, and it shows how to consider startups as machines of imagination in the Western world and beyond. As an ever increasing way of life for affluent Europeans and Americans, this study is a consideration of what that way of life consists of, and how it shapes people's expectations about the future and what's in store for them. It offers a description of how many, disillusioned with the current world, stopped looking for change today and instead started

hoping for a brighter tomorrow to appear overnight—as simple and routine as buying a new iPhone, or a downloading a product update. In short, this is an examination of what could be termed 'startup optimism' and its pitfalls.

PRECARITY: A SICKNESS OF THE SOUL

The people I met in coworking spaces called themselves coworkers. They were white Europeans between 18 and 40 years old—most around 32 to 35. Many had recently graduated from university. According to a leading survey of hundreds of the world's coworking spaces, the overall gender divide was two-thirds men and one-third women, with 38% of respondents in a relationship, 36% married, and 26% single or divorced (GCUC 2016). Half were freelancers who managed their own businesses, a quarter were employees of a startup or small enterprise and the rest were entrepreneurs who worked on aspiring business projects (GCUC 2016). Sociologically speaking they were affluent people, in John Kenneth Galbraith's paradigm of *The Affluent Society.* They were 'the exception' in human history: wealthy people with comfortable socio-economic circumstances, a privilege of 'the last few generations in the comparatively small corner of the world populated by Europeans' (Galbraith 1958: 1). Coworking spaces began to open in Europe around 2010. Their proliferation over the following years was due to affluent workers who abandoned their jobs in corporations, large companies and government organisations that no longer met their social, economic or spiritual needs. Escaping the cubicle on the one hand (representing the confines of corporate work life) and the living room on the other (standing for the suffocating isolation of at-

home work), this group of self-identifying ‘co’-workers experimented with a new way to work and live together in coworking spaces.

The office and home were the normal, stable work environments for the vast majority of affluent Western workers. For most middle- and upper-class labourers in France during my fieldwork they were the norm. But while they didn’t necessarily take a toll on the wallets of workers, they placed an affective price on their soul. ‘Working for your boss’ was just as untenable as ‘being your own boss (at home!)’ for these well-educated but structurally disenfranchised labourers. To establish an analytical overview of this affluent phenomenon, Allison introduces a particularly useful idea —*‘precarity of the “soul”’*—I would like to build on in this ethnography. Precarity of the soul is ‘rooted in the material conditions of life-making, including work, and the social and existential conditions of living, including the ties we have with others and the ways we define (and find) meaning, energy, and worth’ (2012: 349). In the context of Japan, she explains,

> Under the post-war regime of the “enterprise society” and Fordist capitalism, people were affectively ensconced in a very particular orientation to life grounded in the triple institutions of home/work/school and desires/disciplines of working hard, (re)producing home, and consuming brand name goods. […] Inciting a sensation of failure and loss, this rubric of well-being and being-normal needs to change if it is not to keep excluding so many. And this, too, is what I am interested in here: in changes being made in the horizons of expectation for what constitutes social citizenship, quality of life, and everyday security. (2012: 350)

This situation was similar for coworkers I met, especially in France. Here, I came across former students of reputed *lycées* and established *grandes écoles* in business, management and finance. They had large networks, partook in respectable internships in banks, consulting firms, government ministries and had enough money to live comfortably, eventually searching for their future on the job market. For many, it was here here where problems reached a peak: 'I don't like the term "job market,"' explained William, one Parisian coworking space manager. 'It evokes a big trade show of livestock where career candidates show neither their teeth nor silky fur coats, but instead their suits and diplomas' (Van den Broek 2011, my translation). This meat market of hungry job seekers was a site of separation for young French people from the 'home/work/school' infrastructures Allison identifies above, decoupling 'desires/disciplines' of hard work, where 'horizons of expectation for what constitutes social citizenship' begin to be decided. The job fair was one of France's sites of cultural 'ordinariness,' a 'holdover from Fordist times' that continued to propagate outdated societal and existential expectations (Allison 2012: 357). William continues,

> I'm reminded of certain old school traumas like Business Week [*semaine de l'entreprise*]; a week of "encounters and recruitment between scholars and job offerers." The recruiters in question, being essentially audit companies or consulting firms, came to dig for their interns in the wriggling breeding pool of student contestants (or the resigned). Lost in the mass of suit-wearing pupils, I roamed like a zombie—head empty, and heart filled with a gnawing rage. I was incapable to take the least initiative, clammy hands crinkling my crumpled CV that wasn't distributed anywhere… (Van den Broek 2011, my translation)

Here, in the 'empty head,' 'raging heart,' 'clammy hands' and 'crumpled CV' of the author we see the agony that is precariousness of the soul. This agony of the soul is important to recognise, because 'to speak of a *soul* at work is to move the center of gravity in contemporary debates about cognitive capitalism,' updating conceptions of capitalism with the realities of modern, affluent work (Smith in Berardi 2009: 9). 'Foucault tells the story of modernity as a disciplining of the body,' where work and life become effectively equated as a never-ending sequence of disciplinary procedures that form bodies into appropriate socio-material and psychophysiological shapes (Berardi 2009: 21, see the concept of docile bodies in Foucault 1995: 135). In industrial societies, disciplining the social body was rendered visible through the simple fact that bodies were ordered to achieve productive capacities in physical terms, primarily through muscle movements. But 'if we want to continue the work of Michel Foucault' in post-Fordist, post-industrial societies, Berardi argues, 'we have to shift the focus towards the automatisms of mental reactivity, language and imagination, and therefore towards the new forms of alienation and precariousness of the mental work occurring in the Net' (2009: 22). Changing perspective from regimes of physical discipline to those of imaginative exercise is important to consider how affluent work today has evolved. William's frustrations come from restraints put on life at the *Business Week,* where the 'horizons of expectation' met physical needs (providing income) but suffered imaginative shortcomings.

Leaving school and a series of internships, the problem for these affluents was not in finding a job (though youth unemployment has been a worsening problem in France) but in finding a *satisfying* job from a mass-marketed mix of 'essentially audit or consulting companies.' Because, as a 'wandering zombie' in the job fair, what were the substantive differences between the types of work advertised? In other words, one could ask, 'Today, what does it mean to work?' because the

differences to corporate newcomers seem null (Berardi 2009: 74). For job seekers seeking purpose in white collar industries, the choice might seem pointless as today 'work is performed according to the same physical patterns: we all sit in front of a screen and move our fingers across a keyboard. We type.' (Berardi 2009: 74). 'Architects, travel agents, software developers and attorneys,' Berardi suggests, 'share the same physical gestures, but they could never exchange jobs since each and every one of them develops a specific and local ability which cannot be transmitted to those who do not share the same curricular preparation and are not familiar with the same complex cognitive contents' (Berardi 2009: 74). In the work world of increasing conceptual diversity paired with converging physical regimens, computers, smartphones and software are forging *a new type of fulfilment capacity at work:* one that increasingly puts precarity at the centre of production and personalities into products.

Ethnographically speaking, at the heart of Copass and of the coworking movement more generally was the conviction that *work* and *life* were no longer separable. The *'co'*- prefix of coworking hinted at this belief. As Eric put it, 'co'-working was not strictly about work, it was 'the concrete expression of a culture of openness, sharing and curiosity' (Van den Broek 2015c). I suggest that coworking was a response to 'soul precarity' in France—its well-to-do populations with clammy hands and crumpled CVs mentioned above—to make space for people 'who needed new horizons in societies that progressively destroyed traditional forms of communities' (Van den Broek 2015c). Reflecting on Berardi's question of, *today*, *what does it mean to work?* for French coworking entrepreneurs the answer had surprisingly little to do with work. It had to do instead with establishing spaces of existential resistance against Fordist expectation. Spaces where, as Allison put it, 'the soul can be soulful again' (2012: 362). Entrepreneurship came to encapsulate not only

the search for non-institutional business opportunities, but moreover the non-institutional pursuit of self-understanding: ’the ways we define (and find) meaning, energy, and worth’ (2012: 349). Coworking spaces were ‘newer alternatives’ for a disenfranchised youth that needed to be ‘equipped to nurture—others, a future—beyond themselves’ that had more to do with ‘implanting more security, futurity and compassion in daily living’ than it ever did with business benefits (Allison 2009: 106).

What is notable about the post-Fordist world is that, as Muehleback and Shoshan have argued, it has left traces in the affective lives of its descendants (2012). This manifests itself in ‘commonly held attachments vis-à-vis the future—a future marked by predictable, measured incrementalism mediated by the state’ (2012: 333). Fordism was characterised by a ‘lifelong framework of biographical progression’ that gave ‘coherence to events and delineated an arc along which economic security could be pursued, professional progress could be measured, and markers of status and prestige could be granted value’ (2012: 334). Here, William’s frustrations at the job fair become evident: work detached from a smooth ‘biographical progression’ where the future—propelled at accelerating speeds in the launching of new technologies—lost its ‘predictable, measured incrementalism’ once assured by the state. Studying this phenomenon could be thought of as doing a ‘phenomenology of precariousness’ as Al-Mohammad has undertaken in post-invasion Iraq (2012: 601). Examining the singularity of a kidnapping, she illustrates not only the precarity of everyday life (laden with the potential to be kidnapped in everyday routines) but also how the ‘existential insecurity’ of kidnapping ‘opens the possibility of engaging with the toils of and for life that come as part of such insecurity’ (2012: 601).

Writings on the experience of precarity are abundant in recent anthropology. Prentice provides insight into the effects of Trinidad's 'kidnapping epidemic' on Indo-Trinidadian workers in garment factories, who 'are left feeling vulnerable and beleaguered' by an Afro-Trinidadian working class (2012: 60). 'Forced to choose between class and race loyalties,' the anthropologist argues, "they struggle to find a 'place' from which to speak, where their emotions […] are given legitimacy" (2012: 60). Cho writes on the precarity of urban workers and rural migrants in Northeastern China, and the failure of government intervention to provide certainty for these groups, 'emphasizing the precarious and patchy nature of state oversight' (2012: 189). On the other hand, Norris and Worby analyse precariousness caused by privatisation for sugar plantation workers in Tanzania, suggesting it raised unemployment and created a job market for seasonal cane cutters —forcing women 'to rely on the sale of sexual services' to replace former incomes (2012: 366). Sanchez examines the casualisation of work in a Tata Steel plant in India, unable to stay profitable in the context of the country's economic liberalisation policies in the 1990s. Permanent positions were closed, and with them 'the right to company homes, healthcare, education, and pensions for all but a minority' had also been lost (2012: 811). In the aftermath, this workforce relied heavily on 'discourses of corporate paternalism and cultural superiority,' to manage 'tensions and uncertainties of the present'—experiencing the jet lag of post-Fordism discussed above (2012: 823-4).

These ethnographies of precarity, along with others (Johnson 2012, Molé 2012, Razsa & Kurnik 2012, Reeves 2010) offer insights into how global labour forces respond to increased precarity in the workplace, but as of yet there is little literature that takes the precarity of affluent, digital workers seriously. Recently, several anthropologists have begun pursuing this phenomenon. Lukacs presents a fascinating examination of Japanese cell phone novelists, who 'put their souls to work' as

a 'response of young people to their incorporation into a precarious labor regime' and their 'exclusion from collectivities, such as the workplace and the family' (2013: 45). Funahashi writes on Finnish 'occupational burnout' rehab centres, suggesting that attendants of in-patient programmes are encouraged to improve self-awareness, yet this paradoxically makes symptoms of soul-sickness worse, 'making evident to them that "something" not yet identified nonetheless animates their actions'—making worse their symptoms of workplace alienation (2013: 2).

This thesis will contribute to these conversations on precarity not because it analyses the precariousness of affluent digital workers *per se,* but because it illustrates *how they tried to envision their way out of it*. Copass, a self-determined and labour-intensive vision of the future, can be considered as 'affective labour,' and each chapter will explore how its cofounders were 'increasingly invited to invest their subjectivity' into their work (Lukacs 2013: 48; see also Hardt 1999). By dreaming their way out of their own work experiences (Chapter 1), spending time and effort creating new forms of social organisation (Chapter 2), defining new and powerful subjects (Chapter 3), envisioning well-checked travel routines (Chapter 4), designing and engineering metaphysical safe-houses (Chapter 5 and 6), chasing self-worth in pictorial exaggerations (Chapter 7), making a place for themselves in cities (Chapter 8) and finding their place on the road (Chapter 9), my informants used design tools and marketing strategies to construct a bulletproof vision of a 'soul-invested' world free from the precarity they were actually living. Working to manufacture a precarity-free world not yet in existence, building their startup was a way to project a vision of the future that could be achieved from the present.

By making a better future something one could literally prepare for (by going to work, by accomplishing daily tasks, by increasing user activity), the startup was a means to *design out* precarity from the future. No longer drifting in vague hallucinations of a dream, a wish or of general anticipation, what is interesting about this ethnography in terms of precarity was that precarity itself was made into a *technological and business feat to accomplish.* Thus, the only excuse for living in a precarious future would be the failings of the startup, because the alternative—which they were working towards every day—was not impossible, but designed to be achievable within the contours of real life.

GLOBALISATION: THE WORLD AS BRAND

At the end of the 20th century, globalisation was understood analytically as a sum-total set of political, economic and social forces that has 'shrunk the distance between elites, shifted key relations between producers and consumers, broken many links between labor and family life, obscured the lines between temporary locales and imaginary national attachments' (Appadurai 1996: 9-10). Since the 1990s, social scientists have systematised globalisation using analytical schema such as Appadurai's *-scapes* or Giddens' thematics of *'the separation of time and space,' 'the development of disembedding mechanisms'* and *'the reflexive appropriation of knowledge'* (Appadurai 1990; Giddens 1990: 53). The fast development of the world's now explicitly interconnected societies—or as Giddens put it, life 'aboard a juggernaut'—has marked a radical discontinuity from previous civilisations (Giddens 1990: 53). Globalisation has been

characterised by its 'sheer *pace of change*' and *'scope of change,'* where 'waves of social transformation crash across virtually the whole of the earth's surface' (Giddens 1990: 6). But changes do not just 'crash across' societies. They are 'domesticated' by modern citizens, where dramas of change, separation, recombination, and acceleration are 'rewritten more as a vernacular globalization and less as a concession to large-scale national and international policies' (Appadurai 1996: 10).

Such perspective of micro-integrations with an imagery of domestication (as if turning the big bad wolf of globalisation into everyone's new and unexpected house-pet) was a first step to escape the totalisation of abstract theories. The rearrangement of centre and periphery in understandings of globalisation (i.e., moving from political programmes to 'vernacular globalization') was met with works in history such as Frank's *The Underdevelopment of Development* (1991), Wallerstein's *The Modern World System* (1976) and Wolf's *Europe: A People Without History* (2010). Frank suggested that to understand global development was equally to understand underdevelopment, which should finally include 'the historical experience of the colonial and underdeveloped countries' (1991: 4). His satellite-centre opposition introduced the notion of 'uneven development' and the 'monopoly structure' of the global system, which, he suggested, deserved 'much more attention in the study of economic development and cultural change than they have hitherto received' (1991: 15). In a similar effort, Wallerstein introduced the perspective of a 'world system' to combat Weberian sociologists who, since World War II, insisted that modernity ought to be a process studied 'country by country, the existence, or coming into existence of such values' (1976: 29). These perspectives 'replaced fruitless debates about modernization with a sophisticated and

theoretically oriented account of how capitalism developed and spread' to its new global scale (Wolf 2010: 49).

Wolf, building on these works, offered a new perspective demonstrating how 'the world of humankind constitutes a manifold, a totality of interconnected processes,' obtaining new perspectives on globalisation as an analytical subject. He writes,

> On one level it has become commonplace to say that we all inhabit "one world." There are ecological connections: New York suffers from the Hong Kong flu; the grapevines of Europe are destroyed by American plant lice. There are demographic connections: Jamaicans migrate to London; Chinese migrate to Singapore. There are economic connections: a shutdown of oil wells on the Persian Gulf halts generating plants in Ohio […] These are familiar facts. They indicate contact and connections, linkages and interrelationships. Yet the scholars to whom we turn in order to understand what we see largely persist in ignoring them. […] Even anthropology, once greatly concerned with how culture traits diffused around the world, divides its subject matter into distinctive cases: each society with its characteristic culture, conceived as an integrated and bounded system, set off against other equally bounded systems. (2010: 40-41)

Going beyond anthropology as a science of 'distinctive cases,' was the impetus for Appadurai, Giddens and others to redraw the bounds of analytical terrain. But for all of the intellectual game-changing that comes from new visions of globalisation in the abstract, how is it *performed?* While we can speak endlessly of *scapes* (Appadurai 1996), a '*space of flows*' (Castells 2000) or *rhizomes* (Deleuze & Guattari 2004), to move into concrete illustrations of globalisation requires taking into

account 'the experiences of people living in particular localities when more and more of their daily existence is understood and enacted with reference living in other localities' (Foster 1999: 143). In other words, it is possible to escape the abstraction of globalising forces by locating them in transnational phenomena. Looking out from localities, 'it becomes quite apparent that most "global" influences are locally experienced and manifested only as specific transnational social processes and institutions' (Tsuda et al. 2014: 130). This intuitive rephrasing could be taken as a useful working definition to think about globalisation for this thesis, avoiding abstractions that would take us away from the ethnographic interest I wish to pursue. For, 'what anthropology offers,' write Inda and Rosaldo, 'that is often lacking in other disciplines is a concrete attentiveness to human agency, to the practices of everyday life, in short, to how subjects mediate the processes of globalization' (2002: 5).

This thesis aims to contribute to anthropological understandings which 'map the world of globalization in a way that highlights human agency and imagination,' demonstrating how a small team of entrepreneurs in a startup tried to globalise on their own terms. It can be considered a 'global ethnography' that takes as its object 'how local peoples are embedded in and create transnational linkages and networks' by placing the startup's product at the centre of the study (Tsuda et al. 2014: 132). In the description that follows, I hope to 'bring deterritorialized, macro-global process down to earth and illuminate how they operate at the local level' (Tsuda et al. 2014: 132). Burawoy has proposed three dimensions to tackling globalisation in ethnography, by forming thematic observations on global forces, connections and imaginations (2000). This thesis contributes to the third—global imaginations—showing 'how different images of globalization are produced and disseminated, and how they can galvanize social movements' (Burawoy 2000: 31).

Copass was in the business of building its own brand of globalism: a world where entrepreneurs were free to move and work anywhere they wanted to. It flattened the earth's surface out into a stable and playable game where finding one's place was as intuitive as navigating an interface. Copass, in its own way, wanted to prove that, indeed, *The World Is Flat* (Friedman 2005). Images of globalisation for the startup were 'produced and disseminated' across social media platforms, blog posts, events and conferences, but the unusual element in their *product(ion) of globalisation*, was that it was not to philanthropically 'galvanize social movements.' It was to make profit used to galvanise the social movement of the startup itself.

The Copass project fits within a wide literature on the globalising imagination. In sociology, Gille explores the introduction of an incinerator in post-socialist Hungary, and local opposition that has equated this 'dirty business' with 'moral dirtiness' to build images against rhetoric of '"joining Europe," whose positive meaning is uncontested' (2000: 258). Lopez's (2000) work on Pittsburgh steel unions and Klawiter's (2000) study of breast cancer activists provide introductions to how 'one way to challenge global forces that seem to float freely above the horizon of local communities of workers' is 'precisely to counterpose and appeal to local solidarities, identities, images, and interests' (Gille et al. 2000: 239). Similar flavours of radical opposition to globalisation can be found in anthropology in the works of David Graeber. In *Direct Action: An Ethnography*, he aims 'to convey a sense of what it's actually like to take part in the planning for, and eventually participate in, a major action against a global summit' (2009: 12). For Graeber, global imaginations are not 'static and free floating, but are entirely caught up in projects of action that aim to have real effects on the material world'—precisely what the authors above endeavour to show (2009: 521). He vividly illustrates his informants demonstrating against the Summit of the Americas in Québec

City in cafés, city meetings and street protests, sites where a new imagined world begins to gain definition and come into clarity. Reflecting on his experiences, he writes,

> If imagination is indeed a constituent element in the process of how we produce our social and material realities, there is every reason to believe that it proceeds through producing images of totality. That's simply how the imagination works. One must be able to imagine oneself and others as integrated subjects in order to be able to produce beings that are in fact endlessly multiple; imagine some sort of coherent, bounded "society" in order to produce that chaotic, open-ended network of social relations that actually exists. (2009: 526)

The Copass startup was established to imagine a better version of the globalising world for startups and entrepreneurs, and *to make it happen* by turning virtual circumstances into actual ones. It was a project made clear from day one: to 'make a global community of local communities,' as Eric would regularly describe it. This oversimplified vision of a new world was not careless in its simplicity, but as the chapters that follow go to show, it was a deliberately complete, 'coherent, bounded "society"' necessary to constrain and enable a way of life in its shadow that could actually exist. How the cofounders tried 'producing images of totality' will be made clear in every chapter by analysing their strategies and activities to make that totality possible. This will be seen in the totalising quality of their personal dreams (Chapter 1), in how the cofounders invented their own pseudo-sociological theories (Chapter 2), designed brand costumes (Chapter 3), engineered experiences of discovery (Chapter 4), built forcefields to maintain comfort zones (Chapter 5), stuck stickers in different countries (Chapter 6), circulated social media images (Chapter 7) and organised city events (Chapter 8) to bring into effect a new, complete and air-tight global community.

I would like to contribute to this anthropological literature by recounting one startup's incredible intention to globalise *differently.* One startup so convinced of its potential to offer change, producing images of a better tomorrow that seemed so close because they were in such dazzling high resolution. In other words, Copass's globalisation was one steeped in imagination because it was so thoroughly aesthetic. By trying to draw, photograph, design and colour a new globalising world, it was easy for others to see—and by being seen, it would appear not as some hazy dream but a reality clear as day. Not 'up there' in the skies of abstract thought, but 'just over there' in the specificities afforded by beautiful photos and a media-rich website. Not generic, like a heap of vague wishes, the globalising world Copass wanted to bring about was *made specific* in the delicate intricacies of design that built an interface between users and a seductive game-world. Because—as shown in Chapters 7, 8 and 9—the global imagination that Copass was installing was not purely prescriptive: it was meant to enrol the user in its affective capacities, turning them into processors of a better world through their own use of the platform.

In this way, aesthetic means of redrawing the frontiers of a globalising world were put in the hands of users themselves, where by using the website and attending events, they would paint a new world in the startup's brand colours. This was made clear in the image for the '404 Error' page of the company's previous website: a young boy progressively painting over a black-and-white world in Copass hues. Indeed, this serves as the cover piece for my ethnography of a startup that tried to paint a vibrant, connected world on top of an older and less colourful one.

With this aesthetic-imaginative focus, this thesis also contributes to the anthropological literature on the transnational imagination (for a discussion of transnationalism see Glick Schiller et al. 1992;

Erikson 2003: 4-5). The experience of the Copass cofounders raises interesting updates to this concept, through how they used the startup as a means to 'confront, draw upon, and rework different identity constructs—national, ethnic and racial' travelling and working around the world (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 5). National, ethnic and racial constructs were simplified, made pleasant and presented as problem-free. Because Copass was a startup aiming to design a pleasant user experience, the ugly complexities that come with 'hegemonic contexts' were whitewashed in order to paint the image of a newer, better world (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 5). While many moments in this thesis might seem politics-free, this is because for the startup concerns of the *aesthetics* of their 'global community of local communities' superseded mere principles. In what follows, I have tried to write politics into the aesthetic productions of Copass (in Chapter 2, community-making as profiteering; Chapter 3, gender as a costumed affair; Chapter 5, migrants as a non-concern; Chapter 6, the world as aesthetic and political closure; Chapter 7, the aristocratic tendencies of digital workers; and in Chapter 8, the gentrification of space and place).

So while it might seem surprising that I would like to contribute to a field so overwrought with political concerns of migrants and movements in a world settled by frontiers and visa officers, this is precisely *why* I want to contribute: to show how visions of a global startup designed to be kind to customers encouraged a branded glittery transnationalism that was worry-free and unproblematic. To put this juxtaposition together—of smooth-talking brand-building and the inconvenient political facts of ethnic, gender and class struggles—in the context of globalisation, I want to call attention to the recent (what I would term) *anthropology of brands.* This recent subfield has taken as its object global brands (and their counterfeits) to examine the adoption and projection of brand identities from local perspectives. As a new take on transnationalism, its authors take brands and examine

their perception, reception and adoption in various field sites to posit them as sites of identity negotiation for new generations of world consumers. Through their ethnographies, one is able to see how brands (although they are global phenomena) are enacted locally, and how they circumscribe new kinds of locality and globality through their particular adoptions.

A large part of these ethnographies focus on how brands are 'called into question, bracketed, refashioned or negated' (Nakassis 2013). Nakassis writes on his experiences amongst stylish non-elite Tamil men in India, who consume 'surfeit' clothing items from export surpluses, hybrid brands and fictive ones. 'Brand garments and fractions of them,' for this youth concerned with being stylish, were 'reanalyzed and simulated as instances of *style,* as vague allusions to foreign lands and the fashion sensibilities of those who inhabit them' (2012: 715). Thomas examines Maya 'garment workshops and informal markets where clothing is sold,' to interrogate the disparity of 'what branding means in highland communities and how brands are understood in international projects of legal harmonization' (2013: 145). Luvaas writes on the phenomenon of DIY production in Indonesia, and tells the story of how one indie brand 'took ownership over the Nike trademark, literally stamping their own brand name on top of it' (2013: 128). This indie company became 'a model of youth-driven enterprise in Indonesia,' as 'a mode of creative collectivist capitalism that places idealism above profit' as a form of 'material intervention' against the global titans that produced their clothes next door (Luvaas 2013: 139). These ethnographies are informative in shaping new academic conceptions of globalisation and transnationalism with the realisation that the 'dominant players in the global economy don't produce products anymore; they produce the *consumers* of their products' and this is done primarily through brands (Luvaas 2013: 139).

The entanglement of ethnicity and brand, worked out in localities that draw their own contours, has been creatively explored by John and Jean Comaroff in their book, *Ethnicities, Inc.* (2009). This work offers apt comparisons to Copass's world-building project, as the authors examine groundbreaking business ventures that commodify cultures (South African chieftain venture capitalists, Native American casinos, a Zulu theme park and more). In the introduction, they explain how a group of traditional leaders 'decided to move the politics of ethnicity into the marketplace' by creating a for-profit investment firm. 'Futurity' in this context, the authors write,

> depended on turning finance capital into cultural capital and vice versa. For them, in fact, the line between the two had become porous to the point of dissolving. Could it be, *contra* much of social science orthodoxy […] that one possible future—perhaps *the* future—of ethnicity lies, metaphorically and materially alike, in ethno-futures? In taking it to the marketplace? In hitching it, overtly, to the world of franchising and finance capital? In vesting it in an "identity economy"? (2009: 8)

Using culture to generate profit, in the case of the Zulu in South Africa, 'KwaZulu, the ethno-nation *itself*, seems to be mutating slowly into a culture park, a tourist destination, the *ur*-space of tradition in the country at large' (2009: 11). This confusion of culture and culture park, at the crossroads of brand and ethnicity (the cover of their book is a billboard of a 'Zulu maiden, wreathed in a mass of colourful beads') illustrates the complex interplay of advertising and cultural propagation (2009: 12). Copass exhibited similar symptoms, 'taking ethnicity into the marketplace' by—instead of selling a product—selling a culture encapsulated in a *vision of what life could be like* for affluent Europeans. Cultural appropriation by businesses is not exclusive to exotic tribes. It also applies to

tribes of disenchanted digital workers, looking to make their ideal and pleasurable world *the* world—and achieving that success of culture through their simulations of it. If the use of Zulu-esque billboard tactics (in the social media representations of Chapter 7) and cultural theme parks (in the 'retail installation' deployed in Chapter 8) seems familiar in the story that follows, it is because these examples were counterpoints to the consolidation of traditional cultures in globalising images—happening in the heart of affluent, Western, technological, urban societies. As a means to 'empower their people,' a Parisian startup and South African investment firm might not be so different in their claims to seek a better world through business, using ethno-futures as capital to do it (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009: 7).

While the aesthetic of Copass was central to the startup's cofounders as a means to build a better world, much like the Comaroffs argue, it is important not to 'assume that globalization always broaden's local people's imaginations and leads to more expansive transnational identifications and affiliations' (Tsuda et al. 2014: 139). The startup's ambitions to create a 'global community of local communities' were founded on a wish to open the world and connect its people—but this must be qualified by admitting that 'opening the world' really meant giving affluent people more access to affluent places, and that 'connecting its people' really meant helping well-off, well-educated, well-travelled workers meet their well-off, well-educated, well-traveled compatriots. This will be suggested in Chapter 5, pointing out the hidden plights of migrants at the doors of a Parisian coworking space; in Chapter 6, demonstrating how the startup's global expansion was actually an *enclosing* of comfortable localities; and in Chapter 9, articulating the incomprehensible—or, more accurately, incompatible—experience of street poverty at a San Francisco startup event. Indeed, Copass's globalising project was a double-edged sword: I will argue that while Copass did achieve

its goal to form a 'global community of local communities' on a small scale, it was made possible by ignoring inconvenient facts of a globalising existence.

In short, their attempt to build a new global imagination worked because of its aesthetic simplification—'through producing images of totality'—but failed for the same reason (Graeber 2009: 526). Here, trying to build a better globalising world didn't mean eliminating poverty, it meant forgetting about it.

THE FUTURE OF WORK: THE LIFESTYLE CLASS

Why did the Copass model hide poverty so well? Was it purely out of some secret desire of the cofounders to lie to users, to delude them in a closed system of self-gratification? A better answer might be found in the changing world of work in which they found themselves. The constant danger of precarity they were trying to design out of their lives (and the lives of their customers) had combined with their ambition to design *in* a pleasant way of life: one where problems of poverty were no longer a concern in daily life. To understand how this was the case, it is important to consider the new challenges they had to face in entrepreneurial work life. 'In place of a centrally hetero-organized system (like the Fordist model),' today, André Gorz suggests, 'we have an acentric self-organizing one, comparable to a nervous system' (1999: 31). This acentric model—which the cofounders and other informants proudly participated in—encapsulates experiences both working in a startup and working for oneself. During my fieldwork, I was told repeatedly in lunchtime chats,

strategic meetings and conference lectures, that this was an amazing chance, a once-in-human-history opportunity: a new way to produce value by working for oneself, and not having a boss. Of pursuing a project that gives meaning to one's life and gets one excited to get out of bed in the morning.

But here I pose the question rarely asked in my fieldwork: *was this kind of work worth it?* It was always a one-way conversation: bosses were bad, big companies were soul-sucking and having beers around the coworking space beer tap was better than chatting at the office water cooler. Taking distance from this heightened positivity, Gorz asks if the entrepreneurialisation of work actually does open 'unprecedented scope for workers' power' (1999: 32). 'Or does it,' he continues, "carry the subjugation of workers to new heights, forcing them to take on both the function of management and the 'competitive imperative'"—to turn dreams into marketable materials? (1999: 32). The entrepreneurs and startup employees I came to know in my fieldwork had long since entered the ranks of 'journalists, propagandists, advertising copy-writers and artists,' as those 'who *give wholly of their persons* in the service of activities which are gratifying *in themselves*, but by way of which they become the venal and eager instruments of an alien will: in which they *sell themselves'* (1999: 42). This would not be a very good critique, however, for the workers I knew would agree with this. They had made a silent pact with the market, deciding to sell themselves to buy time doing productive work that was no longer on someone else's payroll. They made the transition from working for bosses to working for clients—although many times I would ask myself how much better that really was, as they were still *'giving wholly of their persons'* to those who had the money to buy their way in (from a new angle, but still linked to the bank accounts of scrupulous creditors).

Building on Gorz's insights, Beck goes further to suggest that moving beyond this crisis of post-Fordist precarity one must welcome these developments, which can lead to 'a strengthening of the political society of individuals, of an active civil society here and now, of a civil democracy in Europe that is at once local and transnational' (Beck 2008: 5). He suggests,

> This society of active citizens, which is no longer fixed within the container of the national state and whose activities are organized both locally and across frontiers, can find and develop answers to the challenges of the second modernity—namely, individualization, globalization, falling employment and ecological crisis. For in this way, communal democracy and identity are given new life in projects such as ecological initiatives, Agenda 21, work with homeless people, local theatres, cultural centres and meeting-places for discussion. (2008: 5-6)

Beck's optimism reminds me of the unceasing optimism of my entrepreneurial informants: powerful and prophetic, but somehow lacking in substance. What I saw, fifteen years after Beck's hopeful predictions, was not quite what he was waiting for. Parting ways with Beck's *Brave New World of Work*, the brave new world of coworking was nowhere universally concerned with 'homeless people, local theatres, cultural centres and meeting-places for discussion' in a new, horizontal civil democracy. It created quite the opposite: splintered members-only clubs concerned mainly with the well-being of price-paying denizens. Instead of strengthening a 'political society of individuals,' this movement strengthened apolitical societies of people selling themselves to fund desired lifestyles. That's not to say that political discussions didn't take place, that political startups didn't exist or that political movements weren't possible; it's just that all things *political* were bracketed off and given their own reasonable portion of daily life's attention. Politics were an object

to be concerned about, but not enough to risk being uncomfortable for. Homeless people were ignored, or at least tolerated, local theatres were occasionally frequented to meet monthly culture quotas, cultural centres were forgotten about as the free coworking spaces of lower classes, and meeting-places for discussion were invite-only. Even when coworking spaces were open for public events (which was quite often in many cases), if you wanted to stay, you always had to pay the market price for continued admission.

In short, although Beck's vision of the future of work was correct as work has, for some, become less 'fixed within the container of the national state,' digital workers who live his vision in approximation are less concerned to 'find and develop answers to the challenges of the second modernity' than they are with making themselves more comfortable within the constraints of that second modernity's political, economic, social and existential consequences. He offers another, more powerful suggestion on the future of work, however, that turned out to be more accurate. Post-industrial societies are witnessing the rise of a phenomenon long observed in developing countries, where burgeoning economic growth 'is rendering obsolete the idea of classical full employment, lifetime jobs and everything that went with them' (2008: 91). In what he calls the 'Brazilianization of the West,' Beck borrows from Michael Lind who argues that this is 'the chief danger confronting the twenty-first century United States:' 'not the separation of cultures by race, but the separation of races by class' (Lind 1996: 216). What I witnessed in my fieldwork was a further separation of class by *space:* through the access-only creature comforts of coworking spaces. To understand this contemporary connection of space, class and race, Beck suggests that if jobs continue to become less formalised there 'are likely to be four groups of people in Western societies' (2008: 106). These are:

1. The ‘Columbus’ class of the global age
2. Precarious employees at the top of the skills ladder
3. The working poor
4. Localized poverty (Beck 2008: 106)

The Columbus class consists of ‘the winners from globalization, the owners of globally active capital and their top managerial executors’ who, in the footsteps of Columbus, ‘set out to conquer global space and subject it to their economic goals’ (2008: 106). Precarious employees are ‘temporary workers, the spurious self-employed, people with their own business,’ where ‘things that used to be mutually exclusive—a good education and income and a tightrope-walking biography—here converge with each other’ (2008: 106). The working poor are ‘low-skilled’ and ‘unskilled’ labourers endangered by globalization; they must continually partake in ‘several employment situations at once’ and experience how ‘freedom makes you poor!’ (2008: 107). Finally, localised poverty includes those who have ‘time in abundance, but they are chained to space,’ unable to move due to financial restrictions (2008: 107). This vision of the future of work, looking on from 2000, was not far off from the situation in my field. Copass and many startups I came to know, however, demonstrated a mix of two classes—*precarious employees* and *the working poor*. Coworkers were well-educated with ‘tightrope-walking biographies,’ but suffered problems of *low, unstable income*. For those I got to know during my fieldwork, it was not unusual to sacrifice one’s own well-being for the sake of one’s startup: not earning income, or not earning enough to live, was deemed part of the process of entrepreneurial self-martyrdom in the pursuit of one’s own meaning in life.

An important point to understand the chapters that follow is that Copass did not earn enough money to finance the whole team. Although I did not take part in the startup's financial discussions, during my fieldwork I became aware that I—legally speaking, an intern—was the only person earning a regular monthly wage. The others were living off of a small income every month from Copass users, and revenues from various side projects. One cofounder was frequently doing event photography, one was part-time managing a coworking space and one was programming on the side. Three of the four cofounders lived in accommodation in Paris owned by family members. At one point, around six months into my fieldwork, Augustin left the startup out for the reason that he was not earning a fixed income. Seeing as the startup decided not to accept funding (after two offers from venture capital firms were turned-down), he chose to dedicate his work to projects that could pay. This situation of financial precarity eventually had its affect on me. One afternoon in February 2015, I had a Skype call with Eric, which I recorded in my field notes under the title *'Having the Rug Swept Out from Under your Feet:'*

> Well today's that day I'd anticipated since my research proposal—about eight months into my work with Copass, Eric and I speak on Skype (while he's abroad at Mutinerie Village) and he tells me they can't afford to pay me for the next four months, despite the agreement we established in my job contract. He says that he's going to work hard to get us funding in the next few months, but that right now they can't afford to pay me—especially because they just brought on a second programmer part-time who's doing necessary technical stuff that they have to pay for.
>
> Eric told me, however, that if I wanted to 'switch up my job role a bit' I could dedicate myself to 'revenue-generating activities' like events and meetups, which would suit everyone better. I told him that I agreed about focusing my role more on revenue-generation, but that I couldn't

> live on that. He tried to cut me a deal whereby I take a certain cut of the revenue they made from events on top of a much lower base salary, but I'm not sure how I feel about that.

This shows Copass's unusual socio-economic position. In terms of Beck's future of work, on the one hand, it was a group of affluent people who claimed their freedom working for clients rather than bosses, but on the other hand they were hardly able to sustain that freedom. This recalls Beck's claim for *the working poor* who 'experience what many others fear: freedom makes you poor!' (2008: 240). As a consequence I suggest a correction to this classification: building precarity back into the category of Beck's precarious employees to emphasise *glamorous living, in hidden poverty* that the cofounders normalised. What was so peculiar about their situation, was that Copass was all about projecting the work situation of entrepreneurs *as if* they were members of the Columbus class. The basic premise the cofounders built into the startup was precisely that they 'set out to conquer global space and subject it to their economic goals' (2008: 239-9). It was to empower entrepreneurs to work for themselves anywhere and anyhow they wanted, to give them the ultimate freedom of being spatially and temporally liberated workers. On the other hand, they were projecting these hopes from a hotbed of economic precarity, where scarcity was a feature of daily life. A daily life where not being able to pay employees was *normal*, and breaking contracts because of revenue problems was *acceptable*. On top of all of this was the constant distancing from *localised poverty* through the relative affluence afforded by privately owned coworking spaces.

Startups, entrepreneurs and coworkers could be considered as *a Lifestyle Class.* This term designates the subjects of the thesis, revising Beck's categories to include this (between his second and third classes) as a growing category of workers in Europe and America. 'If the informal sector,

in expanding,' Beck writes, 'is not accompanied by public money for all, it can turn into a ghetto for the poor' (2008: 240-1). Indeed, this was *already happening* in coworking spaces: global ghettoes for the Lifestyle Class. A well-off, precarious, partially-employed, globetrotting group who define themselves as Columbuses to conquer a New World of 'global space and subject it to their economic goals,' but who don't have the means to succeed without funds from the *actual* Columbus class of financiers, bankers, technologists, CEOs and moneyed visionaries. It is perhaps no surprise that the most popular political opinion I encountered in my fieldwork was support for universal basic income. With this cash, the Lifestyle Class could subsist in pursuing their dreams without the harrowing experience of precarity, perhaps one day consolidating this class into Beck's second category. Through this ethnography, then, I hope to contribute to the ever-developing visions of the future of work by examining one startup that, in constant throes of financial difficulty, maintained its blind optimism to put in place the infrastructure for a better *future* world that had the potential to resolve *current* problems.

Other research illustrates how the Lifestyle Class is a wider classification of what my interlocutors called 'digital nomads.' Beth Altringer defines these people as 'a new class of workers who combine travel and working from anywhere with an internet connection,' whose global ambitions and economic limitations matched the Copass cofounders and their ideal customer-type, the Copass hero (2015: 1). Altringer found the average salary of nomads to be $1,000 per month (Altringer 2015: 5). But even this figure, she writes, 'is skewed by exceptionally high earners, which hides the fact that the majority of nomads are making very modest salaries, not saving adequately for the future' and fighting to keep their skills at a high enough level to acquire new clients (Altringer 2015: 5). I suggest changing focus from the term 'digital nomad' to Lifestyle Class to claim

analytical distance on this phenomenon, which in the discourse of my informants implied an overwhelming positivity. For them, to be a nomad was to be free. This research offers a critical perspective on the phenomenon, with a focus on aristocratic representation-making (Chapter 7) and gentrifying space-making practices (Chapter 8). Digital Nomadism can seduce analysts as much it does location independent workers, and by speaking in terms of a Lifestyle Class I hope to further academic discussions by framing 'digital nomads' in terms of a 'buzzword' more than a 'research category' (in response to Müller 2016: 346-347, and to youth mobilities research outlined by Richards 2015, in particular the call of Franquesa 2011, to understand empirically one startup that has 'adopted different mobility strategies,' Richards 2015).

As the first two parts of this chapter demonstrate, by designing out precarity from life and by creating a new global imagination for others to latch onto, Copass was productive in aesthetic terms to picture a new world of the not-so-distant future in extreme detail. The startup's 'particular near future,' borrowing from Jane Guyer, 'unhitched ideologically from the present and distant future, becomes a regime (or series of regimes) in its own right,' and that is what this ethnography is committed to examining—a future world concretised in a set of work regimes (2013: 418). But by putting entrepreneurial drives into this future world, the cofounders chose not to be concerned with the current one. A current world rife with precarity, overwhelmed by financial inequality, driven by unjust forces and structurally inadequate to give good lives to its people. Far from being some naïve hope-structure of affluent people unable to accept the downsides of modern life, the startup was gamble. Copass was wagering a bet on the arrival of a certain future world of work. One where the problems of today's work life wouldn't apply because basic conditions of that world functioned according to a new schema: one of collaboration, cooperation and expanding horizontal networks of

a Lifestyle Class that would be transformed into a self-sustaining, dream-generating, meaning-pursuing group of healthy, wealthy, world-changing visionaries.

A SOCIAL BIOGRAPHY OF ONE STARTUP'S DREAM

How can an ethnography of a startup help untangle these problems? In the ethnographic chapters that follow, I present a journey into the life of an ambitious startup trying to invent a new world where these problems ceased to exist. By looking at these problems through the lens of an ethnography, my goal is to use the Copass example to demonstrate how startups are not merely trendy projects or profit-seeking businesses, but how they are in fact *serious worldmaking endeavours*. The point of opening with an analysis of the problems these workers faced with precarity, globalisation and the future of work is to emphasise how these were jumping-off points for the Copass cofounders' decision to leave behind an old world and make their new one. One that could be sold to customers also seeking something different, and quantified in sales volumes to evaluate success or failure in transitioning from one world to another. Using the principles of worldmaking as a lens to undertake an ethnography of a startup is enlightening because it shows the strengths and weaknesses of startups in a general sense. The strength of startups lies in their ability to leave behind the old, the dilapidated and the inefficient for something completely new, but their weakness is in forgetting the old too quickly, and assuming the new can be smoothly and seamlessly integrated into peoples' everyday lives overnight. In short, I need to show you how the world of this one startup is made, in order to show you what is really at stake. Because what is at stake is not

merely the hopes of four startup cofounders and their financial prosperity or failure—but the seductive potential of a new, better world and the insuperable problems it promises to solve.

I first encountered Copass through a job opening posted on the University of Oxford's Career Service in November 2013. At first, reading through their website, I had a hard time telling what precisely it was they were, and what it was they wanted to achieve. This ambiguity was a problem the cofounders often cited, and it was the main reason they were hiring at all for their new position, a 'Chief of Communications.' They wanted to clarify their vision and share it to an audience in clear, defined terms. Interested, I sent an email to propose my candidature and around a week later I had a first Skype interview. That was the first time I met Eric and Sophie: Eric with wild springy hair and Sophie with oversized purple-rimmed glasses—both with big smiles. At the end of the interview, they made it clear that I could work with them, and we kept in touch to settle the details. Over the months that followed I prepared to leave for Paris and begin my one-year work contract. Since the beginning, the cofounders knew I was a PhD student at Oxford in anthropology and that I was going to study the startup and the coworking spaces where it was based. But because I was being hired in the paid position of 'Chief of Communications,' my priority was to work for the startup full-time, and do research analysis after-hours.

The Copass idea was born in 2012, between Eric and Stefano. Eric arrived to the idea as a venture to follow up his successful coworking space in Paris, called Mutinerie. Stefano was looking to help build the coworking movement in Europe after he started his own coworking space in Rome, called Cowo360. Having met at a European coworking conference, they both shared a vision of the future of coworking as a new work model on the cusp of becoming a truly global phenomenon. Their

vision of the impact of coworking proved to be reasonably accurate. In 2011, there were 1,130 coworking spaces around the world encompassing an estimated 43,000 members (Foertsch 2016). In 2016, the largest survey amongst coworking spaces reported 11,300 coworking spaces and 835,000 members worldwide (Foertsch 2016). Although the annual growth rate has steadily slowed since 2011, Eric and Stefano did correctly see themselves at the beginning of a change in white-collar work life. Since each one already started their own coworking space, they both were looking to do something bigger, and their ideas met in the concept of a global coworking space network. A network that would unite private businesses and independent workers into a global *movement*, consolidating diverse spaces and trades into a class consciousness of 'coworkers.'

By 2013, their idea crystallised in a decision to form a private startup, where they would dedicate their efforts to bring about this global movement themselves. As catalysts for the eventual change they predicted would arrive, they created Copass (the idea behind the name being that it took 'co'-llaboration from 'co'-working and the notion of the 'pass' as a ticket to workspaces) and began to develop a business plan. The other two cofounders, Sophie and Augustin, joined after the groundwork for what Copass was to become had already been laid. Sophie ran the company's finances and often took the lead for customer support. She had a pivotal role in the startup, often working out the practical details of creative elements that Eric and Stefano would envision. Thanks to her, Copass performed well on a day-to-day basis and kept users happy. Augustin was the last to join, and his role in the team was technical manager. With a background coding in the Ruby on Rails programming language, he was the one who built the Copass website, its map, its payment system and who implemented the aesthetic visions of Eric and Stefano.

While Eric and Stefano had the ideas for the world Copass would become, it was thanks to Sophie and Augustin that it ever took shape. They were the 'doers' of the team, who would craft the path-breaking ideas of Eric and Stefano into feasible financial and technical possibilities. By mid-2013 their business idea was settled, and their project of worldmaking began with the development of the website and booking engine. I arrived in June 2014, seven months after I made my application for 'Chief of Communications,' and the team was ready to receive me as their new manager to direct social media, customer newsletters, blog posts and events coordination. Upon arriving and spending a few weeks in Eric's coworking space, Mutinerie, I learned that the 12 months I was going to work with them were going to be exciting for the company. Because although Copass began in 2012, their space booking tool wasn't put in place until late 2013 as a prototype. As I started my fieldwork, the product was *officially launching*. The team had been working hard to resolve any bugs and issues with Augustin, and now they wanted to get it to the public. So June 2014 to July 2015, the year of my fieldwork, coincided with the official business launch of Copass.

The team's practical business priorities matched my ethnographic interest: bringing a dream to life, and bringing a vision of the future into the present. That is why the thesis tracks this startup specifically under the notion of *building a startup as putting an imagined world into practice*. Because this moment, after two years of the team having dreamed up their creation, was their chance to make it real. My position as an anthropologist was doubled as 'Chief of Communications' (directing communications, one could say, to entrepreneurs first and anthropologists later). Each weekday for one year, I spent eight hours achieving business goals that were delegated to me by Eric and Stefano and managed by Sophie. What follows is thus decidedly autoethnographic, because although I was making daily observations and nightly reflections as an anthropologist, my

position in the field was first and foremost as an employee of the startup. Autoethnography is a research method that allows analysts to use data from their own lives 'as situated in sociocultural contexts in order to gain an understanding of society through the unique lens of the self' (Chang et al. 2012: 18; Chang 2008, 2011). This conceptual framing fit nicely into my field experience, as the autoethnographer occupies the dual roles of *researcher* and *participant* in their study, just as I occupied the dual roles of *researcher* and *employee* in mine (Chang et al. 2012: 188).

Using this ethno-entreprenographic approach in the context of a startup has its advantages. As I spent one year examining the daily practices of how we concretely established the startup's vision and the deployment of certain descriptive terminologies and visualising methods in the process—as an employee I was not only obliged but *contracted* to learn and emulate daily work practices and to learn and reproduce descriptive terminologies and visualising methods as they played out between the cofounders. Put differently, this postitionality gave me the ability not merely to observe their cooperations and disagreements, their planning and practice, but I was actually contracted to know them in order for me to replicate them in the field to achieve business goals for the company (which was, after all, the reason I was there in the first place: to produce results for Copass). Data collected for this ethnography come from my year working alongside the four cofounders, except for several interviews I conducted after my fieldwork to gain a retrospective of the project. Two of these are reconstructed in Chapter 1 from Stefano and Sophie, who reflect on their lifelong experiences in the startup. During my fieldwork, our projects took us around the world. I spent time in seven countries —France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, the UK, Bulgaria and the USA—in over fifty coworking spaces. This thesis can be considered a multi-sited ethnography, which followed the local and global contexts created to generate profit for the startup.

Knowing my postitionality in the field would be that of an employee, it was my intention before heading to the field to investigate an anthropological subject that I would be well-positioned to analyse. Because my role was 'Chief of Communications' with a strong focus on social media, I initially aimed to describe the launching of a social network from this small company to people in many countries around the world. My interest was to examine how the startup's cofounders built this social network and how they extended it to new users, looking at how a digital community was an emergent, ongoing achievement of daily work life. What shocked me in my first weeks of knowing the cofounders was that an enormous amount of daily work was actually *not* directly concerned with acquiring new users or spreading the Copass network. Instead, they spent a majority of their time on how to best represent the startup, debating and revising colour schemes, description texts, image selections, photo edits, interface layouts, logo choices, video formats, as well as costume and t-shirt designs, the fabrication of laser cut objects, the painting of branded flags and the 3D printing of custom-made trinkets. In a bootstrapped startup, I was taught to expect a pragmatic work ethic, judiciously managed finances and stressful quarterly targets. I never found that with Copass. Their concerns were elsewhere.

This turned out to be quite a surprise to me, and as such I redirected my theoretical interests to fit the contours of the startup's work life. If their work was not financially productive, what was it productive of? Later in my fieldwork, I arrived to an answer: their work went towards an *imaginative productivity to make a Copass world,* which was what one of the cofounders told me in an interview—their goal 'to create a universe.' Logo modifications, homemade costumes, handpicked image galleries, perfectly edited event photos—these were the basic components of the world Copass wanted to make real. So with that change of analysis, my research was no longer

about how a startup launched a social network, but instead how a startup launched *a new world in pursuit of a dream*. I devote extensive description to the 'imaginative productivity' I witnessed throughout this research, describing the team's colourful work practices. To phrase their productivity as imaginative is not to say it was *imaginary.* Rather than taking the team away from potential financial reward, spending so much time on branding and marketing was, for the cofounders, a conscious business strategy with economic benefits. If their universe got off the ground, and enough people began to believe in it with them, Copass could have snowballed into a sensation because, with more subscribers, their creative contours would be filled with more and more stories of people that proved them right.

Moving from a strict analysis of social network engineering to a richer analysis of a dream world, the analytical approach I wanted to take in writing this ethnography stayed more or less the same. It is a *social biography of a startup's dream:* presenting *that dream as a social artefact* derived from the hopes and ambitions of four people. Connecting the cofounders' lives with practical operations of a business entity, my aim was to write a story of how personal dreams played out in a private company. In the genre of social biographies of technological organisations, this research could be placed between two books: *Aramis, or the Love of Technology* by sociologist Bruno Latour (1996) and *Arbitraging Japan* by anthropologist Hirokazu Miyazaki (2013). *Aramis* charts the 'tale of a technological dream gone wrong,' of a failed groundbreaking renovation of Paris's urban transportation system (1996). In the style of a murder investigation pursuing the question, 'Who killed Aramis?' Latour blends fiction and analysis to trace human relations, technical schematics and communications breakdowns all in hopes to find the culprit (1996: 2). Posing the question of

how dreams shape everyday life, the author offers a small vignette to visualise how a recombination of man and machine offers new and nuanced forms of analysis:

> The guy who spray-paints his innermost feelings on the white walls of the Pigalle metro station may be rebelling against the drab reality of the stations, the cars, the tracks, and the surveillance cameras. His dreams seem to him to be infinitely remote from the harsh truth of the stations, and that's why he signs his name in rage on the white ceramic tiles. The chief engineer who dreams of a speedier metro likewise crosses out plans according to his moods. But if the AT-2000 had been developed, his dream would have become the other's world. The spray-painting hoodlum would then be living partly within the others' dream brought to life, just as he is living in the waking dream of Fulgence Bienvenüe. In Paris, a war of the worlds is raging, a war of dreams, a war quite different from the opposition between states of feeling and states of affairs, between soft subjects and hard technologies. Dreams seeking to be realized are shaping Paris, working through its subterranean spaces and stations. (1996: 27)

Indeed, dreams seeking to be realised are shaping Paris equally in its dozens of chic coworking spaces. The realisation of dreams through material means is what Latour explores adeptly in his book, and this approach inspired me to trace the materialisation of one Parisian startup's dreamworld. A useful point to take from this excerpt is how space houses the potential to become the dreamed world of one among many different actors, painting an image of 'war of the worlds' in the underground enclosures of Paris. While the large part of my research comes from the inside-looking-out of Copass's dream, I show in several places how their dream encroaches on the lives of others: rendering them irrelevant, removing them from the picture and writing a new world with no

space for them. I demonstrate how their dream valorises one type of actor and a class of people over the dreams of others. Because to make one's dream real is not an innocent act: doing so passersby would be 'living party within the others' dream brought to life' regardless of their opinion on the matter. This research, then, takes a descriptive role in an ongoing 'war of dreams' by examining in detail one subject, a team of young Parisian startup cofounders hoping to make other people dream the way they already do.

Latour's sociological approach, and in particular his own genre of 'scientifiction' to describe the object of a failed transport network, has been informative for my research in terms of how to analytically treat a technological project. Its inventiveness in recombining descriptive elements, aesthetic materials and a variety of voices has helped me reimagine how a startup could be presented to an audience analytically. But I wanted to write the story of one startup's dream as a whole rather than in cryptic fragments from disparate characters. This makes sense given that unlike Latour's object, Copass—at the time I left the field—was alive and well, still pursuing its ambitions and held tightly together by its cofounders. While his work provoked the *social* (as in sociological) dimension of my analysis of Copass, Miyazaki provided the *biographical* inspiration I needed to humanistically characterise the life of a living, breathing startup. In his 2013 book *Arbitraging Japan*, he describes the lives of Japanese financial professionals after the global crash of 2008. Writing on a subject where, five years after the fact, much ink had already been spilled, Miyazaki presents an intimate and creative account of a small group of these professionals to relate their hopes, fears and anticipations for the future of capitalism. He explains that 'this book is about a particular kind of intellectual excitement that animated a group of Japanese pioneers in derivatives trading. Put another way, this is a kind of utopianism at work in financial markets' (2013: 23).

At the heart of Miyazaki's investigation is not a static and abstract concept of finance, it is arbitrage as deployed by Japanese traders caught up in a 'particular kind of intellectual excitement.' I have tried to capture this excitement in each chapter of the Copass story. Its cofounders were not working day and night 'to create a universe' because they were mere employees at work—they shared a world to-be-realised and together, through that world, were animated by an 'intellectual excitement' of their own. One where, realising certain facts about the changing nature of work and potentials of technology, they could envision a seemingly natural outcome of those facts that was achievable. It is this excitement—of a palpable future, as Steve Jobs might see it, right around the corner—which keeps together the Copass world I present in my research. Each chapter relates to the others by an underlying thread of eager optimism for their world as it was coming alive through their hard work, and each one proves their excitement right through their capacity to *have fun*. Whether it's dreaming of better futures, dressing up in costumes, designing customer experiences, sticking stickers, sailing the Mediterranean, organising parties, driving off road vehicles or surfing—the intellectual excitement they experienced to launch their business project was met by sensorial excitement of doing amazing things they knew were already possible.

Miyazaki tracks the excitement of his informants by placing documents at an intersection of traders' derivatives and dreams, encapsulating their 'commitments to the practice of arbitrage and their personal dreams partially inspired by the idea of arbitrage' (2013: 17). Similarly, I have put *media materials* at the centre of my ethnography of a startup (also taking inspiration from Riles 2000, 2006). While financial experts might spend their workdays wading their way through spreadsheets, complex reports or business plans, the Copass cofounders spent their workdays, above all, in representational media. This was important for them because of their goal 'to create a universe,'

which coincided with my surprise that work was less oriented towards economic productivity (e.g., where work entails time spent with business models, strategy plots and financial reports) than it was imaginative productivity to *image* a world. The cofounders spent time with Photoshop projects, webpage prototyping drafts, copywriting documents, blog post versions and social media galleries. Of course they spent time working on excel spreadsheets to accomplish tasks, but they were always developed towards aesthetic goals—from organising a new Copass event in a beautiful location or testing the website to make the user experience flawless. As Miyazaki takes a biographical approach to locate people in relation to their work and dreams through textual objects, I do the same by using media (photos, costumes, stickers, laser cut objects, videos) to describe the cofounders, their daily work and their ambitious dream.

Finally, this research is inspired by Christopher Kelty's book, *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software* (2008). Presenting a global ethnography of the free software movement, the anthropologist examines not just the structural dimensions of what its development looked like, but moving beyond 'an academic pursuit' of free software he illustrates it as 'an experience that transforms the lives and work of participants involved' (Kelty 2008: x). What follows is therefore a study 'not only of public spheres but of practices, technologies,' of people and the tools they used to establish a new world that underwent 'modulation and experimentation in accord with a social imagination of order both moral and technical' (2008: 305). The startup was a technical project as much as it was a moral one: its tech introduced a version of what its cofounders deemed a *'good'* society (that was open, collaborative and conversational), just like its moral precepts encouraged the use of corresponding *'good'* technologies (cloud computing services, web applications and social media platforms). Taking time to focus on the lived experience of those involved in free software,

his work has inspired me to do the same with a startup: to analyse it not as a business or a formal organisation, but instead as a group of people with their own personal hopes, dreams, aspirations and frustrations arising from daily life that crystallised in the form of an emergent technical and moral world order.

WAYS OF WORLDMAKING

The 'universe' of Copass was inspired by the literary universe of Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires*, but divested itself of aesthetic similarity early on. When I first came across the startup in 2013, their website was replete with pencil-drawn vignettes of well-dressed 19th century elites in hot air balloons. These images featured three figures. One seemed to be a conductor-explorer, wearing a rigid-rimmed hat and thick goggles with a well-trimmed moustache, trench coat and tie. The other two figures—a bearded man with his hand calmly behind his back and a woman in a long dress—faced away from viewers, standing confidently at the front of the balloon basket looking out at a vast, undefined landscape or, in another instance, looking down on the flat and smooth continent of Europe dotted by several of its remarkable cities (Paris and Barcelona). Accompanying text tells visitors that, by using Copass, one can 'Go straight to the cool things,' not unlike a Vernian protagonist who (in living an adventure) moves from one exciting moment to the next. By the time I arrived in mid-2014, the cofounders designed an updated website that left behind its fascination for hot air balloons, for stronger visual emphasis on maps and an iconography of connections that repackaged Verne's thrill of world travel in new forms.

In fact, the cofounder who admitted to me that the team wanted 'to create a universe' was the one who insisted on this aesthetic renovation, arguing that Verne's antiquated imagery was too distracting from the *new* universe they were trying to establish. But what exactly was this 'universe' for the cofounders? Although one put it in precise terms in an interview, during my fieldwork it was never a concept we would openly discuss. This 'universe,' from an analytical point of view, was scattered across brand materials and published media as the concrete result of work. This work, under the guise of what the cofounders would call 'brand-building,' 'marketing,' 'advertising' or 'storytelling' can be thought of, I suggest, as *'ways of worldmaking,'* in the philosophical terms of Nelson Goodman (1978). 'To create a universe' was to make a world that was one amongst many other actual and competing worlds in society and on the market. But 'in just what sense are there many worlds?' Goodman asks—'What distinguishes genuine from spurious worlds? What are worlds made of? How are they made?' (1978: 1). William James offers a useful analytical starting point, suggesting that 'the first thing to notice is this, that the only material we have at our disposal for making a picture of the whole world is supplied by the various portions of that world of which we have already had experience' (2004: 6).

There are many worlds because, as James suggested in his empiricist treatise *A Pluralistic Universe*, each one is nothing more than a particular way of 'explaining wholes by parts,' where people take as their starting point 'some particular feature of it which has particularly captivated their attention' (2004: 6). In the case of Copass, its cofounders decided to create a world based on new ways of working afforded by digital technologies, which happened to be the thematic that 'particularly captivated their attention,' along with the narrative scope and energy of France's famed adventure writer, Jules Verne. 'Worldmaking as we know it,' Goodman writes, 'always starts from

worlds already on hand; the making is remaking' (1978: 6). And in the case of Copass, it was the unusual remaking of two disparate worlds into one: combining the recent changes in technology and office space on the one hand and Vernian travel drama on the other. Goodman suggests a classification for how to understand worldmaking as a method that combines a series of activities. The 'processes that go into worldmaking' include, 'composition and decomposition,' 'weighting,' 'ordering,' 'deletion and supplementation' and 'deformation' (Goodman 1978: 7-17).

Composition and decomposition include the division of wholes into parts and their recombination by forging connections. Weighting consists of judging parts by their importance or relevance. Ordering consists of arranging items according to 'periodicity and proximity' that 'alter with circumstances and objectives' (for example the patterns of twelve-tone and eight-tone musical scales, see Goodman 1978: 13). Deletion and supplementation incorporate the erasure of old materials and the addition of replacements. Finally, deformation comprises acts of distortion (or alternatively, correction) that cast different emphases on points of view, noticeable in the works of caricaturists. These processes, while not absolute categories on worldmaking, highlight the rich variety of 'ways that worlds are made' (Goodman 1978: 16). The empiricism of James and the worldmaking method of Goodman serve as a basis for what I present in this research as *an investigation into an imagined world created by four people*, designed to spread across the entire globe. Each chapter is an ethnographic investigation of an element of worldmaking that the Copass team worked on.

As the building blocks of this ambitious world were media materials, I have chosen to study their new universe by partitioning it into certain analytical themes. These themes come from Goodman's

useful paradigm of *Ways of Worldmaking* explored above, with each chapter using certain materials to present a portion of the overall Copass universe, revealing the cofounders' vision one step at a time.

Chapter 1 begins by recounting the histories of three Copass cofounders, tracing through their self-spoken biographies the frustrations and hopes developed in recent years of work and study. This chapter is an exploration of 'DREAMS,' as a process of composition and decomposition where an old world is broken down and redivided into new parts. From the work difficulties and the office experiments of each cofounder, the possibility for how a *different* future could be born arises in each as they come together to begin a project that can make it happen. Taking as a starting point the work of Gaston Bachelard, in particular his concept of the 'dream house,' I propose that to understand this Copass universe analytically, one must begin with the anticipation of something better, more exciting, more perfect than the present world. It is here that the intellectual excitement of the cofounders takes shape, which will inspire them to pursue projects in subsequent ethnographic chapters. Chapter 2 is a study of 'COMMUNITY' in the Copass universe, adopted from coworking space practices. Providing background on the wider experience of my fieldwork, I argue that the cofounders partook in a sociological enlightenment of entrepreneurs where social theories were packaged and sold as products. This chapter is a study of community using Goodman's notion of 'weighting,' as Copass's world was not defined by a new organisation, but rather the changing importance of what it meant to be part of one.

Chapter 3 is an examination of 'HEROES,' in the startup's propagation of an ideal customer type. 'Hero' was the cofounders' term for this classification, in an effort of 'composition and

decomposition' that established a new kind of human being to inhabit the Copass universe. As the startup was envisioned to empower disenfranchised white-collar office workers, the cofounders pictured its users as heroes rediscovering their own lost agency. Goodman notes that this way of worldmaking 'is normally effected or assisted or consolidated by the application of labels: names, predicates, gestures, pictures, etc' (1978: 7-8). This specific type of individual took shape through costumes, circulated social media photographs and blog posts, fixed 'under a proper name' of the Copass hero (1978: 8). Chapter 4 looks at 'DISCOVERY' as the main activity in Copass's universe. I explore how it was engineered behind-the-scenes to give users the impression that they were discovering new communities and spaces on their own, when in reality, it was orchestrated by us long beforehand. This falls under Goodman's worldmaking category of 'ordering.' 'Radical ordering,' he argues, occurs 'in building a unified and comprehensive image of an object or a city from temporally and spatially and qualitatively heterogeneous observations and other items of information' (1978: 13). Putting together observations, confirming hypotheses and achieving facts was the work that we undertook in order to make sure that customers' experiences in the Copass universe were 'unified and comprehensive' at all times.

Chapter 5 considers how previous ways of worldmaking were sustained in practice, via the deployment of 'FORCEFIELDS' used to hide customers from unpleasant experiences. 'Forcefield' is a term of my own analysis to characterise a phenomenon I witnessed in the field that kept the Copass universe stable. The team spent a large amount of time designing user experiences, and part of that work went to make sure certain discomforts were designed *out*—like inconveniently placed West African refugees. This theme can be considered as 'deformation' in Goodman's model, where 'changes are reshapings or deformations that may according to point of view be considered either

corrections or distortions' (1978: 16). Deformation is a useful analytical tool to consider forcefields in worldmaking because, from the perspective of the Copass hero they might be considered 'corrections' on a world which was not yet properly optimised for the right experience. Chapter 6 is a presentation of 'ENCLOSURE,' what I pose as the key existential principle of the Copass universe. Taking examples of the startup's use of stickers, logo choices and special events, I argue that by 'weighting' elements of everyday life differently, the cofounders attempted to enrol customers into their world by 'exemplification and expression' (Goodman 1978: 12). Putting customers in a graphic universe of enclosed spaces, a symbolic one of planned logos and a phenomenological one of built interiors for conference events, the cofounders sorted 'important and unimportant features' of their world around an imperative of seeking spatial enclosure (Goodman 1978: 12).

Chapter 7 is an inquiry into 'LIFESTYLE,' a term regularly used and valued by the cofounders. Lifestyle can be organised under the final category of Goodman's ways of worldmaking, 'deletion and supplementation.' This was meant to explicate the more general concept of 'life,' emphasising the fact that, in the Copass universe, to live was not just a result of biological activities but rather a result of *design* applied to one's actions. Goodman writes that 'the making of one world out of another usually involves some extensive weeding out and filling,' where outdated elements of a previous world are replaced by updated versions (1978: 14). This new universe, defined around style, would fit perfectly the cofounders' attention to media materials and the aesthetic constitution of their new world because it turned the very living of one's life into a primarily representational challenge. Chapter 8 is an investigation of 'CULTURE,' where I discuss the final crucial element of Copass's universe. This was the ultimate feature the startup needed to achieve to fully realise its

world for customers, because the previous ways of worldmaking—while providing a well-rounded basis for a new world and way of life—needed to be put in place physically for a group of people, where they could be fully immersed in it and, thus, *actually live in the universe Copass had created*. Culture was achieved in Goodman's category of 'deletion and supplementation' as well, where previous conceptions of culture were eliminated and new ones were installed that carried with them the implicit assumption that society was now permanently a retail space.

Goodman offers a useful analytical structure that is signposted in each chapter that follows, with occasional theoretical support from another philosopher of worlds, Peter Sloterdijk. In particular, I borrow from his 'poetics of space' and his study of worlds from the *Sphären* trilogy (Sloterdijk 2009, 2011 and 2016). Sloterdijk's notions of worldmaking are especially useful in my analysis of Copass because of his conceptualisation of worlds as a *'being inside a dwelling,'* a kind of 'Being-with' people and objects in a Heideggerian sense (Elden & Mendieta 2009: 6, my emphasis). Because to be is not enough: Sloterdijk moves from 'the question of being to the question of being-together—from *Sein* to *Mit-sein*—which concerns both proximity and distance' and turns ontological investigations into spatial ones (Elden & Mendieta 2009: 5). Being with others turns a project of understanding existence into one of understanding co-existence in a shared world, implying that to be in that world is to be a world maker. He writes,

> Humans have never lived in a direct relationship with "nature," and their cultures have certainly never set foot in the realm of what we call the bare facts; their existence has always been exclusively in the breathed, divided, torn-open and restored space. (2011: 46)

This perspective helps us understand precisely how Copass's project was one of worldmaking, because of their efforts to create a new world that was 'breathed, divided, torn-open and restored' through their labour to envision it, plan it, engineer it and sell it. The labour of making this new world took place in a variety of registers, that Sloterdijk represents in his trilogy as at once 'poetic, literary, or material and real, such as glasshouses, palaces or caves' (Elden & Mendieta 2009: 6). While Being-with is, for Sloterdijk, a general human condition, in Copass, *this form of Being-with became an explicit business project,* consisting of engineering a new world through physical means (in coworking spaces), aesthetic means (in Facebook photo albums and the design of the startup's website) as well as poetic means (in email copy, or printed materials given out at Copass events). Sloterdijk is useful to take further Goodman's analysis because he demonstrates clearly how worldmaking is an all-encompassing activity that is not strictly limited to one medium or one style of work—it encapsulates all dimensions of the Copass project, as each chapter goes to demonstrate.

As this selection of investigations goes to show, 'to create a universe' was the task that Copass spent so much time and effort to accomplish. As is noted in Chapter 8, their new universe was realised, even if in a very limited way, and through all of their efforts, these four people were able to change the whole world by developing a new one—even if it was only briefly, and for only a few people. Encapsulating all of its ethical complexities and aesthetic achievements, financial limitations and imaginative returns, this is an ethnography of their vision. A story of how four people tried to change the world not by fighting it but by introducing their own newer, improved version. This is one startup's dream.

1

THREE DREAMERS OF DWELLINGS

> Who among us, in his idle hours, has not taken a delicious pleasure in constructing for himself a model apartment, a dream house, a house of dreams?
>
> —Charles Baudelaire (in Benjamin 2006: 246)

I spent 12 months working for a Parisian startup called Copass. This company, despite its state-of-the-art branding and future-forward marketing rhetoric, presented a vision of thrilling adventurism in the style of 19th century French author Jules Verne. As one of the startup's cofounders made explicit to me in a retrospective interview, the company's goal was never just to create a successful

business. It was, as he put it, ‘to create a universe.’ One inspired by Verne’s cohesive worlds of *Extraordinary Voyages*. Copass envisioned a ‘universe,’ he explained, in the spirit of ‘hot air balloons, Jules Verne and *Around the World in 80 Days*.’ By assigning universe creation a central role for the business, its cofounders did something unusual from the beginning of their project. Instead of just developing a successful enterprise to be scaled, mined for profit and courted by venture capital firms, they chose to spend their time developing a believable universe where—within its aesthetic and narrative contours—the startup would play a leading role to change the world. The significance of this was that, contrary to most cases, the main mission of these startuppers was not to build capital. It was to build a universe.

Rather than fine-tuning the economic model of a niche-focused lean startup, they decided to engineer an entire universe they wanted to make real. In trying to make this universe come to life, the startup’s success would be realised with it. The cofounders hoped customers participating in their universe through brand materials and events would eventually be convinced of its reality, so that their created universe would become more than just another futuristic fantasy. By partaking in it, customers would help the startup gain investment and then (in a performative twist) transform their created universe into the *actual* one. From an analytical perspective, this was quite the opposite of a usual startup trajectory. According to this model, a small company with a little idea thinks small—but very accurately—about a small problem, in a small place, for a small group of people, then slowly expands. Once its model is proven on a small scale, investors gain confidence and lend money, from which a small idea can grow into a technological behemoth. Such stories have been recounted endlessly in newspapers, biographies and conference presentations. Copass did something different. Instead of starting small, they started as *big as one could possibly imagine*.

Their goal? They aimed not to fix a little problem for a few people in one place. They aimed from the first instant (as the cofounder candidly admitted) to create an entire universe. A universe that, like a Vernian novel, was expertly circumscribed, densely populated and full of journeys.

Copass was a global federation of over 700 independently-owned shared workspaces. These spaces, known by their users as 'coworking spaces,' were shared offices that rented desk space by the day, week or month to independent workers and startups. Independent workers included programmers, designers, artists, consultants, photographers, translators, and startups included small-to-medium sized advertising agencies, software companies and non-governmental organisations. Copass built a federation to help both customers (including independent workers and startups) and clients (independent coworking spaces). For customers, it provided a membership system where new users could sign up and pay a fee of €299 per month to work in any of its member spaces around the world. That meant, for example, one could have a desk space ready-to-use in 475 cities, from Barcelona to Beijing. For coworking spaces, it provided a free payment management system and, above all, a potential revenue stream by helping match spaces with new coworkers who would otherwise not know about them. Upon joining the federation, spaces had to agree to certain terms and conditions about how to treat Copass members, and they were also asked to provide members a discount on their normal prices, usually 15-20% off the space's daily or monthly cost. Copass earned its own revenue by skimming off the surface, taking a small percentage of daily transactions that members paid the spaces they visited. From this, the company made a basic income that kept things going, but their financial situation was not without trepidation. Although over time the company acquired increased recognition from the European coworking community, their user base did not increase enough to provide the whole team with sustainable incomes.

Aiming to expand their created universe globally, they sought out likeminded investors with success. In the startup's lifetime, the cofounders were proposed two funding offers. They received an initial offer within their first year of around €200,000, and a second one months later of €1,000,000. But, on both occasions, the cofounders turned the offers down. Both were rejected because the team was concerned that the company vision had not yet been fully achieved in practice, and introducing investors with financial expectations would contaminate the delicate universe they were still setting up. The fact that the team struggled with limited financial growth throughout the life of the startup yet still rejected sizeable sums of capital goes to show how passionate they were about not just a business idea (that could be tweaked and modified by investors' expectations) but their determination 'to create a universe' (that could be easily dismantled by investors' dissatisfactions). They wanted total creative control over their brand, which served as the vehicle of their crafted universe.

But just what did that universe entail? It was a future where white-collar workers would be liberated from the shackles of office life, free to work anywhere in the world, to meet new people and to have amazing experiences. It was an inversion of the dull pace of work life, where tomorrow's work would be on one's own terms as a self-starter, where workdays would be permanently mixed with holidays, where work would be fun and workplaces could be play places, where workers could be adventurers. And just how was their universe inspired by Jules Verne? Like Verne's lifelong work, his *Extraordinary Voyages*, Copass was fundamentally concerned with global movements: new ways of travelling that took work on the road, transforming 9-to-5 office routines into globetrotting vacations. As another cofounder explained, it was meant to help independent workers and startups

‘expanding to different cities, even different countries,’ to ‘work with teams of talented people, whether sat next to us or 2,000 miles away’ (Van den Broek 2014a). It was a turn away from what the cofounders saw as the despondent lives of stagnant, disempowered office workers towards a horizon of hope that came from the freedom to travel. Copass proposed to its customers the ‘freedom to be anywhere,’ and its cofounders designed into many branding materials the startup’s catchphrase, ‘Be There. Anywhere’ (Copass 2017a).

‘Be There. Anywhere,’ could also be a slogan for Verne’s *Extraordinary Voyages,* whose protagonists end up in the deep jungles of Africa, on the moon, twenty-thousand leagues under the sea and even at the centre of the earth. What Verne’s created universes shared with the Copass universe was that, for both,

> Travel is movement and contrasts with repose or rest. Travel is adventure, discovery, escape, liberation of the imagination, dream and poetry. One could well establish an entire psychology of travel in the Vernian narrative with its spiral or linear movement, projected in space and time, and with its cyclic form. The setting of the extraordinary voyage is always exceptional and takes therefore itself the aspect of adventure: the great North, the deep sea, the volcano… (Winandy & Winandy 1969: 98-99)

‘We want to be able to work from anywhere on the planet,’ a company blog post reads, ‘whether at home in Paris, in San Francisco for a business trip, or overlooking a beach in Rio’ (Van den Broek 2014a). For the Copass cofounders, travel was always at the centre of their project. They wanted to use travel as a means to inject work life with a Vernian thrill. To take work out of boring office

buildings and put it in a new way of life characterised by 'adventure, discovery, escape, liberation of the imagination, dream and poetry' (Winandy & Winandy 1969: 98). This way of life, interestingly, was already *their* way of life. The cofounders loved to travel and, in fact, founded the startup partially as a means to finance their own personal voyages. So when the cofounders began 'to create a universe,' they were actually creating a universe designed to support *their own* way of living—but their own way of living exploded to a planetary scale. As another company blog post admits, 'When we started working on Copass, we did it because this is the way we wanted to work' (Van den Broek 2014b). In an interview by a coworking space, one of the cofounders elaborates: 'Travel is really what we're thinking about in doing something like Copass. The idea is, what can this way of life bring you? What can you learn from travelling?' (Van den Broek in Mutinerie Coworking 2013).

Like with Verne, one could do 'an entire psychology of travel' for this startup, where travel becomes adventure, enabled by a poetics and aesthetics of brand building. What you can learn from travelling with Copass is that the world (according to the startup's brand materials), despite the bland and boring experiences of typical office life, is still exciting, colourful, captivating and full of joy. In a gesture of Victorian showmanship, the cofounders spent a significant amount of time showcasing the delightful experiences of their universe in marketing images and texts to prove this point. Much like a Vernian adventurer might move around their universe, discovering savage tribes or natural beauties, the Copass cofounders moved around their universe having 'discovered amazing spaces and met loads of great people' (Van den Broek 2014d). One cofounder lists a handful of exotic oddities in this universe: 'a guy building open source meteorological stations to a group working on the optimization of energy consumption in smart cities and even a few people

who are making their own movies…' (Van den Broek 2014d). What Copass valued was the life they wanted to make real all over the world, a brave new world of work written by the startup's four cofounders dissatisfied with work as they saw it. Instead of resisting or revolting against a world order they found inadequate, through the means of a startup they decided to instead invent a new one that would be more accommodating.

The fascinating element of the Copass project that I have chosen to investigate, is how these four people invented a whole new world and way of life, and how they tried to establish it across the planet. The ambition of these four cofounders was to turn the way they wanted things to be for them into the way things ought to be for everyone. *To turn their desired lifestyle into a global social movement* that enrolled, as they saw it, hundreds of cities and thousands, tens of thousands, even millions of people. They created a company to fulfil a dream. One cofounder, in the early days of my fieldwork, admitted to me that, someday soon, he envisioned an interconnected world fully powered by Copass. Members, or 'Copassers,' would be permanently working in each others' coworking spaces and living in each others' homes, travelling every week or month to somewhere new. They would even have a 'Copass Bank' setup globally to help kickstart coworking spaces and to fund the budding businesses of Copass customers. They saw themselves as the facilitators of a future that everyone in coworking spaces wanted to arrive, but one which nobody had yet fully dedicated themselves to *making* arrive. At the helm of a new technological-workspace revolution, their ambitions were unabashedly global and anything but modest. A line from a company blog post sums up their aspirations: 'We can't wait to see the world Copassing' (Van den Broek 2014b). A quote from a company t-shirt echoes this excitement: 'I'M GOING TO COPASS THE WORLD.'

With their intense focus on creating a universe, it is important to note that what made Copass unique was not its product of a global coworking space network. There was ample competition in a crowded market of similar shared workspace networks. LiquidSpace (with total equity funding of $26.3 million), PivotDesk ($6.9 million) and ShareDesk ($3.7 million) were leading competitors (Crunchbase 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). Alongside these competitors were several highly successful coworking franchises, such as the attention-grabbing media monolith WeWork (boasting total equity funding of $8.9 billion) followed by Galvanize, Grind, Bond Collective, Impact Hub and more (Crunchbase 2017d). Setting itself apart from competitors, the key selling point of Copass was its universe, dressed up with its own particular *lifestyle:* one that would empower independent coworking actors, yet that was simply fun. Although anyone could join, users and spaces on Copass were curated by the cofounders. Optimal kinds of people and types of places were highlighted to exhibit a special coworking experience, *the Copass experience*. Here one could find beautiful architecture, tight-knit communities and thrilling experiences all under one roof—in comparison to soulless cookie cutter experiences of other workspace networks on the one hand, and isolationist members-only coworking franchises on the other.

What Copass offered was, at its most basic level, a web-based application. Visiting their website (www.copass.org) one would find a series of public pages with a description of their project, a map including all of the federation's member spaces, a 'Meet the Team' page and an extensive FAQ. But to benefit from Copass, one would have to create an account. Creating an account was free, but users were encouraged to signup for the startup's €299 monthly membership. Those who did not pay this fee could still access the federation's coworking spaces, they were just required to pay-by-the-day when visiting spaces (which was ideal for part-time users). After creating an account, users

would have access to the 'back-end' of the website, and this is where all the features of the Copass product took place. Logging in, users were presented with an interactive world map of member spaces. Here, one could peruse the map and click on any of these spaces. Clicking on one would cause an in-map popup to appear, listing its address and showing a small thumbnail image of the space's logo. By clicking on the space's name or logo, one would be redirected to that space's 'profile page,' which included its detailed practical information and services offered, as well as its address, contact details and photos of the space's interior. Prices were also listed on these space profile pages, and—the key feature of this page—one could find just next to the price a large green button that says 'Check Me In,' next to a check mark.

On Copass the daily cost to work in a coworking space per day would vary depending on the city, but for a high quality space in Western Europe, a Copass member might expect to pay between €20 and €30 for a shared desk in an open workspace (including wifi and occasionally coffee, tea and snacks). A typical use-case of the web application might resemble one of the two following scenarios. In a first scenario, an independent worker wakes up one weekday morning, and while having breakfast at home, logs onto the Copass web app. Using the interactive map, she zooms into the city where she is currently working and examines the number of member spaces available to her. In central Paris, for example, on Copass her choice would include over forty coworking spaces. She might click on a handful of these spaces, to investigate their profile pages. Maybe some are too expensive, some are too far and others require one day of advance notice—so she finally decides to work in Coworkshop, a work-café in the city's 10th arrondissement. This space is cheaper than most, only costing €16. She is happy with this, so she closes her laptop and takes the metro to go to the space. When she arrives, she says hello to the space's manager, explains she wants to pay for her

coworking via her Copass membership, then opens her computer, connects to the space's wifi, and goes back to the space's profile page to click the big green 'Check Me In' button. Once this is done, since she has paid for a monthly membership of €299 already, the €16 cost for her day of coworking is subtracted from Copass's business bank account and sent to Coworkshop.

Like gym memberships, this payment model relies on the fact that people will not go to coworking spaces every single day, and that if they do, they might go to cheaper spaces from time to time. (Otherwise, for example, if a monthly subscriber went to a coworking space that cost €50 every day for four weeks, Copass would lose €701—so balancing budgets with the daily cost of coworking spaces was a tricky but necessary exercise the cofounders had to manage). A second use-case might include an entrepreneur who is travelling to Berlin for a weekend conference. Because she wants to make use of the city's eclectic coworking spaces to network and find new clients for her business, she decides to research Copass coworking spaces in advance in order to find the best choices for her business needs. Like the first use-case, she logs in, uses the interactive map to see Berlin, and she clicks on various pins on the map to go to their space profile pages. Looking at the photos, seeing what reviews people left on different spaces and considering the prices, she makes her decision to go to a new space every day, totalling five unique spaces for her seven-day trip. From each space's profile page, she makes requests to cowork as a Copasser on specific dates that she sets in advance. The managers of each space are notified that there is a Copass member coming to visit, and they can accept her coworking request ahead of time.

Copass's web app was modelled after popular social networks. Users could message friends, track all the member spaces they visited, list spaces they wanted to go to next, and see where other

A screenshot of Copass's public-facing website homepage.

A screenshot of Copass's post-account login homepage. This is what users would see every time they used the web application.

members have gone and their wish lists of spaces they found interesting. Each Copass member had their own personal profile page, which listed one's accomplishments (like number of checkins, number of unique spaces visited, number of cities visited, number of countries visited) in a gamified format—where each user was collecting experiences as they used the platform. The social features of Copass were under-utilised by many members, who preferred to chat with friends on Facebook or by email, so most users just used the platform to discover new coworking spaces on the startup's interactive world map, or used it to check in to Copass spaces on days when they were working. An interesting feature that excited the cofounders (but which was also under-utilised by members) was the startup's 'hosting' feature, where personal profiles could be linked to AirBnB or CouchSurfing accounts. This was the basis of a more expansive Copass society that the cofounders had in mind, where people could find a coworking space in another city they wanted to go to, look at the space's profile page to find an active user, then message that user to see if they could host them during the visit. This took the startup far beyond competitors, who were concerned only with daily quotas of filling seats and earning revenue. Copass envisioned a future where its members were truly a *society:* not just working and networking with fellow members, but also sleeping in their homes.

When users would log in to Copass for the first time, their default profile picture was not a generic black-and-white headshot (like the one made famous by Facebook and MySpace). Instead, it was a sketched portrait of Jules Verne. From the user's first moment on the network, the Copass experience was derived from its adventure-loving ancestor. Copass's roots in Vernian mythology signalled something unusual about the company that couldn't be found in its quarterly evaluations: its spirit. What I learned during my fieldwork was that to understand this startup was not just to memorise and recite relevant facts. It was to take a *trip* to visit a new world. The cofounders'

emphasis on creating a convincing universe was what situated Copass in a literary style of Vernian storytelling. Because, like Verne, everyone who knew the startup was impressed by its inexhaustible optimism. With brightly coloured costumes, wide smiling faces, a tirelessly jovial sense of humour, a long series of odd jokes, a happy iconographic library, a cheerful colour scheme, a charming tone of voice and sparkling mix of real-life and web-based brand presentation—the startup was perceived by all (from detractors to enthusiasts) as, in varying degrees of believability, a utopian view of the future. Its utopian aspirations were so exaggerated that the bulk of this research became an examination of just that.

That it was utopian is not to suggest that people found it naïve. It was utopian because those who got to know the startup's cofounders recognised that in them was a seemingly endless source of elation. Things were always *great.* The product was great, its users were great, its values were great, its vision was great, its experience was great and its future was great. Everything about it was wonderful, easy-to-use, and thoroughly streamlined. Copass offered a product that was obviously made by user experience enthusiasts, because it was as pleasant to use as it was to imagine. For some, the constant positive excitement for the future, the evolution of work, the advancements in consumer technology and the potential of a new liberation enlivened spirits in need of uplift. For others, this overt idealism often became too much, discouraging potential customers and tiring out actual ones. Whoever knew of Copass had no doubt that it was powered by a happy anticipation for its future. A hopeful reliance on the fact that, no matter what, things were going to get better, and if not, we (together!) were going to make them so.

ONE STARTUP'S DREAM

The research question that organises this thesis could be posed as such: in the case of this startup, *how did four people try to change the whole world?* They didn't try to change the world, instead they created a new one, and tried to usher people into it. What I found so impressive about the ambitions of the four cofounders was how they saw their project as something resolutely global, with themselves at the centre of an unfolding story where they were positioned to bring their vision to workers all over the planet. From the corner of a cosy Parisian coworking space, they designed and transmitted a new world to thousands of people in dozens of countries. A world they would bring in their backpacks to company events and industry conferences. A world they could squeeze into the thin dimensions of four MacBook Pros, that they could store on a small server, that they could share to anyone instantly by typing six letters on any internet-connected computing device: *C-o-p-a-s-s*. Such a transportable and transposable world was an excellent business asset because it seemed that from any perspective it was a *huge* project. Huge in terms of the cofounders' ambition, of planetary scale, business potential, revolutionary change and number of users.

Logging onto Copass's website during my fieldwork, if one visited the 'Meet the Team' page, they would witness an impressive number of what seem to be user portraits. If one signed up, they would see a surprising number of coworking spaces, many with high levels of user activity. One would really be under the impression that this world of theirs was something *big.* In the field I was

constantly met with surprise when customers and enthusiasts learned how, actually, the startup's activity was quite modest. Despite appearances, for the duration of my fieldwork we only had a few dozen monthly subscribers, as well as up to a hundred more paying users. Numbers would occasionally increase and decrease, with users signing up to see what Copass was about, but not spending money. I was amused to speak with people who would claim with certitude that Copass had at least thirty employees to run its global network for its thousands of active users. This illusion of grandeur was deliberately presented, however. 'Featured Spaces' were chosen for high user activity, the 'Meet the Team' page used photos from industry conferences, and the employee list (making it seem as if there were eight staff) kept up old profiles of the startup's previous interns. The cofounders also left two job positions permanently open just to receive applications, which might give the impression that the startup was growing—or just exceedingly demanding for new hires.

The game of scale as it played out between four people and the all-encompassing universe they brought to life might merit them the provocative description of *visionaries*. I use this not in an anthropological register, but speaking in the terms of my field through the globe-spanning ideology of Silicon Valley. Indeed, today much less a place than a state of mind, Silicon Valley has become equal in stature to 'the Mesopotamia of antiquity, Florence in the fifteenth century, Paris in the Twenties' (Kaplan 2000: 16). This 'latter-day renaissance' is a city-turned-zeitgeist, where every driven twenty year-old 'somehow thinks he (or, on some rare occasions, she) has the idea that will transform the way we live, think, play, even govern ourselves—when, in fact, most of the ideas just have to do with yet another way to sell jelly beans on the internet' (Kaplan 2000: 16). The discrepancy between the twenty year-old selling jelly beans and the *visionary* changing the world is

useful in order to come to an understanding of what attempting to realise a vision of the world entails in the Silicon Valley mindset. Taking an example of the most worshipped visionary of the tech world, Schlender and Tetzeli write the following passage in their 2015 New York Times Bestseller, *Becoming Steve Jobs:*

> Steve was a visionary. It's a word that is loosely tossed around these days, especially in Silicon Valley, but it legitimately applied to Steve even from very early in his life. He had the ability to see around corners, to envision how the seeds of existing ideas could be combined to create something unimaginable to others. The challenge he faced was to become an effective visionary—that's what turns a dreamer into someone who changes the world. (2015: 118)

To be a visionary, according to the authors, is to 'see around corners' and to 'envision how the seeds of existing ideas could be combined to create something unimaginable to others.' The description fits anthropological conceptions of mystics, seers and diviners—but further implications of Silicon Valley divination deserves to be the subject of a much larger project. The cofounders I came to know had their own 'visionary' qualities. These were rendered in each members' description on the startup's 'Meet the Team' webpage (see Copass 2017b). I examine three of these cofounders in my research: Eric, Stefano and Sophie. Augustin, the fourth founding member of Copass, was not directly involved in my fieldwork (he also later left the startup team), and as such does not play a central role in the story that follows. Eric—President of Copass—loves 'tough challenges' and 'likes to guess where the wind will blow and has proven to be pretty good at it' (knowing how the future will play out, much like Jobs 'had the ability to see around corners'). Stefano—Chief of

Product Development—'is in charge of imagining and crafting the products' of Copass, working like Jobs to 'create something unimaginable to others.' Sophie—Operations Director—'is in charge of finance and operations,' where she 'juggles numbers, organises projects, crashes events and eats legal stuff for breakfast.' Like Jobs, she worked in many domains, envisioning 'how the seeds of existing ideas could be combined' to make something extraordinary.

But, as the biographers note, having these features is not enough to be a visionary. One must become an *effective* visionary: 'that's what turns a dreamer into someone who changes the world' (Schlender & Tetzeli 2015: 118). The conclusion of Eric's team member description emphasises the effectiveness of his ambitions, specifying that he works 'to make sure the world knows about Copass.' From my analytical perspective, this research traces the fine line that separates faux-visionaries (a twenty year-old selling jelly beans) from effective visionaries (Steve Jobs reincarnate). Because certainly the question of *how did four people attempt to change the whole world?* begs for yet another question: did those four people *actually succeed* in their mission? Did they change the world, and could they be labelled as, in Silicon Valley-speak, effective visionaries? Or did they *fail* to change the world? Was their project a flop like so many other garage startups? The Copass story defies this dichotomy. By the end of my fieldwork the company had neither achieved big success nor suffered crushing failure. In fact, all along its lifetime the startup cruised along rather calmly—with a string of financial difficulties, but functional all the same. These cofounders charted a course for the future in their own elaborate universe, but their story is interesting precisely as it was not one of the two expected endings, visionary or flop.

The ambiguity of the Copass story—with its drama of scale between four people and their giant universe—establishes an original entry point to present a startup. Instead of recounting a story of a business that achieved fame and fortune, or telling the crash and burn tale of a company's financial failure with moral lessons, I present *the middling case of a startup stuck between stardom and bankruptcy*. Their story is interesting because, unlike Steve Jobs biographies and entrepreneurial self-help books (such as *How Entrepreneurs Turn Failure into Success* or *True Confessions from Ten Years of Startup Mistakes*), this is the story of the majority of startups: people who work hard to make their vision succeed, but who never taste great victory in market domination or shame in utter failure (Scaramucci 2016, Carlson 2015). 'A new company's most important strength,' PayPal cofounder and Silicon Valley legend Peter Thiel writes, 'is new thinking: even more important than nimbleness, small size affords space to think' (2014: 10-11). Copass, like most small startups hoping to make it big in their own way, was an experiment (as Steve Jobs might remind us) to 'think differently.' The small size of a four-person company gave them 'space to think' about current problems in the work world with an original twist.

While the story of Copass, with their mandate 'to create a universe,' is an extreme example of carving out space to think, it is evocative of the richness of new perspectives that can be born from small groups of people trying to affect big change. Because recounting the lives of middling startups does not make headlines or produce best sellers, I would like to offer this research to shed light on such richness by writing at length *not* about a dream that came true or a dream that failed, but a dream in progress. One startup's dream in high resolution, presented as a world of possibility unto itself that hasn't yet been achieved. I titled this research *One Startup's Dream: An Ethnography of a Vision* because I propose a case study of four startup cofounders attempting to create a business

whose point was to achieve a dream. It is a study that, through ethnographic observation and analysis, offers an investigation into how these four people used technology to their advantage to turn their desired way of living and working into a global social project, through the amplifying box of a startup. The dream that the title refers to is the 'universe' that the cofounders spent so much time creating and sharing. Put in its most precise terms, Eric described the vision of Copass, or this *One Startup's Dream,* in an interview for an American technology website:

> Our vision of the future of work is not to replace the old office with a cooler office with a community, even if it's already a big improvement. We think the future of work is going to be made of lots of different workspaces that you can use based on what you need and want. You might want to go on holidays with your kids for two weeks in the Canary Islands while being able to keep on working productively; you maybe need an inspiring space after meeting with a partner or client in some city; you might want to connect to developers and switch to a tech oriented space. When the office is not a constraint anymore, it becomes a tool that you use to improve your work and your life. (Van den Broek in Johnson 2015)

The dream of Copass was to turn the office from 'constraint' into 'a tool that you can use to improve your work and your life.' In practice, this meant that you could work and take surf lessons in Portugal, or go white water rafting and organise a conference in San Francisco, or discover new communities of independent workers in Spain, or record a hip-hop album and network in New York City. These were some of the events of my fieldwork. As much as this research is an analytical reflection on one startup's dream, it also happened to be one startup's dream that I lived—at least momentarily. This dream was achieved by travelling on Copass and 'living the Copass experience,'

as the cofounders put it, an act that opposed the static and unchanging oppression of office life. Gaining traction from its Vernian heritage, work and travel became mixed in this startup's dream as 'adventure, discovery, escape, liberation of the imagination, dream and poetry' (Winandy & Winandy 1969: 98-99). What was so fascinating about this startup was neither its business project, its market of coworking or the potential revolution that it promised it was a part of. Instead, it was the level of effort and intensity the cofounders put into trying to enrol people in their cohesive created universe of the way they wanted things could be.

Incidentally, it was their roles as 'visionaries' that would make or break their project: because if they could believe in it enough, if they could convince enough people of what they were trying to do, then they would pass a tipping point to become 'effective visionaries.' But, in this *Ethnography of a Vision,* we will find that they never quite reached this tipping point, and as such their created universe was—at the time of writing—still up for debate. Thus we are left with a very precious intellectual object: an artifice that, with so much time and care put into its creation, could quickly fall away into the endless archives of failed startups. Or, one that could still succeed with its 'vision of the future of work,' in its goal 'to create a universe.' Today, the Copass cofounders still stand by their aspiration written on the company blog: 'We can't wait to see the world Copassing' (Van Den Broek 2014b). In anticipation to see the world Copassing, I present this research as a preliminary perspective on the potential of what could be in Copass's World 2.0: *a fantastical universe deployed by a business to realise its dream of a better tomorrow.* I hope this investigation will serve as a seed for 'the world Copassing,' for the cofounders, as well as a seed for new academic understandings of middling startups that—if not for the efforts of their creators alone—deserve to have themselves taken seriously on their own terms.

GENESIS OF A WORK WORLD: PART I

STEFANO BORGHI

[COPASS COFOUNDER]

'Well, I started working remotely when I was still in high school in the early 1990s. I was in school, and I began thanks to my dad who bought some of the first ever computers. At the time, I was already passionate about computing because I had a computer class at my primary school in Rome. Back then, it was an experimental thing. We were the first case of kids using computers. And I started by making things in 3D for video games. I was designing spaceships and doing animation. But I really loved drawing. So even though I was at a high school specialising in science (where there weren't even any courses about drawing), I spent many days sketching spaceships. And so, my first job was to make 3D spaceships for video games. I taught myself by spending time in front of the computer at home alone. My dad was a doctor but he was always really interested by new technological developments. So, we always had new cameras and camcorders lying around. You have to imagine, back then, there wasn't

even Windows! We used DOS, you know, D-O-S? And the first operating system that I remember… bah, everything was hand-drawn! I don't even know if that exists anymore? Imagine—there wasn't even a mouse! It was really all black-and-white screens.

And yeah, I was also influenced by my mom who was at a national research centre in Italy. So even family friends were interested by computers. I remember having visited friends who had computers synchronised with ours (you know, the time and some other basic stuff). And all of their computers took up a whole room. At our house, we had a small bedroom for ours. It must've cost, I dunno, between €10,000 and €15,000. Because it was simply gigantic. The screens, all of the other hardware, it was really necessary to have space for everything. My father had everything just for fun. And me, well, it was what I grew up with. Rather than playing video games, I spent time in front of the computer screen doing, you know, making something. And that meant that all the hours other kids spent playing games, I was trying to understand how 3D graphics worked. Back then unfortunately, information on computer development was very hard to come by because there wasn't any internet. So today, if you're searching for how to do something you can find it—but I knew nobody who was developing in 3D. I didn't really know anyone else who was developing at all, and so I had access to very little info. I remember sometimes, having worked for days on something simple, like 'how do I cancel?' because there simply weren't the means to find out without trying!

From there, what's funny was that I started to work remote, but in Rome with other Roman guys. At the time, because I didn't have my driver's license (and these guys lived really far from me) it was a pain to go to theirs, to exchange data in person… So we saw each other time to time in meetings, but most of the time, we transmitted data digitally. Obviously, there was no internet. So we transmitted data via modem. So say I had a model I was working on. I would call their phone number, and that would put is un touch. I took our house telephone line (and that cut the line for my parents), and voilà, we were able to say: 'Hello? Yeah, it's me! Listen, I'm going to send you these models I've been working on, hang up so I can call your modem.' We would hang up to connect our modems, I would connect (and hear the 'beep-bi-bi-beep! bi-bi-beep!') and after that we would have a connected line. This was just a connection between computers, and I would write on the screen, 'I'm sending you these documents now, etcetera,' and they would receive them. Finally, there you have it, my first job was remote work! I did that for a couple of years. Then, I changed to work for a small company called LOUDONET. They were designing video games that were a bit more elaborate, and I started to make 3D packets, graphic design, character design and icon design for the rest of the 1990s—still remotely, though.

After that, with the introduction of floppy disks, everything started to get easier. In this last period of my early work, we started to use email—so finally we could send documents easily from a distance. And then, still with my young passion for computers, I got my first Apple computer. From there, I took a turn into photo editing and image creation, as all of that was starting to evolve. We started to have thousands of colours on

the screens. In short, technology started to take a new direction from simple editing on black-and-white screens. Around this time, there was a big work project to make a photography book with retouched photographs. So I found a photographer, and we took it on and gave it our best shot. I said to him, 'I know how to edit photos with a computer, I can do the scans, we can work on them, I can add some things around it, elaborate it and everything…' and that marked my entry into photo editing—in post-production. That, however, wasn't remote. We were stuck in the same place because the means to send high-resolution photos, well, nothing was saved. To do anything took twenty minutes, to burn it took forty-five minutes. And we would send photos in a CD by air mail. From this project, we started our own photo retouching studio specialising in post-production. I bought the computers we needed, and made an agreement with the photographer that they would stay with me—like that, I could use them for other projects.

So I began to find projects with other photographers, and after a while I started working with a small group of them. I started to teach other people who joined our studio, and I also studied at a fine arts school in Rome. After some time, I mastered several ways to manipulate an image: whether it was through photography, hand illustrations or 3D design. I achieved a good level with them, and above all I knew computers well, which was the best means to mix the three methods. In the studio, at the end of this period, we were working more and more on retouching. At the beginning, we worked on calendars, book covers, pamphlets, things like that. But after we started doing retouching, we were hired to retouch all photos used by all of Rome's newspapers and magazines. And we

started working with big ad agencies, where we did some of our highest quality work. We had the advantage of being able to make really weird images! Fantastical things, for agency creatives, and to mock them up quickly. Because we were working with photos, 3D or hand drawings, we learned to mix them easily. So a lot of our work was also preproduction—where a creative tells us 'Ah, we could have a giraffe, but with the head of Rino Serron!' The objective of that was to make an image hyper-photorealistic, to show the idea to the client so they could say, 'Oh, that's great! Go ahead, let's do that.'

The studio grew and grew, and finally we rented an office in Rome. We restored the place, it was our first big office where we could all feel comfortable, and where we had everything we needed to work well. But a feeling came to me all of a sudden, I didn't want to do this anymore. I wasn't getting along with my colleagues. Above all I felt that I was just teaching everyone, and not doing anything anymore. Personally, I prefer to stay on a computer making things, and at that point I had become a teacher for others to make things. So we decided in 2008 for everyone to return to their own, independently managed work. Everyone in the office started pretty easily working independently: each person found their clients, doing their own work like free labourers in the same space. We shared the costs of the place, saying to ourselves: 'we have the computers, we have the cash, everyone knows how to keep tidy, but now the difference is that everyone works on their own independent projects.' It was at that moment where our office became a coworking space. And it's the same place that would become Cowo360, the actual coworking space that I came to manage. A little while later, we discovered something called 'a coworking space' in Milan. We said, 'Well hang on a second!

They're doing more or less what we're doing, they call their model coworking, and it's even more flexible because anyone can come, pay and take a desk!' So we reached out to them and became affiliated to their workspace network (which, at the time, they were trying to launch). With that, we started to become a flexible office.

During this time, my coworking space Cowo360 was developing into an interesting project. We were working on a special payment system. Back then, there was no standard method to pay for coworking spaces, everyone was doing their own thing. We found a system with a special plugin that could manage credit payments. The way it worked, was that people would buy 100 credits and spend them by paying for space access by day, by paying for meeting rooms and things like that. I liked it a lot, because it allowed people who needed to use a meeting room or something, you know, to consume to their needs. We put this in place, and people used a lot of credits! It gave us the right to say '100 credits costs €100. But 500 credits costs €400.' So after the success of our system, I went back to the coworking space in Milan (as they had succeeded to have several more spaces in Italy) to a sort of coworking conference they were organising. I presented my idea, I met a developer, but finally nothing was done with it. Nobody wanted to say 'Yes, it's cool, we believe in it, let's go.' But it's true, I guess, when you think that it was 2009. Nobody even knew about coworking then, it was such a small thing! So, trying to imagine the needs of a digital nomad in 2009, it was impossible.

As I was travelling a lot, I spoke with many coworking contacts in Europe. I tried to speak with people who were living the coworking life abroad. Among a few other trips, I went to the European Coworking Conference in Berlin just to talk to people. It was my first real experience of coworking at the European scale. Just imagine, it was a bit like the first-ever conference for digital nomads. Here you have a big group of people who do pretty much the same thing, but all across the planet! Each person was working their own way, and it was great. There were a few people who reacted well to my credit system idea, but when I would respond, ‘Ok, great, but let’s go then! Let’s do something!’ it was always the same thing, nobody wanted to commit. And so it was there that I met Eric. Back then, he didn’t even have his coworking space, Mutinerie, up and running. Mutinerie was just a prototype, in a temporary location somewhere in Paris. He really liked the idea, my concept and everything, and he said, ‘Fine, well, let’s see meet in Paris, and we will continue to develop the idea like that.’ But at the time he was really busy with Mutinerie obviously, because the project was really starting to become something. In any case, I kept talking with other people.

Now, the name: Copass. Well, Copass was the name that I gave to the project. With Eric, the idea at the very beginning was to do Copass really collaboratively, and not to make it a company. We were thinking that we could drive the whole coworking movement by creating a common tool that everyone—spaces and coworkers alike—could use. Following that first talk, we spoke a lot in Paris and finally we agreed, ‘Alright. We like the idea. The thing is, we can’t really do it as an informal and shared effort.’ We understood that we could solicit people as much as we wanted, but everyone

was occupied by their own projects. They all had coworking spaces, and we knew how time-consuming it was to try to make them grow from our own experiences. So we couldn't just sit around and wait for these guys to participate with us, and from there we decided, 'Either we forget about the whole thing, or we create a company and really push this idea.' Actually, it was Eric who had this reasoning—that we go now, or we don't go at all. He insisted, 'Now! On we go!' At this time, Mutinerie had officially launched and was doing well. So we could put Mutinerie at the centre of our project, and it was after that when Sophie—Eric's girlfriend—wanted to quit her job, so she proposed to participate in Copass.

The fourth and final member of the cofounding team—Augustin—met Eric, I think, at *le Perche*, near Mutinerie's eventual second coworking space, Mutinerie Village, in the countryside. It's a funny story actually. There was a call for developers at a school there. Eric and his brothers, the other cofounders of Mutinerie, spoke a lot with the school to get involved. And Augustin, well, he didn't know anybody. He just came, from Paris to see what was happening. It showed a lot about his interest in development because he took the train just to come see this event; he was very interested in technical questions, of transferring practical knowledge to digital nomads and programmers. He completed Copass's founding team. It was at that point, after getting to know him, that we drew up and signed all the paperwork. We legally formed the business, and, well, we launched this idea between us four.

‘And after that… well, more or less… I guess you know the rest?’ Stefano scratched his head, looking up at me. ‘You knew us after one year of the startup’s life?’

‘Right—when you put up that job post for a chief of communications, because you decided to push comms efforts after you launched the platform…’ I continued, shutting off my microphone.

GENESIS OF A WORK WORLD: PART II

SOPHIE ODZINSKI

[COPASS COFOUNDER]

‘I studied at the ESCP Europe, a management school for three years. I spent my first year in Paris, second year in London, I took a gap year and then I went to Berlin. The programme consisted of three diplomas: a Master of Science, just a Masters in Germany and France, in management. Mostly European management, like laws, marketing, communication and generic management over the course of three years. In the beginning, I wanted to work in a human resources department of some company,

because I was always keen to work with people. And at the same time, I wanted to… well, I wanted to work for the army! Because—okay, wait, wait, wait!—the thing is, I'm totally against violence, and I was thinking that if you want to prevent war, you have to understand how it works on the inside. So I took my first internship in the French Army, the Marines, and I was working for their human resources department. It was amazing. It was one of the best things I'd done in my life so far. The most interesting, actually. So, the army is a public institution, of course. And what I was working on was a project of 'capital opening.' So the Marines were selling part of their capital to a private enterprise called DTS, a European company of weapons and electricity. And so, when you do that, in French it's called *'ouverture de capital aux salariés,'* so you have to fix a price for all of the actions of the organisation. I was working on that.

Normally, when you're doing finance, you are just trying to sell your product on the financial markets, not fixing the first price. So we did that, and at this time in human resources a huge part of what I was doing was around '*épargne salariale*,' basically savings management. When you're in a company you can also invest part of what you own inside of the company; this is *épargne salariale*. I'm not sure, actually, if it's the same in every company, but anyway! So I was doing this, and I realised that there was something that I was happy with, but I really didn't want to make just salary stuff for life… you know, I mean it was very repetitive! So I found that maybe human resources wasn't for me, and I didn't find my goal of understanding war. We were working with nuclear weapons on submarines… so actually, no. No, I didn't find the answer to my goal! What I found actually was pretty interesting: the population that works for these

kinds of companies really, um… well, it’s not full of people like you and me. You really have to be in the ‘military mindset’ to work for military companies.

That was the feeling I had. They are super direct, you know, super straight-to-the-point. Just answer ‘Yes!’ or ‘No!’ and the interaction is pretty bad… No interpretation. Someone gives an order, and you are asked to do something, you do that something and that’s it. I guess what I realised there was maybe I wasn’t the kind of person that would be super happy in this kind of environment. I really need contact, and also people who develop a little bit more what they feel about things, emotional thinking, or feeling thinking and not only ‘okay, I’m doing my job, and that’s it.’ Considering the violence stuff, you can have a military action that is not waging war (which is cool), but this doesn’t happen in this kind of area, there are only a couple of people that have a great impact on stuff. And I was trying to be one of these people! It was only for three months in Paris, so very short, but still by the end of the project we managed to deliver what we wanted to do. It was nine or ten years ago, now, so In 2006-7. Oh, shit! That was ten years ago! Wow…

Once during this internship, I met a guy who worked in a consulting company around financial and corporate savings—still on *épargne salariale.* We stayed in touch because he was really interesting, and he indicated to me that what I was doing in the human resources department of the army was linked with what he was doing in the financial industry as well, because of two projects he was working on in human resources and finance. Anyway, it gave me the wish to work more in finance. So when I was in

London, which is a huge financial city, I did my next internship in finance and asset management for Société Générale. I hated it. That was awful. I chose asset management because it was not like 'pure' finance. For me, it was a step into the 'real world.' It was like you were working with companies and helping them find some financing solutions, but you had a directness with companies. In comparison to trading and this kind of stuff when you're just in front of your computer and you're just sending bills, and that's all. But actually, when I arrived—three days after my first day—there was the Jérôme Kerviel story, and Société Générale started collapsing. Just three days after I started! And it was just so awful. Because one of my tasks during this internship was to calculate the performance of one of our funds every morning.

So I was logging in to Bloomberg, and I was making a lot of calculations, and I was telling my boss 'Hey, we are doing fine,' which means, 'Oh boy, we are earning a lot of money!' And that was it. I was not doing only this, but it was my first task every morning. That day… I logged into Bloomberg I did my calculations something like one-hundred times… and we were losing everything! I was telling myself, 'No, this is not possible!' I wanted to tell my boss, so I went to his desk, and was saying 'Hey Ed, (his name was Ed), I've got something to tell you'—and the guy was not giving any importance to what I was saying, because I was just the intern. So, for him you know, I was just a piece of crap. I was saying, 'Well Ed, this, and this and that,' and he didn't want to listen at all! But I knew that something was happening, I was saying to myself, 'oh shit, oh shit…' And we didn't know at that time that Société Générale was collapsing, and that there was a huge financial crisis. At that time, nobody had the

figures. So, for them, it was just like a normal day. Ed told me, 'Look, I have no time, please come back later.' And I was just freaking out so much, saying 'Shit what can I do?'

And I thought at the beginning that it was ME! I was thinking, 'Shit, maybe I did something wrong,' and so I went back to my desk and I said, 'This day is going to be long and awful…' Ten days after, we were in a market sales room with, you know, screens everywhere, and a guy just puts the sound on for one of the televisions, and all of the televisions said: 'Breaking news! Société Générale is collapsing! It's awful! It's a nightmare! Sell everything!' And everyone just stood up—one hundred people stood up in the room looking at the television—and my boss was just staring at me. I cried to him, 'I knew that! I wanted to tell it to you!' and it was too late. We lost everything. That was awful. And it was three days after the beginning of my internship, so just imagine the three months after… so… But it was super interesting. I learned a lot of things regarding finance, like how to deal with funds, how to diversify risk exposure, and so on. What I liked was the content—you know, it was super interesting, dealing with risk theory, trying to get some models that could help you to invest and diversify all of your savings, and so on.

What I didn't like was the way it was done. Like for instance, we had to take some money back from companies after the crash. So I was just calling them, saying 'Hey, hello, Michael? Last month I lent you three million dollars, but listen, tomorrow I'm taking it back!' Uh… what?! And that was super bad for the economy actually, and for

real life. And that was the way it was done. That was normal. 'I don't give a shit about what you're doing, because that was my money and I want it back.' And this is what I didn't like. But those were only two internships, I had four at the ESCP—one every year. You have nine months of studies, and then three months of internship. I did that in Paris, London and in Berlin, and in between I took a year for myself. I didn't want to do finance again (I said, 'Okay, well this is not for me') but at least I wanted to work on some project-oriented stuff like consulting, because I really wanted to change environment, clients and a lot of other things. For me, consulting was a perfect match to that, because as you change projects every three or four months, you can see a lot of things and you can discover really what you want to do.

So I took an internship in Paris again, around strategy. I wasn't very lucky, because they told me, 'Oh yeah, you're going to make strategies, that's fine,' and they hired me so I was super happy. But the first day, my boss told me, 'Oh you do know that in strategy you also have the part of restructuring?' You know, like firing people? 'Yeah, you know, that's not really my expertise,' 'But you did your first internship in human resources, so you know this kind of area, and you're keen on being with people! So you're going to see what it's like to really be with people in a company…' So I was doing that. It was one of the hardest times of my life. I was super young, only twenty-four years old, and I fired 288 people. Yeah, I'm smiling now, but I was not smiling at the time. So that was awful because I was not ready yet to do that: to break people's lives. That was way too young. Don't do that! No, but my job was not to fire them. I was working for an *actionnaire* where one company was sold to another. And the stakeholders bought this

company to make money. Our goal was to identify the productive areas, and when a department wasn't productive enough, we had to 'restructure' it. So I was not face-to-face with the people even though I knew a lot of them through what they were doing, but at the end my goal was just to save the company money.

During those six months, I learned more about consulting than I'd ever learned in my life, because it was so fast and super intense with a very small team. The people will put a lot of pressure on you, but they also teach you so many things because you're confronted with many kinds of issues. It was great for how to structure your ideas, how to talk to people, how to organise and how to deal with different activities within a company. For this time, it was super great. But then from the human perspective, it was awful. You come back to your place at night, and you say 'Okay, I know what I've been asked to do, but what I've been asked to do leads to firing two-hundred people, so…' It's kind of awkward. After that I took a break. I went to Berlin, and it was the time of my life. Berlin is an amazing city. Very booming. The thing with the ESCP is that we spend one year in each European capital, but it's like a group moving. So you really have a 'family spirit.' When you all gather in Berlin after a gap year, and you all arrive in the same city, and you know it's going to be your last year of studies, you have a great time with everyone—apart from German. The first three months, I understood nothing that the teachers were saying. While we were there, the first iPad from Apple was launched.

It was in 2009, right? So, imagine: at that time, people didn't have many smartphones, it was just the beginning—but then it was a revolution! Hah, I'm feeling so old here! But it was super interesting, all of this new technology, because I considered it would change the way people were living and communicating with each other. And I saw that: when you're abroad, far from your family, you're always finding new ways to get in touch with them. How you interact with them also changes. In Berlin I was using Skype, but the way you find new information sources through the iPad, for example, was something new: you have all of the internet with you in your pocket! We had a strange feeling that we were taking part of something that was gonna be big: and as I had to find my last internship, I was inspired to do something different. I wanted to work for a new technology company, because at that time everything was moving at an incredible speed. I found an internship in a small startup, and we were doing marketing campaigns on mobile devices. It was one of the first companies to do marketing on mobile, as smartphones were pretty new. We wanted to touch people through mobile. I did that for three months. We were making QR code campaigns with Fanta, it was great. They were the first to say smartphones will become something big, so we have to take your brand into the device. It was fascinating because we just had to invent everything, to create it.

Then came a moment in my life when I wasn't a student anymore! I didn't know what I wanted to do or why. I was thinking of staying in Berlin, because I loved the city, but for a private issue—let's consider it a 'boyfriend issue'—I had to move back to Paris. So I went back, and chose to work with Capgemini, a French consulting firm, in a

special technology department. It was marketing and sales but 'New Technology' marketing and sales. I know, it's not very sexy. I did that for three years, in partnership with MIT. We were producing three reviews per year on digital strategy and how companies would evolve in their organisation to fit with the new world that is coming from technology. We were working with Nestle and Coca-Cola. So. You know Eric? Yeah, he's a big man. After Berlin, when he moved back to Paris, he did that to setup his coworking space, Mutinerie. I remember: he was trying to explain to me what coworking was about, and I realised what it was when Mutinerie was opening. I took part in the opening of the space, helping them on the weekends, and I realised how cool it was! Because imagine: at that time there was only one coworking space in Paris although it was not really a coworking space, called Numa, and that was it. This was something new! When he explained to me, 'Oh, I'm going to open a coworking space,' even the word coworking meant nothing for me!

I heard about coworking through Eric and Mutinerie. Back then there were only a few spaces in Berlin, San Francisco and Paris. At Capgemini, I was always keeping an eye on what they were doing because it was super innovative, new and really refreshing for me. I liked coming to Mutinerie after work, and chilling with the coworkers from time to time. During my third year in Capgemini, I was getting fed up with what I was doing for several reasons. It was boring sometimes. For instance, one case I was working on was the technical system implementation of a bank. What I really hated was you were never free to choose who you were working for, and where you were working. Sometimes I had a mission in the south of Paris, and my boss told me I had to go back

to La Défense—one hour away—just for a ten minute meeting. I said I could do it by phone, but my boss insisted on seeing me in person, 'I know I'm super beautiful, but still!' Just imagine! I was taking the train for one hour, seeing this guy who was late for ten minutes, then going back for an hour again… It was bullshit! I couldn't stand it anymore. At the time they couldn't trust people to work from their place, or any other place. You had to be in your offie or the client's office. There was no middle point.

In the end, I felt like I wasn't bringing value anymore. I learned everything I wanted to learn around new technologies and the digital world, but the missions I had were very repetitive, so after three years (in 2013) I quit to pursue the things that I believed in, trying to bring more value to my life. I wanted to do something that could be real. At that time, Mutinerie was booming and the coworking market was too. Coworking spaces were popping up faster than ever in Paris. It was then that Eric met Stefano at the second European Coworking Conference in Berlin, and both of them having coworking spaces, they decided to find a way to exchange members. Eric explained to me, 'I think I'm going to develop a system where we can exchange members between spaces,' and I said, 'Hey, yeah! But you know what, that could also interest other non-coworking people. People in companies like me who want to go to coworking spaces!' So we were thinking about that, how we could not just exchange members of coworking spaces, but go beyond it for anyone to simply become a member of all the spaces. With Stefano's credit system, we realised that we could make something super cool. My touch was that we should take coworking to everyone in the work world, especially companies,

because we had to find a new area for work to take place. For me, from Capgemini, it made a lot of sense.

I quit my job, I took two weeks of vacation (in Paris, actually) then we started Copass. That was three years ago now. Wow… I'm so old now!'

GENESIS OF A WORK WORLD: PART III

ERIC VAN DEN BROEK

[COPASS COFOUNDER]

'The office—as we know it today—is the legacy of an old world. And so, the question is, how can we remake it today? Being familiar with new technologies, being aware of ecological imperatives, how would we redo the office if we could restart from zero? I want today to discuss how we have retaken the means of production in work: everyone can work on a computer, on a phone, on a tablet. These are the means of production, they are always with us. And so, in fact, today we have a progressive dissociation where work is no longer a physical place, but it is instead what we do. That is the basic

concept. When you try to imagine the conclusion of that, it could seem that we no longer need places! And here, I have some very bad news for you all: it's that you have been ripped off because you paid thirty euros just to come to this TEDx… when, maybe they didn't tell you, but all of these presentations will be put online as videos shortly! I am sorry to tell you. Voilà, I see you all are stooped by this analysis. Well, good: it's completely false. This is a tempting error for a company, because that would mean a substantial cheaper base cost—but it's just a myth. It is necessary to do things in the real world, after all. There are basic kinds of human confidence that we cannot surpass in the world of the internet.

And in fact, the internet—if it can be useful in any case—is best used as a touchpoint for the offline world, that then permits a collaboration online. It's this direction here that we should aim for. Taking a hint from Steve Jobs, he said himself at the moment when he was designing Pixar's logo, 'There's a temptation in our networked age to think that ideas can be developed by e-mail and iChat. That's crazy. Creativity comes from spontaneous meetings, from random discussions. You run into someone, you ask what they're doing, you say, "Wow," and soon you're cooking up all sorts of ideas.' That perfectly illustrates one of the needs for physical places: friction, a kind of unpredictability and the conflict of ideas. Voilà. So, the idea is that if we don't need the same places we once did, what places do we need? The answer, I have found, is in the useful metaphor of the ecosystem. Places should be understood as ecosystems including various groups: the biological beings that inhabit them, and other biological structures and conditions that include the climate, currents, geological structures, etcetera. And all

of that forms an environment that is more or less favourable to life, more or less favourable to the emergence of ideas. Because it's exactly the same thing for ideas. Places will become part of an ecosystem that mediate different skills, that will mediate different profiles and that will permit different ideas too.

So, ecosystems have three properties: the first is that they increase productivity. Because giving more efficient means of production will produce more efficient relations online of course, but also it will increase the energy that we can take from other people when we are in touch with them. That is a first thing which increases productivity. The second thing is that ecosystems will improve flows of collaboration [*fluidifier la collaboration*]. This is something very, very important. On the internet, we are soon going to reach a level where we will be blocked, because we are going to meet people less. It is also very important that we improve flows of collaboration because in doing this we create a sense of belonging [*appartenance*] and a community of people just like what we have here at the TEDx conference, where we all might find common points of interest and similarity. One has the impression that they are not alone in having innovative ideas. Collaborating with others will help them. It will put them in a climate of confidence from the beginning. The third point about ecosystems is that they generate innovation in confronting ideas. There is a theory developed by Stuart Kauffman, which is called the theory of Possible Adjacents. In biological evolution, innovation is born from the fact that there are an huge number of possible encounters, and from that come the enormous possibilities of evolution. And the accident will make

it such that, finally, the more you have possibilities to evolve, the more you have a chance that evolutions will arrive.

(I'm speaking to you all covertly, however… I know that creationists exist!) Hah! So applying these principles to a place, I came across very interesting literature elaborated by the Harvard Business review which discusses that a collaborative place should respect the 'Three P's:' first, Proximity. Now, what is proximity? It's not physical proximity, which is to say it's not the fact of being stuck one against the other, but it's rather the fact to have spaces of friction. Typically, in a workspace the coffee machine is a traditional space of friction between workers. The second point that one should follow is Privacy. It might seem contradictory with the first point. But, in fact, it isn't. Privacy is just the simple fact that, when one has the need to cut oneself off from others, to get some work done (because work time is divided between production time and elaboration, or collaboration time). Finally, there is Permission. That's to say that the environment should make it clear that it's not frowned upon to communicate; it's not frowned upon to go see one's neighbours; it's not frowned upon to take a coffee break or to arrive a little late because one had a conversation with others… So, these three points are very interesting, and we tried to to apply them when we designed our coworking space, Mutinerie.

Finally, it's important to note that places have a social function. There are social needs: to belong to something, to believe in something, to share something and to create something; and to have physical contact with others. With the situation of places in the

era of the internet, one could believe that individuals could stay alone in their homes. But individuals who stay home alone are those who dry out [*qui sèchent*]. We need therefore to re-create social contacts in real life. To finish, I will say that myself and my colleagues perceive places as experiences. A place is space for experience, and Mutinerie—our place—is an experience. We don't precisely know where we will take this project (all the better, really). We are currently experimenting. We put in place a *ruche,* that is a space to buy vegetables online then to come take them afterwards. In short, we are trying to go beyond the strict frame of 'work,' all the while creating the best conditions for it when we have to do it. I was speaking to you all earlier about coral reefs. In fact this ecosystem of Mutinerie, like any ecosystem, takes part in a much larger ecosystem. One that is extremely fertile: of fablabs, of open-source, of the internet. All of these new initiatives (which have been discussed at length during these TEDx talks) in fact, are in the midst of creating a new world that is beginning to become conscious of itself. Politically, we see it in certain protests from angry people, like the Pirate Party in Germany. In short, there is a whole group of signals which show that there is a global realisation [*prise de conscience*] of the existence of this class, and of this world.

And if this world here is still at the margins of a more traditional society—I wanted to finish in citing, rather in summarising with a quote from Jean-François Bizot, the founder of Radio Nova in '81 and the magazine *Actuel* before: *the margins today are the mainstream of tomorrow.* Thank you.' [Applause] (Van den Broek 2012)

OF CHILDHOOD HOMES AND DREAM HOUSES

These three vignettes, although from three people who present three very different attitudes in speaking (not overstepping, one could imagine in sequence: *the 'dreamer,' the 'doer' and the 'mystic'*), are concerned with an identical problematic: space. For Stefano, the dramas of space—beginning with spaceships—started in his youth, trying to find his place in an era when computers used to take up entire rooms. From many moments of enclosure in his father's computer room, to his renovated office, to his attempted coworking space experiment, we see a concise history of comfortable interior workspaces. His drive for collaborative work in a technological world, it could be thought, came from his lifelong history of intimate experiences of rooms with computers in them. If one wonders where a life's passion for shared workspaces might come from, a boy drawing crude spaceships would be a good starting point. These mystical and infinitely replicable line-boxes of encapsulation, drawn onto pages and pages with tireless childhood dedication (some crumpled up, some proudly guarded in a hidden stash) began a journey not moving from earth to space—but moving from paper to real life. The room-sized machines of his family and friends might be the next waypoint in spaceship trajectory. To a child, such gigantic whirring, flashing boxes that demand their space in a childhood home equally demand their own space of childhood curiosity. Because like other domestic objects such as well-shaped mattresses, worn-in carpets, favourite mugs and worn-out tableware, they occupy not only square feet, but also the interior spaces of a budding imagination.

For Sophie, dramas of space took on a nautical dimension. One has the impression that the overtired meeting rooms of an army administration building carried the pressures of undersea submarines to the surface: establishing possibilities for a cold and thick submerged sociality in the corridors of landlubbers. Under such tight conditions, one must duck under the pipework of interpretation, walking a narrow path between reinforced walls that kept emotions on the outside. Later, in a confined private office, one bank manager managed his time like his space: privately. Floor-to-ceiling glass shows that he is there, walking back and forth while on the phone, looking nervously at his wristwatch. And, looking up from her computer screen again, she might see him moving from behind his desk to wave back—but only getting up to shut the blinds, cutting her loose on the high tides of a cold sociality which, despite no longer working on deep-sea military craft, carries her to the heights of steep-drop vertigo in some London skyscraper. The market room, buzzing with the flashing chatter of international news channels and a calm, constant scrolling of green and red figures on the stock ticker, becomes flooded by financial failure. Later, still tethered to tides of corporate responsibility, she was pulled back and forth around Paris by the whim-blown sails of another high seas boss. Until finally, she leaps out of the stormy seas of expectation and fulfilment onto the sunny shores of an idealistic island community ready to found their meaning no longer in mysterious currents of capital, but under the sunny radiance of social happiness.

And for Eric, the dramas of space were things to be observed with ecological systems thinking. Beginning in floating coral reefs, he recasts the dull rhythms of the workday in planetary proportions, where the coffee machine is no longer a morning break centre: it has become, in this observer's eye, a site of friction for the tectonic plates otherwise known as human beings. Natural

formations who, in the natural history of a weekday, grind and grate against each other in an archaeological tragedy of force and tension. Eric tells us that, in fact, the audience is also subject to ecological analysis, consisting similarly of discrete mineral-based lifeforms who evolve thanks to the friction that, paradoxically, keeps them together. Dramas of space take place as a component of the cosmic drama, where interactions in the workplace can—much like lava flows in the Pacific Rim—form a solid foundation for a world that is still slowly emerging from dark and cloudy depths. Interestingly, this geological aesthetic of space goes one step further. If one does not partake in the dramas which space, like biological evolution, will ruthlessly furnish, one will dry up! Spaces then, go back to where he began, as we discover that the wetness of coral reefs is necessary for existential hydration. Without the flows and funnels of well-designed spaces, a human being will prune up like a raisin in the sun.

What we witness in these introductory texts is the birth of the startup's worldmaking project, in Goodman's terms of 'composition and decomposition' (1978: 7). Stefano explains the history of his relationship to work in computers, and from spaceships to shared office space his mini-biography presents a lifelong story of 'dividing wholes into parts and partitioning kinds into sub-species' (Goodman 1978: 7). From playing alone in his home computer room to collaborating remotely via modem, to moving into a workspace, we see the composition of new worlds made possible through ways of working together, along with the falling away of old worlds no longer practiced, no longer relevant. Sophie, in her handful of internships, is able to consolidate these disparate environments and office colleagues into a corporate culture she wants to avoid in the future, 'combining features into complexes, and making connections (1978: 7). Finally, Eric most clearly represents this feature of Goodman's world making through his 'application of labels:

names, predicates, gestures, pictures, etc.,' used in his TEDx presentation to claim knowledge on the coworking environment, a newly composed world he has become proficient in. Composition and decomposition is a solid beginning for the possibility of a new world, where by juggling features of the current one relationships can be established, parallels can be drawn and changes for the better can be imagined.

Pulling the strings of historical understanding through these three monologues, I aim to capture a glimpse into where the Copass startup came from. Because it was born from a small embryo: concerns for space. Although each of the main cofounders puts it in their own terms, experiences of space in the widest sense formed the foundations for what their startup would become. To cast a light on these dramas of spatial encounters from childhood excitements to adult disappointments is thus a way to grasp not just what the Copass project was about, but what it was in the midst of becoming. Launching a startup doesn't happen overnight: to take on the substantial risk of following a very specific vision for how things should be comes from a long life story of how things *were,* for those that decided to pursue what *could be*. Pictured in this way, Copass could be understood as a *space-making machine.* It was a tool to reshape the material conditions of the world along the imaginative contours of three very space-concerned people. It was an experiment to take the unsatisfactory spaces of modern life—sad offices, emotionless meeting rooms, soul-sucking coffee machines—and to refashion them in a new design. That design would be what the Copass project would try to install everywhere. In short, that design could be considered, in the words of Gaston Bachelard, an image of '*the dream house*.' And, becoming familiar with its interior, one must realise that 'an entire past comes to dwell in a new house' (1997: 5).

'Sometimes,' he writes, 'the house of the future is better built, lighter and larger than all the houses of the past, so that the image of *the dream house* is opposed to that of the childhood home' (1997: 61). Approaching a dream house, one must be aware of the feeling of the childhood home from which it gains definition. The waxy texture of wallpaper, the satisfying turn of a doorknob, the smell of the spice cabinet, the wet air of the basement, the plumes of dust and ancient wood of the attic—these are all elements that come to define why a dream house is the way it is. To live in a manor house, cottage or palace (like living in a photo studio, trading floor or corporate kitchen) is to dwell: to dwell physically, emotionally and using one's imagination, slowly synthesising certain facts of existence into the lived experience that would come to be known as *being there* (for a philosophical discussion of dwelling and building, see Heidegger 1977: 347-363, as well as anthropological elaborations by Ingold 2000, 2005). Dream houses all have their variants because of the infinite familiarities one can have growing up in their childhood one (enough, even, to move confidently in the darkness of a deep night). The opposition of childhood home and dream house is important, because pulled between the comfort of one and wonder of the other, we become stuck in the middle, drawn in both directions (towards both the familiar tactility of a lived life or the thin air of what could be). But it's never a one-sided tug-of-war, as at any one moment we 'descend to living close to the ground, on the floor of a cottage,' then later 'would like to dominate the entire horizon from a castle in Spain' (Bachelard 1997: 63).

The dream house of Stefano, Sophie and Eric was not just a business, it was also 'a cottage, a dove-cote, a nest, a chrysalis,' because 'intimacy needs the heart of a nest' and the dream house they were trying to build contrasted the failed intimacies of other real spaces (1997: 65). In this dream house, they wanted to establish a new intimacy of *people with people*, not wage earners with part-time

freelancers, or employees with bosses, or customers with managers—they wanted to build an intimacy that was not just professional. It would be an intimacy where, living under its roof, one would want to stay. Where, as Eric put it, 'it's not frowned upon to take a coffee break or to arrive a little late because one had a conversation with others.' And the more 'concentrated the repose, the more hermetic the chrysalis, the more the being that emerges from it is a being from elsewhere, the greater his expansion' (Bachelard 1997: 66). The more potential for resting in the sheltered intimacy of a dream house, the more magnificent changes could be realised. So spending extraordinary amounts of time to perfect small details of new Copass users' experiences was not a misapplication of productive energies, it was to water the garden of a startup-cum-space that, like the dream house, 'must possess every virtue' (Bachelard 1997: 65).

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard quotes several lines from the French poet Supervielle, who is 'inviting the entire universe to come back into the house through all the wide-open doors and windows' (1997: 66). He writes,

> Tout ce qui fait les bois, les rivières ou l'air
> A place entre ces murs qui croient fermer une chambre
> Accourez, cavaliers qui traversez les mers
> Je n'ai qu'un toit du ciel, vous aurez de la place
>
> — — —
>
> All that which makes the woods, the rivers or the air
> Have a place between these walls that believe to close in a bedroom

> Hurry, knights who cross the seas
> I have but one roof of the sky, you will have your place (1997: 66, my translation)

The house of Supervielle is so welcoming that even its landscape belongs to it, before any external world. In another poem he tells us,

> Le corps de la montagne hésite à ma fenêtre :
> “Comment peut-on entrer si l’on est la montagne,
> Si l’on est en hauteur, avec rochers, cailloux,
> Un morceau de la Terre altéré par le Ciel ?”
>
> — — —
>
> The body of the mountain hesitates at my window:
> “How can one enter if one is the mountain,
> If one is high up, with rocks, stones,
> A piece of earth altered by the sky?” (1997: 66, my translation)

This house is one that, by standing erect on its foundations, does not merely exist but has the will to see and the thrill of capturing the world through its sight. As Bachelard writes,

> Supervielle’s house is a house that is eager to see, one for which seeing is having. It both sees the world and has it. But like a greedy child, its eyes are bigger than its stomach. It has

> furnished us with one of those exaggerated images that a philosopher of the imagination is obliged to note right away with a reasonably critical smile. (1997: 67)

Copass was a dream house with the same itching desire: not only to look out at the world, but to capture it in its long and steady gaze. The world-changing vision of this startup was so strong that looking outward, it invited mountains to step in without asking, 'How can one enter if one is the mountain—a piece of earth altered by the sky?' Establishing a 'Copass Bank,' enrolling tens of thousands of people at the centre of a world movement, playing centre stage in the work world revolution, Copass was, in imaginative terms, 'like a greedy child, its eyes bigger than its stomach.' The connection of childhood home and dream house is a telling one for this startup because *experienced dissatisfactions for the world invited a new one to enter*, except it was one that—with its 'exaggerated images'—could never fit through the front door. Put simply, Copass was an impossible dream crafted from 'images of totality' that defined themselves against an unsatisfactory present world—which is, after all, 'simply how the imagination works' (Graeber 2009: 526). To the many critical minds who might look back at it, Copass could be received 'right away with a reasonably critical smile' as something just too wide-eyed and too gullible (Bachelard 1997: 67). Since the beginning, the ambitions from which it came were too big, too monumental, too drastic, too simple, too childlike.

While I wouldn't disagree, the last word is a criticism that I would rather consider as one of the startup's greatest strengths. Because in refashioning the world as a new space extending outwards, working from the basis of an idealistic dream to achieve something might just be an asset in a world otherwise marred by disillusionment and weighed down by the violence and desecration of its

inhabitants (and the stories we tell about them). Maybe, in this sense, being in a startup is a form of modern-day storytelling, where dreams for a better tomorrow are indeed something flighty, but through the airiness of their content, they could propel people through ways of thinking and living that would lift them up from states of despair or disillusionment. In other words, maybe the overly simple vision the cofounders tried to execute could be seen as a rehearsal of hope in practice—where the key to its value could very well be found in its impossibility. For, as Bachelard points out,

> Maybe it is a good thing for us to keep a few dreams of a house that we shall live in later, always later, so much later, in fact, that we shall not have time to achieve it. For a house that was final, one that stood in symmetrical relation to the house we were born in, would lead to thoughts—serious, sad thoughts—and not to dreams. (1997: 61)

The downside of a dream house is often that it is continually postponed for one reason or another. Perhaps it is delayed due to weather conditions, engineering problems, material deficiencies or financial obstacles. But the importance is not in actually achieving it or not, for by preserving it as something to continually work towards—a future that one can throw oneself into daily, in the routines of work and rites of wellness—it gives direction, momentum and perspective through its ethereal not-yet-present structure. The beautiful materials, the cosy nooks, the fully-stocked kitchen—and the unbelievable views it would offer. Looking out from the dream house that no one will ever enter gives all the lived-in houses of normal life a new glimmer. Or perhaps a new darkness. In either case, these three dreamers of dwellings, like the rest of you reading and myself, were people concerned with *making space for themselves* in particular ways. Picturing Copass as a dream house,

they were working to give themselves a long-needed upgrade from their current unsatisfactory accommodations. Their situation, therefore, reflects something peculiar about how we all live. Bachelard wrote on this well enough for me to close this investigation of imagination with one clear and compelling thought:

> Housed everywhere but nowhere shut in, this is the motto of the dreamer of dwellings. In the last house as well as in the actual house, the day-dream of inhabiting is thwarted. A daydream of elsewhere should be left open therefore, at all times. (1997: 62)

2

A SOCIOLOGICAL ENLIGHTENMENT

Copass and its federation of coworking spaces shared a continual, unabated obsession with doing sociology. That is, of rendering social structure relentlessly explicit in the form of communities (*OuiShare*), networks (*CouchSurfing*), tribes (*TribeWanted, Yes Tribe*), associations (*The Coworking Visa*), directories (*Coworking Wiki*), federations (*Copass*), franchises (*WeWork, Grind*), partnerships (*The Sharing Bros*), leagues (*The League of Extraordinary Coworking Spaces*), assemblies (*Sunday Assembly*, *The Food Assembly, General Assembly*), orders (*New Work Order*), schools (*School of Life*), habitats (*Cyberhippietotalism*), collectives (*W Kollective*), groups (*Coworking Europe*), chat groups (*Nomad List*), pirate bands (*Mutinerie*), beehives (*La Ruche Qui Dit Oui!*), cities (*New Work City, Village Underground Lisboa*) and homes (*Nomad House, NeueHouse*). These nomenclatures were paired with fashionable job titles such as 'community manager,' 'community engineer,' 'community builder,' 'connector' or 'collaboration catalyst.' The people I lived with partook in what I would call a sociological enlightenment, where in order to combat corporate work routines it

became necessary to reorganise within systems of production and consumption that would accommodate their desired lifestyle upgrades while staying plugged into circulations of capital. My informants zealously constructed new social organisations capable of housing new forms of society beyond (what they saw as) archaic corporate structures of the conventional work world. They achieved this by devising business plans and selling tech-based services. Copass was a case-in-point of this phenomenon, as one among dozens of other businesses seeking change *and* profit by redesigning society in its own proprietary way.

During my fieldwork, I came across an impressive array of folk literature offering social theories to help entrepreneurs and startups manage their businesses (written not by sociologists, but business professionals). Each of these books exposed and investigated *the social space* organisations provided their participants, making it visible and coherent to readers by way of anecdotal analyses, business models, historical overviews and more. Reading these books, one can begin to gain an understanding of just how this literature was at the forefront of a sociological 'enlightenment,' as each one takes the previously latent analytical structure of an organisation of people and puts it under a spotlight, transforming it from a feature of daily life into an object worthy of intellectual consideration. For example, here are selections from several books I encountered:

> (1) — *Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness* (2014)
>
> -Frederic Laloux (MBA, INSEAD)
>
> 'At both the top and bottom, organizations are more often than not play fields for unfulfilling pursuits of our egos, inhospitable to the deeper yearnings of our souls.' (2014: 4)

(2) — *The Coworking Handbook* (2014)

-Ramon Suarez (MBA, Solvay Business School)

'We're starting to figure out how to build new systems that support the needs of a growing group of people who are in charge of themselves, but still want some sense of structure and health. Coworking […] gives people a sense of being a part of something.' (2014: 18)

(3) — *The Coworking Revolution: Four Secrets to Successfully Working for Yourself* (2015)

-Matthew Dunstan (MBA, Australian Graduate School of Management)

'Coworking is like a halfway house for the corporate delinquent. It's a *place* and a *style* of working that combines independence and co-dependence. One that allows you to be a soloist, but still play with the orchestra.' (2015: 10)

(4) — *No More Sink Full of Mugs* (2015)

-Tony Bacigalupo (BS in Computer Science, University of Delaware)

'Building and maintaining a healthy culture in a shared space is an elusive task. […] Creating circumstances that invite and empower people to coexist in a healthy way with each other is the only way I know of to achieve a truly healthy workplace culture.' (2015)

(5) — *Startup Communities: Building an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in Your City* (2012)

-Brad Feld (MS in Management Science, MIT Sloan School of Management)

'Startups are at the core of everything we do. An individual's life is a startup that begins at birth. Every city was once a startup, as was every company, every institution, and every project. As humans, we are wired to start things.' (2012)

The steps for business success outlined in each book are loose strings of sociological observations. In the above quotes, organisations are variously interpreted as (1) 'playing fields' for ego games, (2)

intimacy zones to give 'people a sense of being a part of something,' (3) halfway houses for 'corporate delinquents,' (4) sets of 'circumstances' to create the conditions of 'healthy cultures' (like biological lab cultures) and as (5) results of the apparent human impulse to be a startup entrepreneur—'we are wired to start things.' These examples demonstrate the range of folk literature in my field produced by ex-MBA, ex-management and ex-computer science students who defined an intellectual avant-garde of the sociological enlightenment my informants partook in. Books on community architecture, startup design, network formation and market engineering I came across (in short, the sociological publications of folk experts), presented readers with countless viewpoints on the singular origin of some phenomenon or another. These works shared a common rhetorical strategy. Using buzzwords to attract attention, putting in place a mix of narrative elements and disjointed bullet-point thematics, each book would dive straight into a set of assumptions and worked to convince the reader that those assumptions were worth believing in. Once readers were hooked on the problems, they would want to seek (and eventually implement for their own businesses) the author's solutions: social-theoretical ones, in fact, where structural and functional elements were put in place to offer a purchasable answer to an artificial problem.

And it was in this way that my informants were discussing and exchanging society-*products,* because each book worked by convincing readers of its useful perspective on certain problems, then how its particular solution to those problems was the *best* amongst other thought-competition one could find on shelves of business and self-help sections of bookstores. Driven by competition to sell ideas, this market of folk-social theory was as diverse as it was anxiety-inducing because of the dizzying variety of pop-perspectives on social life available to purchase. From the above titles alone, we learn that 'startups are at the core of everything we do,' but also 'the deeper yearnings of

our souls' is at the core of everything we do (Feld 2012, Laloux 2014). One sentence notes how people connect with others by being 'in charge of themselves' then searching to 'be a part of something,' yet in another book we are informed that relations are articulated more like a soloist in an orchestra, 'independence and co-dependence' being essential (Suarez 2014, Dustan 2015). One author informs us that a great coworking community is one 'where the sink never gets a chance to fill up,' yet another claims the key is to work towards 'soulful organizations' where all participants collectively make 'meaningful decisions' (Bacigalupo 2015, Laloux 2014: 4).

In this environment of heightened sociological sensitivity, to sell a product became a feat of social theory as much as it did financial acumen. In fact, it was *more* important to tap in correctly to the ongoing trends in sociological self-identification of the time than producing something that could simply sell. So, the question of 'what did it mean to be together?' was difficult to answer, because with the melodramatic explication of newfound sociological terrain came constant anxieties of authentic togetherness that cast everything into doubt. What it meant to be together became a question to be answered by *companies selling products* or *organisations peddling messages* rather than philosophical enquiries calmly perused in a library. The daily agora of society-products was overcrowded and ringing with the cries of sellers trying to make their sales quotas. And the more venders that joined the market, the more confusing it all became to tell if one's community was a *good* community, if one's network was the *best* network, if one's collective was an *authentic* collective, if one's group was *meaningful*.

Such affiliation-based misery and social self-doubting gave rise to a distinct concern for *emphasising the concept of relationships* between people. This concern was expressed in Copass's

prerogative (written by Eric in a blog post), to 'start making meaningful connections' in a world where 'the internet is awesome, but *meeting people in real life* is what we like most' (Van den Broek 2014b, my emphasis). With this increased explicitness of social intimacies, Copass's foregrounding of real life relations was a means to engineer new intimacies with intense and 'meaningful connections.' In Eric's formulation, 'meeting people in real life' was now an achievement, not a normal fact of daily life, and for Copass this signified a departure from inexplicit body-to-body coexistence and an arrival into a glittery mechanical realm of healthy engineered relationships achieved through technical manipulation. Here, we reach an answer to our question. To be together, for the Copass cofounders and many coworking customers, was *to connect together*, preferably by meeting people in real life. With that acknowledgement, being face-to-face with others became, for my informants, something *absolutely explicit:* it was now an existential battleground where spectators could witness the ongoing proof-reciting of human intimacy. Being with others was no longer an invisible proxemics in the background of daily life. In this sociological enlightenment, *connecting* (i.e. networking, associating, mingling) was the sociologically specific default mode of existence. It became something stressful, something one ought to be concerned about.

Being with others became a trial-by-jury form of self-testimony with specific requirements and procedures—notably the assumption of the willing and well-qualified entrepreneurial subject, ordinarily prepared to *give* or *take* whatever connections might be present. This observation could be considered an ethnographic appendix to the entrepreneurialisation of the self discussed by Bröckling, for whom 'entrepreneurial activity is less a fact than a field of force' (2015: viii). Indeed, Copass's call for meaningful connections was not just the establishment of a new fact (the

sociological fact of connection as basic status of interpersonal relations), but moreover as Bröckling writes, it was 'a model for people to understand what they are and what they ought to be,' that 'tells them how to work on the self in order to become what they ought to be' (2015: viii). This will be discussed in detail below at the end of the chapter. So, this post-human digital-inspired connected individual was the phantasm that setup the initial conditions for Copass's project. With the assumption of this entrepreneurial self who connects to other configured subjects, the cofounders set to accomplish their mission: *to build a world that this kind of connecting subject could inhabit*. Reading the Copass blog, it becomes clear from the outset that the kind of sociology the cofounders were doing began (like any sociology) from a set of assumptions, with the universal principle of connectivity at its core. In one of the first blog posts outlining the vision of the startup, Eric explains the genesis of this concept in the origins of computation:

> Collaborative spaces have been popping up everywhere on the planet at an ever increasing rate. Coworking spaces, Fab Labs, hackerspaces, maker spaces and all sorts of spaces have become obvious for a lot of people. The flexibility, they offer, the relationships between people inside them, the way they let people experiment and learn matches the expectations of a new breed of people.
>
> They act like servers, connecting talents and know-hows locally. […] When we connected local networks of computers together we started building the internet. Suddenly, the knowledge that was accessible locally was accessible by people anywhere. We believe that the same can happen with people. Letting people and talents circulate between several spaces, making meaningful connections wherever they go, can ultimately create the internet of people. (Van den Broek 2013)

Copass wasn't building a product for just anybody. The startup was for 'a new breed of people,' an 'internet of people,' coinciding with Laloux's remark (above) about 'the next stage of human consciousness' (2014). These people were sociologically specific: they were connection-hungry consumers ready to exchange handshakes like data packets, to accept a business opportunity like downloading an attachment. In a 64-bit turn, this new breed of humans that Copass prepared itself for were pixelated figures for whom degrees of physical intimacy had become equivalent to speeds of data exchange between computers. People had been rendered explicit as storage units (to whom knowledge is 'accessible') that 'circulate,' that exist within a certain engineered 'infrastructure,' on which, Eric suggests, 'a new generation of workers is going to rely to get their work done.' And that is the confirmation: the new breed of Copassing humans are the functional equivalent of software programs. Like software, each of these humans is unique (as laid out in their genetic and historical programming codes), has productive capacities (that use rational processes to 'get their work done'), operates under potentially higher levels of efficiency (by running on a higher-speed server, e.g., a coworking space) and communicates with other programs (which, like two programs on a server, gain their mutual orientation by 'connecting talents and know-hows locally').

This new breed of people—better understood as a prescriptive sociological thought experiment—needed a home to live if Eric's theory was going to have any substance. And as such, Copass dedicated itself to *supplying that world* to produce the new breed, a next-generation digital location-independent entrepreneur, in order to achieve success. The startup would incubate an entire universe to house its new breed of science fiction figures, putting in place everything necessary for the coming of the new messiah: the upgraded human being of Mankind 2.0. And this is what made Copass, as much as they might call themselves entrepreneurs, also a group of secret sociologists.

The machinations they were putting in place with their website, their events, their photographs, etc, can be more clearly understood as doing sociology than as doing business. For Copass was wrapped up in the revolution led by its coworking forefathers—specifically Mutinerie, the coworking space Eric launched in 2011 and Cowo360, the Roman space Stefano started that same year—a sociological enlightenment obsessed with rendering basic, invisible, unthought of human relations into products that could be marketed and sold to an audience who believed they needed to buy in.

In what follows I explore one society-product using an example from Mutinerie: the *community*. As has been suggested, rather than solving for underlying problems of loneliness, this social form was one among many others created to sell to a market. And I found that there was a price to pay for community membership besides the cash fee: a new purchased awareness of oneself where 'acting entrepreneurially is the very condition of participation in social life' (explored in Chapter 8, Bröckling 2015: viii). 'Moved by the desire to stay in touch and the fear of dropping out of the society of competition,' Bröckling writes, 'people answer the call to be entrepreneurial by helping to create the very reality it already presupposed' (2015: viii). Just like a young aspiring startup, in the case of personal loneliness you had to pick yourself up by the bootstraps to become more competitive in the search for companionship. Being together was about buying into a community of meaningful connections to achieve *emotional and psychological success*. If you were lonely in the position of one's own life manager, it wasn't anyone else's fault but yours—and this is what the secret sociologists didn't want you to know. Just like real sociologists, they were selling you an agency that was never yours to begin with.

MY ARRIVAL IN COWORKING

‘À L’UNISSON.’ the sign gleamed while I stood at the corner, waiting for the light to change. The black glassed-in terrace of this typical Parisian bistro glimmered in the summer sun—but it was still too early for anyone to enjoy the sunlight. Looking through the window, I could see a morning crowd of old men, hunched over their espresso cups, canes leaned against the counter. Papers waved in the air, the bartender watching BFM while polishing silverware. A woman moved in front of me, and my attention snapped back to the street, still waking up after rushing out from my flat to be on time for my first day at work. I rubbed my eyes and threw my satchel over my other shoulder as I traversed the crosswalk mulling over the bistro name: ‘l’Unisson…’ This morning was the first day I would begin my participation in the society of entrepreneurs. They called this a coworking space, and it was my first day to work in one.

An abandoned lot stood bare, plaster walls covered in graffiti. Dirt and concrete foundations were grown over in weeds. I walked by a quiet rundown fruit shop, a closed old Chinese restaurant, a hardware store—the smell of sawdust lingered over the sidewalk, two men stood at the door, arms crossed, discussing the details of window installation. Next, a glass-fronted hair salon that seemed unchanged since the 1970s. A

sun-bleached poster of a woman in a fashion shoot leaned against the window, Chinese script written vertically by the door. A large white boxed-in apartment building stood boldly over the street, dark behind the rising sun. Burnt oil smell hit me as I passed two kebab shops, doors ajar, with metal trolleys on the street—delivering produce for the kitchen. I passed under a black awning, shading grey vinyl-covered windows. There was no name or sign, or street number. I kept going, but the numbers had gone too high —I was looking for 29 Rue de Meaux.

Turning back, I came to a stop in front of the grey-and-black storefront at what should've been 29. Looking up from the address I noted, I faced myself reflected in a recessed double-door entrance treated with a one-way mirror. 'MUTINERIE,' scrawled in a faux-handwritten black typeface leaped out from the yellow piece of paper it was printed on, affixed to the door. The head of a cartoon pirate smirked next to the name, donning a red bushy beard and black pirate hat. Putting my notebook away, 'l'Unisson' hit me again—I looked back at the street: this morning the neighbourhood was singing in a unison of sights, sounds, smells and the slow routines of Parisians starting their day. But I didn't understand how Mutinerie fit in. Clambering around in my satchel, I looked back at my awkward reflection in the one-way mirror; the smiling pirate made me feel uneasy.

I pulled at the door, but it stuck. I tried again—it wiggled back and forth but was decidedly locked. Leaning in, I put my hand over my forehead and peered through the mirror to see if there was someone inside who could let me in. Before my eyes adjusted

there was a click and the door budged open. Walking in, the room glowed with colourful cheer and muted acoustic guitar music. It looked like an independent café: walls painted in bright yellow, a ramshackle wooden bar separated a salon area with communal dining table and old rustic couches from a kitchen decked with shelves of teas collected in old glass bottles, model ships and an old provincial clock leaning against the wall. Two groups of people were huddled around the room talking at low volumes—one at the corner of the dining table, sharing a pew-style seat, another sitting on some old blue stitched chairs, looking at a laptop they had set on a treasure chest.

A young man looked up from behind his laptop at the bar. Wavy blond hair and blue eyes, he smiled and said hello. I walked up to him slowly—trying not to break the calming atmosphere—and asked if Eric and Sophie were there. The man nodded, acknowledging that they were there, but he wasn't sure if I could see them; he wasn't the space's manager, he was just watching the front door for a moment. He told me politely to sit somewhere until the manager came back, who could take me to the back room, the 'coworking room.' I put my satchel on a bench and wandered around café area, inspecting its quirky objects. Turning towards a stone staircase, I noticed something peculiar hung on the wall: a collection of polaroid-style printed photos hung in series on loose strings by clothespins. I walked up, lifting up various photographs and reading their text. They were black and white headshots of people, marked with their names and careers in a thick black marker.

The manager walked in from the back, and was quietly filled in by the man behind the bar. He walked over to me, introduced himself as Guillaume, and remarked that this was Mutinerie's 'Member's Wall,' where everyone who was currently subscribed to the space had their photo posted for others to see. He explained this was done for the practical effect of being able to remember people's names, as well as demonstrating the diversity of people and professions at the space. And he was right, looking at the collection of faces and one-word career categories gave a vivid impression of diversity, achieved through the aesthetic of replicable, fill-in-the-blank white glossy cards. Professions included developer, designer, translator, consultant, product manager, interior designer, game designer, researcher, marketing student, artistic director, community manager, copywriter and many more. Stacked one against each other in a grid format, the Members Wall gave the impression of a complete group of people, fully-assured of their lives and competencies together under one roof, waiting for others to join and become subsumed in its vision of completeness.

Guillaume led me through a doorway into the 'coworking' room. I looked up at the entrance and saw a life-size antique sailing ship wheel that was hung square above the doors. It was a fine polished wood with eight large spokes and shiny brass joints. I wondered what kind of rough seas it had steered through, or dangerous storms it had survived—even if it was more likely fabricated as an ornament. In either case, here it was, a sentinel above the keypad secured door to 'coworking,' serving as a daily symbolic souvenir of direction, change, camaraderie and community (the name of the

space means 'mutiny' after all). He then led me through into the room, where a quiet hum of the heating system smoothed out the atmosphere as I stepped in.

It was a large open space with an old iron glass ceiling and bulky sliding metal doors, brilliantly lit by an elevated iron and glass ceiling. Draped underneath it was a white triangular piece of canvas (like a sail), held in place with rigging made of old ropes holding up several pieces of cargo—which were, in this case, potted plants. Desks of different shapes and sizes were arranged casually around. A square table here, an old industrial carton there, many desks were fabricated from wooden boards on carpenter stands, with others that were ergonomic, contemporary, black worktables. The centrepiece was a ping-pong table covered in laptops and paper printouts—people leaned on it as they were typing, clicking, or checking their phones. Glasses reflected blue screen glare, and heads quietly bounced to music on headphones. These, I gathered, were the coworkers.

THE AESTHETICS OF TOGETHERNESS

A nautical inspiration was crucial in the branding and identification of Mutinerie since its founding. This sea-worthy identification struck me as something singular about the space, as its objects, website narratives and brand mascots all participated in completing the story. As Eric was one of Mutinerie's cofounders, his Vernian inspiration was a cornerstone of the space's identity like it also

was for Copass. But at Mutinerie, a taste for adventure and high-seas rebellion was presented much more clearly. It was obvious to any visitor that this wasn't just a shared office, something else was going on here: there was a concern with the identity of the particular community they were in the midst of building. The pirates they were identifying with were built into the brand landscape physically, so that people weren't mere members of a community of independent workers, but were part of a band of buccaneers sailing rough seas, likely pursued by certain royal authorities (corporate managers?) to lock them up in some prison (the 9-to-5 office job). One of their blog posts describes their first space, before their current location, as a 'noble vessel' [*noble navire*] with them as *'pirates'* sailing the seas. The blog post continues,

> Pirates often had the habit of colouring their own boat when they would capture it. It was necessary to give them the determination required for boarding other boats in high seas. This was the state we found ourselves until the glorious 15th of December 2011: drifting, but determined to take possession of a new galleon whose holds were full of gold, gunpowder and rum. On the 15th December 2011, we put our hand on our new boat; a beautiful beast of more than 400m2. (Mutinerie 2017, my translation)

But as beautiful as the beast was, like any good pirate ship, the true importance was not the vessel but the intensity and closeness of its crew. The post continues, 'Our community is our bedrock much more than our space. Everything we've built we owe to the community' (Mutinerie 2017, my translation). And here we find the central ingredient of every coworking space that I visited: the *community*. Speaking with managers or coworkers at any of the fifty spaces I visited, the unanimous answer to the question 'why do you like it here?' or 'what makes this space unique?' was the

community. This generalisation, an overused, imprecise word referring to a collection of people who shared a space with others, reflected itself in a kaleidoscopic variety of shapes and sizes. Some communities were dry and calm, with people existing in the same room but not speaking to others. Some were wild and vivacious, with bustling movements of people moving in and out, phone chats at high volume, presentations given in the same room as focused workers. And there was everything in between. But what was curious, was that on Copass I found a large collection of coworking spaces struck a happy medium, with a specific kind of sociality often indicated by 'Member Walls' that housed collections of space subscriber photographs.

Copass's coworking spaces all shared a domesticity that couldn't be replicated in café environments. I wondered for a long time where this particular creature comfort came from. Was it the whirring sounds of an espresso machine, the soft hum of background conversations, the pitter-patter of laptop keyboards, the soft colours or softer couches, the feeling of home at work (with dishwashing machines and refrigerators, ping-pong tables and dartboards) or something else? The problem with these materials was that they were also present in other types of spaces in similar arrangements, be they bars, coffeeshops, bookstores, student common rooms, libraries or startup offices. I realised that what made many coworking spaces special (with a cool vibe, or good feeling, as my interlocutors might put it) was an ongoing coexistence of human beings with their corresponding Members Walls: *the printed human faces of those that worked in each space*. It was a way of ritualistically sealing spaces in their own brand universes through a visual confirmation of its proprietary faces. Faces that were displayed on walls by entrances, café bars and dining spaces, as if to remind both current members and newcomers that the coworking space succeeded not just because of the people standing around talking or drinking coffee, but also because of the images of

people stuck on the wall watching over them. Here, one could point and find the *community* of the space visualised for all to see. Frozen and set apart, these visages materialised and made explicit what was otherwise ephemeral: people coexisting side-by-side.

The iconographic presence of printed faces in interiors is nothing exceptional. Ever since Mesopotamian and Assyrian structures, civilisations have inherited more contemporary practices of filling rooms with the presence of distinct, invisible others: Jesus Christ in prayer or Mary and child framed above the dining table, or Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong Il at the front of a schoolroom (see Sloterdijk 2009: 422-3). What marked each coworking space as a peculiar 'community'-based locality—along with primary schools and kindergartens—was the use of printed collections of coworkers' faces. Stacked in rows on a wall, with names or professions scribbled nearby, they illustrated to visitors the variety of well-accomplished, ideally diverse (and thus economically competitive) people present there, inspiring others to complete themselves by joining the space, paying a subscription on the route to more fully know oneself as well as reminding them of their own inadequacy (as someone who might be working out of their own home, not networking, not yet *connected* to the right hubs of the right people). And to the space's members, these photos reminded them who they were as accomplished workers collectively on the market for new business (lined up with their competitors, clients and customers) as well as reminding them that they could, at any time, open up the faces of others in the space like clicking on their digital social media profiles.

The principle of connection was elegantly displayed in these arrays of photos: where a group of people who had already taken entrepreneurial control of their lives only had to connect efficiently in order to succeed. But of course, these faces were little more than the fixed representations of the

flesh-and-blood bodies who walked around the space. Juxtaposed against their photographic counterparts on the wall, the mutineers of Mutinerie were in motion, always in the middle of incomplete processes (finishing lunch, washing dishes, working on a report, in a conversation, mid-stride between the café and a conference room). Their constant movement contrasted the stillness of their pinned-to-the-wall poltergeists, fixing Mutinerie's Members Wall as a key item in the space's aesthetics of togetherness, alongside its pirate ship wheel, its antique bottles, its faux sailing mast and pirate mascot logos. Being a member of Mutinerie was the result of daily synthesis of these disparate elements, the physical result demonstrating how coworking members were right in their responses that the unique element of their experience was the community in each space—because the coordination of these elements in ordinary work-life was achieved differently everywhere (each space mobilising its own proprietary recipe).

The kind of community I discovered working with Copass, that the founders also most appreciated, was frequently accompanied by Members Walls. CoworkLisboa, a favourite spot in Lisbon, had a wall of A4-sized black-and-white professional photographs of its members stacked against a black wall in its workspace. Huckletree, an East London coworking space, had a pin-board with film photos printed of each member, accompanied by each person's name or Twitter handle in marker. (Its newer second space used an external company to print these photos, which were collectively tacked up in the kitchen next to a job board). Ideia, a space in Lisbon's business district, had A4 printouts of each person in a profile format, with more room for information about each person's business skills and interests, even with space for their company's logo. La Cordée, a chain of coworking spaces on Copass, had similar photo walls in many of their French locations. These were placed on slack lines of rope with clothespins like in Mutinerie. Each of these spaces offered

members a different aesthetics of togetherness to achieve the effect of community: each with its own branding, colour scheme, events calendar and marketing rhetoric that plugged people into exclusive brand galaxies.

AN UPDATED DISCIPLINARY REGIME

Even though community was a general term used in a wide number of contexts (i.e., product variations), when people would use it, they would reference their own concrete experiences of the word—generated from the combination of materials in each coworking space—and as such, community took form first and foremost in these spaces as successful results of sales leads. So, for example, Mutinerie was not just a space for independent workers working together, but of mutineers who found solace in each other's company on a rogue ship in the rough waters of digital capitalism. This was no mere group of freelancers working together, but *'mutins'* who were 'free together' (this was the space's motto). This difference was more than just pedantic: for customers, the presence of a community in coworking spaces did not respond only to basic needs (of a pleasantly quiet room to work in, or water cooler conversation). Over time, I learned that community was the key to a full, concrete realisation of oneself as a being in a distinct and well-defined society-product. A folk term that expressed this notion was 'self-actualisation' of the Maslowian kind, as written by Eric in an article for the largest coworking media outlet, DeskMag (Van den Broek 2011, see Maslow 1954).

Presenting a 'coworking pyramid of needs,' Eric suggests that good spaces begin with 'physiological needs, then progresses to safety needs, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization.' In his pyramid model, community has nothing to do with the first two levels of 'basics' and 'safety.' These include having an appropriate material infrastructure ('a reliable wifi connection, a comfortable desk, office equipment, storage spaces, food and drink') and 'trust between coworkers' not to abuse or steal these materials. Level three (Love and Belonging) necessitates 'a community of people united by common values and lifestyles,' and level four (Esteem) upgrades the idea to 'a community that supports you […] to start expressing yourself personally.' And here we see something suspicious: the community, on the uphill battle to self-actualisation, requires *first* a certain material infrastructure, *second* a set of common values and lifestyles and *third:* the ability to support unique individual expression. It seems, under this formulation, at the end of it all that a community is something designed to support each person's own ability to fully express themselves in the most singular way possible.

This is because the final level of the pyramid (Self-Actualisation)—Eric suggests—is 'the one we are all struggling to reach for our communities and ourselves!' His accompanying graphic distills the notion of community down to its essence: not the bringing together of people, but, rather, the production of a gallery of viewers to witness *one's complete self-expression*. Self-actualisation granted from coworking communities achieved 'the solitary confinement of every individual with an interconnected bubble' (Sloterdijk 2011: 205). Being together was actually an exercise in being the most completely with oneself, by self-expressing in earshot of a well-behaved and attentive audience that kindly awaited the performance. From an analytical perspective, this was the disciplinary exercise that Eric coined above as 'making meaningful connections.' In working to

bring people together, coworking space communities were bringing each *person* together on an individual level: consolidating their own identity to be clearly expressed in moments of self-actualisation, which was simply another way to say self-explication. These communities, while fighting the good fight to bring people together, instead participated in processes of self-estrangement *by encouraging individualism as a maximal, universal human goal.* One that, Eric emphasises, 'we are all struggling to reach.'

This vision was achieved by Copass as well. On the About Us page of the company's website, large white text states, 'Moving between collaborative spaces, we saw the need for a more fluid user experience: global coworking, without the hassle. We're a small team supported by an incredible community. Join the men in blue' (Copass 2017b). This is laid over a dimmed composite image, a 12x7 grid of people in blue uniforms smiling into the camera. These people, it seems, are part of the metaphorically-wide 'Team' (one meets the team by glancing quickly over their vignettes) as well as the 'incredible community' which aesthetically supports the text, and practically supported the Copass cofounders in their world-changing project. This grid is a digital version of the Members Wall, whose digital translation was copied from the virtual Members Wall on Mutinerie's website designed many months before. (Except that here, the people photographed were not necessarily paying customers, just attendees at conference events made to *look* like members). As Eric founded Mutinerie and then Copass, his philosophy ran through both, as did his visions of community, so its aesthetic similarity is unsurprising. In a contribution to the startup's blog, a prior Copass intern-turned-'community engineer' extends Eric's comparison to Maslow's hierarchy in her own words:

> […] members who fully immerse themselves in the community will feel that they've stopped pretending to be anything they're not. They come to work in the morning and it doesn't matter whether they're wearing shorts or a suit that day, they're themselves no matter what. Beyond that, the people around them are inspiring them to constantly grow in the ways they want to develop. This combination of factors leaves them free to pursue their purpose. (Collins 2015)

In a constitution I saw written on the wall of a London coworking space (that is, in both senses, writing on the wall) the author confirmed her convictions in proclaiming:

> This is a place where you bring your whole self to work.

Suddenly, in these quotes, we realise an incredible pressure to be *someone* in a high-stakes game of choosing 'shorts or a suit' for work, because it is no longer simply choosing an item of clothing: it is a crucial ingredient in the all-too-serious game of preparing one's 'whole self.' We find an assumption that, unless one is immersed in a community, one might still be pretending to be something they're not. We see that people are assumed to need to grow under the motivation that life is only good when 'filled [constantly? to the brim?] with purpose and pleasure.' In her post, the author lists a number of questions to confirm this condition of community-immersion: 'Am I inspired and productive? Am I happy here? Do I know what I'm doing here? Am I being myself?' (Collins 2015). Asking and answering these questions in the context of coworking

communities might seem to do a service, reducing underlying tensions of self-apprehension and nervousness, or helping one feel more confident. It might seem to lay the groundwork for a new version of freedom, and it did. A freedom that required intense self-examination, applying analytical 'violence' to the self to drag it into the open, in order to make it *known* (Sloterdijk 2016: 152).

The freedom expressed by Copass and coworking communities I visited was often claimed to be the peak of human experience, the most ideal achievement anyone could hope for. This 'freedom to be yourself,'—to 'bring your whole self to work'—came from 'inspiration from community,' the author concludes, similar to Eric for whom a community was a means to self-actualise (Collins 2015). But instead of being a success story of community engineering, I suggest this freedom, or self-actualisation, was the fullest expression of the entrapments of loneliness in the constant, cumbersome pressure to 'be yourself.' The freedom Copass called for at the beginning of this chapter in its slogan 'I AM FREE,' was *not* a negative freedom that liberated people from their corporate shackles. It was a positive freedom that called for new forms of self-understanding through new techniques of self-mastery. As Isaiah Berlin has argued, positive liberty is derived from 'the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master,' and for the sociologically enlightened entrepreneurs this meant (at least according to the above author) to stop 'pretending to be anything [you're] not' and to 'be yourself' (Berlin 1971: 131). To quit pretending and to finally become one's whole self—or as Berlin puts it, one's own 'transcendent, dominant controller,' managing an 'empirical bundle of desires and passions to be disciplined and brought to heel' (Berlin 1971: 134).

Achieving enlightenment with one or another society-product was just to adhere to an updated disciplinary programme more insidious and psychologically demanding than the previous corporate

one. Urgent calls to 'be yourself,' to seek 'meaningful connections' and 'to bring your whole self to work' elicited symptoms of a new form of subjectification, coined by Bröckling as the 'entrepreneurial self' (2015: 21). Because the transformations implied in these phrases concern, as Foucault writes, neither 'the representations that men give of themselves' (such as as happily 'being yourself') nor 'the conditions that determine them without their knowledge' (such as not being able to bring one's 'whole self to work'), but instead *'what they do and the way they do it'* (in Rabinow 1984: 48, my emphasis). Calling for new discipline that shapes daily life, the point of these texts was never to help people find happiness in their own representations, or to help them deal with forces beyond their control. It was to craft new ways of living through an aspirational paradigm where methods of self-improvement were applied to objects that previously had no distinction or need for improvement. As Bröckling writes, 'That the self is an inner space to be explored, developed and cultivated is not self-evident. It is the effect of a specific regime of control' (2015: 9). When the above author urged readers to 'feel that they've stopped pretending to be anything they're not,' there is suddenly room for concern: am I pretending? As she asks, 'Am I being *myself?'*

At this point it is clear to see why this regime of control can be categorised under Goodman's category of worldmaking called 'weighting.' Weighting is a shift of emphasis from the current world to something different in a new world. 'What counts as emphasis,' Goodman suggests, 'is departure from the relative prominence accorded the several features in the current world of our everyday seeing' (1978: 11). And by moving the relative prominence of social interaction to the complete explication of the self—'Am I being *myself?*'—one can see how the coworking world prepares a new terrain for people to emphasise their own well-being, which could otherwise be

understood as an emphasis on their own aspirational subjectification to a new disciplinary system. Because now the emphasis was placed so heavily on the correct performance of one's own identity, questions of 'pretending,' of belonging, of desiring, of striving became front-and-centre as a game of doubts that before might have just been present in the back of one's mind. What we see in a world 'where you bring your whole self to work' is how ratings of 'relevance, importance, utility, value often yield hierarchies'—and the importance attributed to the correct performance of one's self, in this new world, was elevated beyond what it was previously (Goodman 1978: 12).

I qualify this kind of subjectification as aspirational because the entrepreneurial self is not an ideal type or real person I met in the field. That it is aspirational is to emphasise how it was a *'real fiction'* (Bröckling 2015: 20). It was a set of principles that shaped the action and self-governance of my informants that continually *ought* to be fully realised. Bröckling elaborates, proposing that this entrepreneurial discipline is,

> a highly effective *as if*, initiating and sustaining a process of continual modification and self-modification of subjects by mobilising their desire to stay in touch and their fear of falling out of a social order held together by market mechanisms. The entrepreneurial self is a subject in the gerundive—not something that exists but something that ought to be brought into existence. (2015: 20-21)

The *gerundive attitude* of this sociological enlightenment prepared the groundwork for what Copass was going to offer its customers: not a world today that was better, but the promise of one coming

tomorrow. The startup's entire universe was one 'highly effective *as if;'* it was a *'real fiction'* that worked by disciplining oneself today for its eventual, awaited-for arrival. The enlightenment presented in this chapter predestined the universe Copass was trying to bring about because of its attention to 'not something that exists but something that ought to be brought into existence.' This is the drive that the ex-Copass intern refers to as inspiration from being in a community or that Eric refers to as self-actualisation, but what I would refer to as a form of millennial discipline. Rather than exercising discipline towards a normative goal, discipline offered by proponents of this enlightenment was pregnant with hope for *what could be tomorrow* if one works (continually) today. No matter if, today, you are not your whole self at work, because there is always a place somewhere where you *could* and, indeed, still *ought* to be your whole self. Every day is full of improvements toward that goal, which means even if you do feel to be your whole self today, there will always be room for doubt because there is always still room for self-improvement.

In short, I found that, contrary to my informants, joining a community and earning one's freedom—like in the startup's marketing slogan, 'I AM FREE'—was not at all about casting aside a disciplinary regime. It was about *buying into a new one.* A regime that, if one paid the daily financial and affective price, could even turn the most average of people into what they ought to become: the most spectacular of heroes.

3

FROM HUMANS TO HEROES

Getting to know the entrepreneurs and developing the early stage of our work relationships in my first weeks, as the new Chief of Communications I wanted to translate the humorous energy I witnessed between the cofounders into the marketing materials used to sell our service. What I realised was although we had a strong comedic rapport internally, this humour needed to be tempered through sales projects and products rather than the other way around (i.e., commercial goals situated within a comedic communications strategy). Humour needed to be channeled to serious ends in our customer relationships. The particularities of how we used this tension to communicate to customers elicited a new kind of figure that was not merely a customer, but a *hero*. The startup was not just selling a service—it reconfigured its customers as heroic individuals, just a click away from amazing experiences in Barcelona, Rio or Bali. The heroic configuration of the user was such that to 'become an Adventurer,' as we phrased it, was as simple as a flat payment to Copass of €299 per month. 'Who in their right mind would refuse such a bargain?' was the thought

process behind this: €299 to work in hundreds of coworking spaces around the world with no limits. €299 to 'open new horizons and discover new possibilities,' as one newsletter put it. As a heroic (or in this case, potentially heroic) individual, the startup's marketing rhetoric created a conundrum where refusing such an offer would be ludicrous.

'To hero' the customer was a strategy that, in my early attempts writing copy for Copass, repeated itself again and again. The first example of heroing a customer came from Eric, who received an email from a friend and fellow coworker called Christophe at Mutinerie using the Copass service. Christophe wanted us to cross-promote his company, and as we wanted to profile a 'hero' this was a symbiotic opportunity. So Eric decided to interview him by email, and to post the interview on the startup's blog. Besides the fact that he was an active Copasser, Christophe's story was relevant because his company's product was a tool that configured customers as heroes just like we aspired to. His company produced autonomous drones that could follow and film users on-the-go, usually used for outdoor sporting activities (such as skiing, snowboarding or cycling). Through Eric's questions, Christophe was presented as a true hero on his own terms. An 'autodidact' fond of software development since he was five years old, he founded his own software company that—in a strikingly specific example—'developed a safety-critical component for the [Airbus] A350 where a [software] bug can cause crash and death.' This heroic figure, in control of the fine line between life and death, raised money for his new drone that reached $600,000 in just one week. After this biography and mini-advertisement for his product and fundraising campaign, Eric moved to discuss Christophe's use of Copass, mentioning he was 'one of the first Copassers ever' (strengthening the connection of customer-based heroism and the startup).

To top off the interview, Eric gave me several small sections of text that I could work with to craft a brief introduction. Amongst these, he included a phrase after mentioning Christophe's autonomous drone, which I left in the final blog post: 'This drone can turn anyone into a hero!' This encapsulated the tension maintained in the text between humorous suggestion and serious, practical benefits. Because of course buying an autonomous drone would not transform the customer into a heroic individual capable of forging world peace, suddenly gifted with powers of super-intelligence, telekinetic foresight or super strength. But it did offer the potential to *represent* oneself heroically: the drone shoots stabilised high quality video of the user on a mountain bike riding down dangerous terrain. When combined with skilled editing and dramatic music, the customer can craft a representation that might be deemed by peers, when posted on YouTube or shared on Facebook, as heroic.

This exaggerated techno-heroism was juxtaposed against what was, in form and content, a serious interview. Eric had envisaged this as the first in a series of blog posts we could develop called 'Meet the Copassers.' It would enable people to become familiar with archetypal customers of Copass. Not just how they used it, but the types of people that associated with the startup in the first place, telling stories of their lives, ambitions and achievements—in other words, 'heroes' of the startup. The interview was straightforward: beginning with a quick 'who you are and what you're working on,' it discussed how Christophe's team used Copass to be productive and achieve their goals. This article was composed of serious, useful information that other readers could learn from in educating themselves of the relevance of the startup and its services. But by beginning the article with the statement that his product 'can turn anyone into a hero' (emphasised by the fact that the protagonist—an 'accomplished, passionate multi-entrepreneur' is apparently a hero on his own

terms), there was a joking juxtaposition that tempered humour into a useful marketing tool. Initially the title I gave to this post was: ‘Meet the Copassers: Christophe and his Amazing Autonomous Drones.’ Following-up from the serious tone of voice the team decided on for a recent ‘Summer Discount’ newsletter, I decided to stay straightforward and to get the point across in the first sentence. Eric reviewed this, however, and advised that I change it to make the article more exciting to readers. The revision read as follows:

> Want to Be a Hero? Meet Copasser Christophe and his Amazing Autonomous Drones

Eric added a finishing touch to techno-heroism: a direct question to readers—even before any contextualising content is given—to leave them hanging: *Want to be a hero?* But the potential of being a hero, like the hero of the article, is not possible without a further clarification. Examining Christophe’s interview, readers would find no more than the flat surface representation of a hero, who was selling a tool that that itself enabled people to fabricate their own flat surface representations of heroes. The swooping camera footage of autonomous drones and sweeping lines of edited text achieved the same *heroic* effect. Metaphoric tools embedded in camera angles, slow-motion editing, lighting and colour adjustments for drones match those in banal humour, over-the-top exaggerations and wording adjustments for the article. Each one crafts a carefully honed, finely tuned representation of someone for an interested audience that aims to sell. In what seems like a corruption of traditional hero narrative (who save damsels in distress, or the world in dire straits), the heroes of Copass seemed to be reduced to a mere marketing tool. For, the heroic condition

necessitates an assistive relationship with the world where the hero is the *subject* who has arrived to save the powerless *object* in peril.

But for the startup, heroes were objects: they were static, empty vessel variations that were an effect of description rather than of action. Superman, for example, would be described as a hero because of the nature of his heroic actions after-the-fact, not because if he was first represented as being heroic, some good would come of it. In this case, our heroes were *anticipatory:* they were heroes of tomorrow, in a literal sense, that the reader could take on and embody in a hopeful waiting for the future. But the trick was in the transformation. These heroes were objects that could be *made into subjects* through something as simple and thin—as surface and cosmetic—as putting on a costume. To wear the outfit of Superman, so this Copass-adventurer logic went, one could save the world when the world needed it most. There was something at work here more than simple marketing strategy. The heroing of Copass customers was itself a transfiguration of the self which, within it, contained the possibility for something better, the potential for a near-future escape from the Clark Kent of everyday life into Superman through a simple change of outfit.

THE COSMETIC POWER OF HEROISM

But if the heroing of customers was a transfiguration of the self—what was the end-result of the process? Just what kind of heroes was Copass selling? The hero that the startup was selling was also what people were buying into, so I decided to examine the heroing process from a dialogic

perspective. In what specific ways did customers take on the heroic role that we were packaging? The clearest crystallisation of this adoption was not in online media, but in certain offline ritualistic events I participated in. In these events, through the relationship of Copass and customer (mediated by materials, captured by a camera lens) the *particular* heroes of Copass were born. For the cofounders, it was always a priority to make an impact and to be bold in all aspects of communication. The best example of their boldness came from Copass's worker uniforms. When creating the startup, the team decided on a distinct visual message to catch people's attention, make them curious and get them excited about what they were selling. They achieved this in a set of worker uniforms Sophie made by hand for the team. These were bright blue full-length bodysuits, with white zippers leading from the bottom of each pant leg up to the collar. There were two pockets with matching white zippers, and two large heavy-duty pockets at the waist.

Each one featured a bright reflective orange patch on the chest with a brass button, on top of which was stitched a 'CC' icon, the logo of Copass. On the other side of the chest, a number of bright orange circular pins were affixed into the uniform, each with the logo in repetition. The collar was lined with the same reflective orange material. In the field, the cofounders would wear these uniforms to international coworking conferences (specifically in Lisbon, Valencia and San Francisco). One of the greatest advantages of the uniforms was their impossible-to-ignore visual presence (indeed, everyone agreed Sophie had succeeded in achieving the team's ambitions). At these conference events, photographers—both professional and amateur—would constantly be taking photos to tweet, post on Facebook or on a blog. A powerful reservoir of marketing potential, to be captured in these photos oneself and one's brand could be injected into media circulations of photos covering the event, which thousands of online users might see afterwards, etched into digital

networks of Facebook, Instagram or Flickr photo albums. For this reason, I noticed that during coworking conferences, many conference-goers would wear t-shirts or other apparel with their printed brand logo. Stickers with logos were another popular means of representation. These would often be given out by companies during the conference, and it was recognised as a sign of allegiance and pride for customers or enthusiasts to apply them to their own objects (satchels, laptops, water bottles, coffee mugs, etc).

The power of brand saturation through event photography was also validated through the size of crowds at each event. The larger the crowd, the more legitimacy could be given to the startups and businesses presented in photos of the crowd. Photographs had the ability to signify in a concrete visual format the solidarity and strength in numbers that coworking conferences would create, permeated with brand enthusiasts that would voice their market choices through representations worn on their bodies. But the difficulty with larger crowds—and an over-saturation of stickers and brand t-shirts—was that individuals and their logos would easily get washed out. It was due to this observation that the Copass cofounders decided early on to go one step further in their audacity to bring their brand's presence to conferences and post-conference photographic representations. The bright blue and orange body-length uniforms advertised the Copass brand into the immediate vicinity: they put together the body of the wearer and the colour scheme of the startup, with the logo entirely, repetitively present.

Outside of photographs, the uniforms served as conversation-starters that would not only build the Copass brand, but that would establish the beginnings of friendships with other conference-goers (which would spread awareness of the brand). Walking around the conference facilities,

participating in workshops, taking lunch items at a buffet—these were all moments when serendipitous relations could be cultivated through the vibrant colours of the uniform. The outfits would magnetically attract attention first, questions second, explanations third and finally (in an ideal scenario) revenue. A large part of this magnetism was the heroic sensibility that came with boldly donning an outfit that was so out-of-the-blue. Conferences, officially, were taken seriously as business development events for coworkers. Guests would normally wear moderate-length business skirts or modest button-down work shirts. Never would someone wear a one-piece brightly coloured costume—and the general sense of wonder and confusion I experienced speaking with people while wearing the uniform was testament to Copass's cosmetic power of heroism. The ideology of Copass's heroism was sewn into the fabric, suggesting 'you don't *have* to wear your normal outfits,' that 'your life *could* be something exciting, daring, unusual' and above all magnetic. It hosted the physical threads of the anticipatory heroism I helped create in our newsletters and blog.

But this materialisation of our heroic way of life didn't end in *our* bodies. In a series of ritualistic ceremonies at conferences, we would put our bags down in the middle of a public space and strip off the uniforms in front of people walking swiftly back and forth, in and out of halls and rooms, heading to other workshops or question and answer sessions. Uniforms-in-hand, we would turn around to passersby (many of whom we had already met and had conversations with about Copass, after their intrigue of the outfits) and extend our arms to offer the uniform to them to wear. Stefano would be at the ready, camera around his neck (after having first spent a short time finding the best background and lighting conditions), and we suggested to conference-goers that they try on the uniform and we would take a photo of them wearing it. In doing this, we were suddenly and

forcefully changing the nature of our relationship with others: we used our previous connections in a friendly register to pressure them into becoming a potential customer or at least enthusiast of the startup—transforming them from friend into advertisement, adorning our logo to be posted for thousands to see online. As Eric explained in a blog post on the topic of the Copass uniforms, 'We become friends first, and then talk about what we do later on' (Van den Broek 2015d).

That 'later on' began in the ritualistic step-by-step moments of helping dress others in the Copass uniform, to be photographed and have their representation posted on our Facebook page. They would initially respond with sheepish smiles, raised shoulders, laughter and surprise, then they would slowly set down their bags and coats (often with visible doubts about the whole situation) to join us in zipping up for their photoshoot. It was a strangely intimate experience, as myself and Stefano (or whoever else was helping) would come close and kneel down to zip up the costumes from the ankles to the waist, then to the collar—as the costume itself was complicated for new wearers. This moment involved an extremely intimate level of touching and bodily proximity that, for any other occasion at these conferences, would've been far too intrusive and a definite cause of discomfort and unease for all parties involved. But people would quickly get caught up in the magnetism of the outfits. They were entranced, they were smiling, and when Stefano would show them the resulting photo, they would howl with laughter or smile in pride. In almost every case, after the experience was finished and the costumes were being taken off—people loved it. People were happy and laughing, having enjoyed a brief break from physical conventions and dress codes of a business-oriented conference in their own special moment of Copass brand-building.

MASCULINE, MUSCULAR LIBERATOR HEROES

But what exactly where people doing in these photos? By the end of my fieldwork, there were nearly 300 of them posted in albums on the Copass Facebook page. It was fascinating that, throughout all of these photos, with very little direction from the team, people would adopt patterns of poses that propagated themselves throughout each conference where Copass held these dress-up rituals. All uniform-wearers took distinct poses in their photos, with a majority of poses falling into three categories: musclemen, superheroes and rescuers. The musclemen adopted body positions reminiscent of bodybuilders during staged competitions: swivelling their body at an angle, hunching their shoulders and leaning in while flexing their arm, turning their hand into a fist. This clenching of muscle continued down from the torso into the legs, which were also bent and flexed, occasionally with one leg stepped up onto a higher surface such as a table or chair, to accentuate the power of the pose and to increase the volume of the body captured on camera. Their faces would be aimed directly into the camera lens, some glowing with pride to match the effortless tension of their bodies, some beaming with confidence, and others with a sarcastically serious muscleman expression—lips puckered, brow lowered over the eyes into a hard, stern line.

The superheroes were by far the most numerous, and took a variety of different positions depending on the attitude they attempted to embody. The most common pose was a Clark Kent to Superman reveal, where wearers unzipped the uniform down to their waist in order to, with both hands,

dramatically pull away the costume to reveal their t-shirt underneath. As Clark Kent has been historically captured in this iconic position to reveal his hidden Superman logo, wearers often did this to reveal their own company or startup logo, hidden underneath the blue bodysuit. Either these superheroes tilted in towards the camera, as if moving forward into an action position (to fight an enemy, to leap off a building, to jump into action) or they stood fully erect and confident, staring unflinchingly into the camera while accentuating the reveal of the brand beneath. Continuing on the Superman motif, another popular pose was the Superman flying position. This was sometimes accomplished with an assistant, with the main character having unzipped completely her suit, leaning forward with one hand in front, arm in-line with a more-or-less horizontal body, and the other hand completing the line draping back with the Copass uniform which was held like a cape. Normally the assistant would stand behind, grasping some or all of the uniform to level it with the horizontal line of the main character, in order to complete the illusion of a superhero in flight.

Other variations on the superhero regularly emerged, unified by the body's contorted position shaped as if to leap into the air in the next second, to dodge a projectile, to throw a punch or to taunt an enemy. These poses would be formed with similar leg-up confidence that the musclemen used, with hands placed on the hips and body leaned in towards the camera. Sometimes, the superhero would be moving side-to-side or up towards the camera, with the uniform unzipped trailing in the air behind them, giving an impression of dynamism and movement, hands extended to attack or defend against something in the next moment. Squatting with one's head tilted towards the camera was another common pose, as if the character was in preparation for a flying kick, or a Matrix-style bullet dodge manoeuvre. A generic variation on this included extending one's arm into a fist (or finger) pointed directly at the camera, as if reaching out through the lens to attack someone or to

An example of a ‘muscleman’ pose at a Spanish coworking conference (Copass 2017f).

An example of a ‘superhero’ pose at a Portuguese coworking conference (Copass 2017f).

send a warning to them. The overt show of confidence of superhero poses was matched with an equal amount of serious and smiling facial expressions. Some characters more seriously embodied the persona implied by their pose, squinting their eyes and lowering their eyebrows (for Superman who might be flying through the city), dramatically raising an eyebrow, straining their facial muscles (for a superhero who might be projecting a laser beam from the palm of their hand) or pursing their lips and clenching their jaw, accentuating a masculine, powerful jawline. Others beamed confident and silly smiles—acknowledging the play of their dress-up routine, yet not doubting in their persona.

Finally, the rescuers were surprisingly common given their restricted variation of poses. The rescuer always involved two people, in which most often the main character was a man, who posed by picking up the second character in his arms, turning towards the camera and smiling. The rescued body was placed horizontally in the arms of the rescuer, and she normally extended her arms around the back of the rescuer in order to keep close and to hang on tight. The rescuer, in the meantime, presented himself effortlessly, making it seem as if the body he was holding was weightless (exhibiting a heroic strength). This was the only pose that required two participants to achieve, and it was the only pose that had a built-in multi-character narrative and power dynamic (whereas others were individual muscular poses, in all their variations, that might have implied other characters or narrative elements, but which were a result of the one fixed body rather than an interplay of multiple bodies). The rescuer pose was such a common feature of the Copass uniform rituals that, in an impromptu photoshoot held at an event hosted by another Parisian startup, the moment that Stefano and I found ourselves in the lens of a camera, without hesitation he reached down and

picked me up from my legs (quite unexpectedly, I should add), holding me in his arms while we both posed and smiled instinctively for the photographer.

These poses were moments of customer-to-company interaction that illuminated what *kind* of hero it was we were selling through our rhetoric. Observing how people spontaneously adopted these characters which the Copass uniforms inspired in them, I realised that Copass heroes were not merely digital representations, stowed away cleanly in online photos galleries. Instead, the Copass heroes walked among us, they were living, breathing human beings that—for just a moment—were captured in the right light to be registered as *heroic*. They were heroes neither of thoughts nor ideas, but of bodies, of muscles. The three patterns I observed at coworking conferences demonstrated how heroes, even those that we were aiming to strategise and sell in an abstract sense, were made manifest in the flesh. In order to an answer the above question, then—*just what kind of heroes was Copass selling?*—I suggest that the kind of heroes Copass was selling (and that, through the above moments of embodied presence, customers and potential customers were adopting) were *masculine, muscular liberator heroes.* To explore this, I shall compare the heroism exhibited in Copass with the muscular heroism presented in the peplum genre of Italian cinema.

Peplum was a fantastical genre of Italian spectacle film popular between 1957 to 1965. As a sub-genre of adventure films, peplum were united by 'celebrating musclebound masculinity in heroic action in the distant prehistorical, pre-industrialized past, and often in unidentifiable countries' (Günsberg 2005: 97). These films take their stories through the presentation of protagonists from a wide range of contexts, including 'depiction of the mythical (Achilles, Ajax, Hercules, Theseus, Ulysses), invented (Maciste), literary (Saetta, Ursus), historical (Spartacus,

Thaur) or biblical (Goliath, Samson) apotheoses of the heroic male body' (Günsberg 2005: 97). The first film to popularise the genre was *La fatiche di Ercole* (1957), based on classical themes with Hercules as the film's protagonist—played by American bodybuilder Steve Reeves, Mr Universe from 1948 and 1950 (Günsberg 2005: 99). In the film's first three minutes alone, we witness the three trope patterns from the Copass dress-up sessions: Hercules pauses to pose graciously in the first frame we find him, before leaping into action to save a woman from an out-of-control chariot (muscleman). Next, he poses with a tree he ripped out of the ground, holding it easily aloft above his head for several seconds to demonstrate his strength (superhero) before throwing it to the ground in front of the chariot, stopping its horses. Finally, moving to a woman in the chariot, she faints directly into his arms, where he pauses, holding her effortlessly before the scene fades to black (rescuer).

There is an underlying similarity in how peplum films and Copass's dress-up sessions produced this particular type of hero: through the *'showcasing of male physical strength'* (Dyer 1997: 168). In peplum films, the presence of masculine strength and vitality is the central draw of the genre, amplified by aesthetic measures taken to present the hero-protagonist as singularly so. One finds this type of hero at surface level: it is immediately apparent in any peplum film that the protagonist gains his power from the muscles of his body, glistening with oil and radiating out into every scene. His body's presence is unmistakeable. It stands out from other characters (who are smaller, more clothed, and take up significantly less screen space), through which the entire plot projects itself. Yet these heroes are distinctly set apart from the brunt of action in each film, always operating at a distance or from above (see *Ercole e la regina di Lidia*, Hercules fights a tiger rather than helping others sack a city; *Maciste control i mostri*, Maciste looks onto a fight between tribal chiefs without

participating; *Le fatiche di Ercole*, Hercules aids Jason's quest for the golden fleece, but is 'kept to one side of the narrative' (Dyer 1997: 167). Cinematographically, what viewers find when they watch the hero-protagonists are all-powerful men who exist among others, but with their own style of action and habitation in the world that sets them undeniably apart. Dyer writes,

> […] narrational devices permit the set pieces of posing that follow on from casting bodybuilders. The latter are not necessarily agile or acrobatic; the point is their size and shape, frozen in moments of maximum tension. Holding a boulder aloft (Plate 4.15), in a clinch with a lion, these and many other set-ups incorporate not only the posing vocabulary of bodybuilding competitions but also the *mise-en-scènes* of such non-narrative forms as physique photography and the strongman acts. The peplum's collage structure showcases the built body and the white value it carries. (1997: 167)

Peplum films can be distilled to collages of physique photography where, visually, the heroic male body of the protagonist is showcased for its own sake, and in registering the strength of the body, the plot is able to develop (with resulting actions of heroes throwing boulders, defeating monsters, moving columns, or otherwise saving peoples from crises through their musculature). Similarly, in photoshoots of Copass costume-wearers, by registering the strength of their bodies, the marketing message of Copass was developed. Subjects of the photoshoot were caught, often by surprise, in similar non-narrative forms of physique photography: flexing their arm muscles, extending their legs, crouching in anticipation, running triumphantly, dodging unseen projectiles, taunting unknown enemies, moving into fighting stances, holding damsels in distress, fists extended, faces contorted, prepared to leap into action—the moments of maximum tension in peplum films match precisely

the moments of maximum tension for Copass photoshoot heroes. Incorporating elements of physique photography, Stefano often shot his heroic subjects upwards from a crouched position, emphasising the size and stature of the wearers, occasionally tilting the camera to add physical dynamism to particularly well-formed athletic poses (such as Superman flying, for example). The musculature of each is the defining feature of the medium, to which the plot is only secondary, the setting irrelevant. (There is, of course, a lingering question of muscle—the discrepancy between the hardened skin-tight muscles of the strongmen, and the loose-fitting Copass bodysuit—this will be explored at the end of the chapter).

BODY-BUILDING AS BRAND-BUILDING

Links to Copass's heroes are remarkable. The Copass dress-up sessions demonstrated a 'showcasing of male physical strength' through posing, that took textual connotations from our marketing materials and embodied them 'frozen in moments of maximum tension' caught on camera (Dyer 1997: 167). Why, however, does it matter to dwell on the *masculinity* of the Copass hero? I suggest that rendering this hero with specifically a masculine orientation helps to understand many features of the Copass product and its means of designing relations between its customers and its world. The point, of course, is not to suggest that Copass heroes are equivalent to the American bodybuilding protagonists of 1960s Italian films—but that in both cases there is a *showcasing* of male strength (whether real or not, which is a non-issue as film props replaced the authentic weight of many objects in the peplum films, after all). This showcasing 'validates the image of the physically strong

male body,' and does so by 'asserting its pleasures of adventure and desirability' (Dyer 1997: 180). The sense of adventure and desirability achieved in peplum films is pumped from the muscles of the hero directly to the audience: these are conditions of the presence of the magnificent body, rather than contextual features which the body accidentally inhabits.

Regarding the body, one recognises that the hero has travelled, fought, and lived through incredible wars and struggles, capable of reciting hundreds of riveting stories that capture his daring exploits. Adventure is a condition evidenced through bodily entrainment, and desirability for this particular kind of adventure (and hence, this particular kind of body) is created in its very presence. Building on this, it is no accident that peplum heroes are usually shown in 'natural, outdoor, public space,' as a 'crucial element in the iconography of this form of idealised masculinity' (Günsberg 2005: 111). Stuck in these open countryside vistas or fields, cinematographically we are given the impression of the peplum hero as 'placeless,' always wandering and dropping in on situations around the world. Indeed, the hero is often seen as 'travelling in distant, foreign lands, setting up temporary, outdoor camps, or visiting peasant villages' (Günsberg 2005: 112). As such, the masculine coded body of the hero extends itself out into the world: just as the body juts out from each particular scene in its size and reflectivity, it also juts out from particular situations and peoples. This body is not just another fellow inhabitant of a place, but instead a wanderer having *adventures*.

Looking at the crystallised figures of the Copass dress-up sessions, one can find adventure and desirability extending from these bodies in the same way. These figures of physical strength, viewers can read complete confidence and total assurance in their poses. Examining one photo, a viewer might be invited to ask: *who is this figure? Why are they dressed like that? What are they*

doing? Where did they come from? The confidence, matched with the juxtaposition of suit and setting, and the aesthetic independence achieved through the camera lens, lent to an air of adventure (it seems as if they've gone through some unusual experiences to arrive at this point) and desirability (confident smile, adopting a stance demonstrating particularly unusual physical prowess for a coworking conference). These elements weren't voiced by Copass; they were made explicit through the body of a potential customer, choreographed between the movements of their bodies in the company's uniforms. The Copass costume-wearer appeared to be *someone*. Someone who had achieved something. And who was on track to achieve more things—to cowork in more spaces, to meet more people, to have more serendipitous experiences, to gain more clients, to expand their business. And this is where the showcasing of male physical strength leads to another consequence of male independent power: their sheer physicality enables them to achieve *accomplishments.*

In peplum films, the male body participates in social and political affairs by flexing its muscles. As these heroes are often mythic, larger-than-life characters, they are independent of the film's setting, their placement in the plot being largely incidental or non-consequential. *Maciste all'inferno* begins haphazardly in a 17th century Scottish witch trial, until the protagonist is sent to Hell, 'where he begins a series of prolonged feats of physical strength with little narrative justification' (Günsberg 2005: 116). Out of this accidental context, peplum heroes often drop-in to circumstances out of their control and beyond their responsibility. Their key orientation towards the film becomes one of intervention. 'The hero arrives in a foreign land and sorts out its problems,' meaning that often 'he fights on the side of an ethnic other' to resolve dispute by physical prowess (Dyer 1997: 176). The hero arrives and gathers strength from his muscles, which proves to be the most effective means of resolving social tensions through one man that was impossible to achieve before. In these films we

find the hero-protagonist as ‘both the liberating hero (offering validation of outdated traditional male muscle power in an era of economic boom and industrial advancement) and the liberated (a reminder of being rescued in the specific historical context of the Liberation [of WWII Italy]’ (Günsberg 2005: 102).

Similarly, the Copass hero is both the *liberator* and *liberated*. He arrives on scene to help free people from the tedium of their work lives as liberator (you can work anywhere! you can wear crazy costumes like this!) as well as representing the liberated (because the person donning the suit was, after all, just like *you* before having put it on). And here we arrive at the fundamental difference between the peplum hero and the Copass hero, but that difference is only skin-deep. Peplum heroes evidence prowess and desirability through the slick curvature of well-toned muscles, but Copass heroes evidence these characteristics through a strangely-fitting zip-up bodysuit. The difference is important, as the bodybuilding of peplum heroes is something achieved through extensive work, years of training and correct dietary regimens.

> The built white body is not the body that white men are born with; it is the body made possible by their natural mental superiority. The point after all is that it is built, a product of the application of thought and planning, an achievement. It is the sense of the mind at work behind the production of this body that most defines its whiteness. […] The built body is an achieved body, worked at, planned, suffered for. A massive, sculpted physique requires forethought and long-term organisation; regimes of graduated exercise, diet and scheduled rest need to be worked out and strictly adhered to; in short, *building bodies is the most literal triumph of mind over matter, imagination over flesh*. (Dyer 1997: 164, my emphasis)

The Copass hero, on the other hand, achieved his physique almost by accident, as part of a marketing stunt. Heroes were corralled into putting on a suit, that we helped zip-up and correctly arrange, and in a matter of seconds they were pushed into the spotlight where they adopted the heroic imagery characteristic of ritual sessions explored above. I suggest that this process was in fact one of 'building bodies' in a similar way to peplum films except with the aesthetic emphasis of these heroes not being placed on the curvature of their skin, but rather on the folds of the Copass fabric that they embodied. Through this fabric, instantly wearable and easily removable, customers could become heroes for as long or as little as they liked through the application of heroism at a cosmetic level. As different as the amount of effort involved is in becoming a hero for peplum films and for Copass, once the suit was on, the fabric was set as the zone of interest, replacing the skin of Italian and American bodybuilding counterparts, framed in the lens of a professional cameraman.

The power of both of these bodies arises not purely from the strength of the body itself, but from the relation of the body to the camera, as captured in its frame of reference. Accentuated by representational tricks and editing techniques, the dimensions of peplum heroes are exaggerated: they become immensely tall (playing on perspective, standing on higher terrain), unreasonably large (acting in the foreground, cast against smaller actors in fight scenes) and unbelievably strong (hollowed-out props, choreographed fight scenes). With Copass heroes, we can observe the same phenomenon. They became strong (flexing muscles viewers couldn't see, holding other people for a matter of seconds, forever crystallised in a photo), charismatic (squinted eyes, chest pumped outwards) and powerful (throwing punches, jumping in the air). Outside of moments when the camera took its shot, the power of the Copass hero was lost, just like the peplum hero. Their full heroism was rendered apparent through the snapshot of the camera, capturing one moment of

maximum tension and extending it indefinitely into the future through film reels or Facebook albums.

And here, we find ourselves at the earlier principles of the Copass heroes captured in the *masculine muscular liberator heroes* analogous to those of peplum films. Copass heroes were representational. In Christophe's drone company, we realise that his heroes didn't have superpowers or super strength, but much like the peplum hero (and their cast, crew, editors and director) they had the power to *represent* themselves heroically through technical means to receptive audiences. What Copass proposed to its heroes was just that: to become a hero but only at the *surface-level*, of merely paying a subscription fee (evidenced in the instant cosmetic power afforded in wearing a costume). Because of this, under the right circumstances (with Copass), you yourself could become this kind of world-changing heroic being. By arranging one's muscles in the right position for a photograph (or by moving one's fingers in correct succession over a keyboard to enter one's payment details in the signing up process), one could suddenly be rendered with the power to do great things, go to great places, and meet great people.

The role of the achieving male hero was the exciting market proposition of Copass. Being an independent, liberated force moving independently through all of the 'peasant villages' of the world (as a peplum hero), one had the luxury to intervene or not depending on one's whim. The world of coworking became a background through which the hero of Copass could propagate himself endlessly and lightly, with little consequence and low energy expenditure. The masculine orientation toward the world as something passive—a uniform background waiting to be arrived to, to be plundered of opportunity and experiences—was the core proposition of Copass's marketing.

Whether figured as ‘conquistadors’ (as we did in an early email campaign), conquerers, explorers, adventurers or travellers, the marketing rhetoric of Copass prefigured a masculine orientation of customer-against-the-world, voyaging out, bravely putting oneself into new circumstances and into new communities.

This transformation turned an open-ended process of moving through the world into a closed-ended process of *exercising a certain muscular power to inhabit it*. Paying the subscription fee, one could gain the ability to travel and occupy the world as a body-builder. Building representations of oneself as a certain kind of person and channeling one’s life plot through one’s muscular movements from one space to another, captured and cemented in those representations. To move around was no longer a question of intellect or of reflection but rather one constituted of *adventure* and *desire* produced from the physical movements of one’s own body (e.g., coworking in Thailand, then Madagascar). The adventure that Copass was selling was *your* adventure, and this adventure was coded into your own body, as an extension of the fact of moving from point a to point b between two coworking spaces. Just like the peplum films, everything else was a consequence of the physical showmanship of being a Copasser. Removed from scenes of local life around the world, the Copass heroes were invasive, interventionist musclemen who, by stepping one foot in front of the other as paying customers of a particular world-service, gained qualities of adventure and desirability that had seduced them from the first place to sign up. This attitude reflects Sloterdijk’s interpretation of the term ‘globetrotting’ in modern travel, ‘which is to say trampling on everything’ (2013: 40).

What I was surprised by, as an analyst of the embodied ritual behaviour in Copass dress-up sessions, was how immediately people would open up to the heroic costume technology that we offered to them. After accepting an extreme invasion of intimate space from a stranger through the zipping-up process, they would often inhabit with total confidence the role which they had just signed up for. It seemed as if people switched on a character and adopted a way of play-acting according to the materials they had just put on. From their side of things, they were not *just* playing around, however—and from our side of things, this was not *just* a marketing tactic. People were embodying the emancipatory masculine world-conquering heroism that Copass was peddling. They weren't merely consumers, and we weren't merely salesmen: these occasions were rich cross-fertilisations of interactions and intimacies, of collaboratively forged anticipations into the future, built into the process of becoming-a-hero that we were co-producing cosmetically through costumes. It was the first moment of many more that would demonstrate to me how Copass wasn't a normal startup, marketing a normal product. With a captivating imaginary, they launched customers at high-speeds through their phantasmagoric world, transforming them into greater subjects capable of accomplishing things and having experiences, all for the price of €299 per month.

The processes discussed in this chapter could be grouped under Goffman's term 'impression management,' as aesthetic and performative exercises consisting of 'a team of performers who co-operate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation' (1959: 152). By co-opting not just customers, not even just fans, but random conference goers at coworking events, the Copass cofounders were able to enrol a wide variety of temporary actors in their performances. Those who wore the Copass workers' uniforms for the camera were 'disciplined, dramaturgically speaking,'

each as a performer 'who remembers his part and does not commit unmeant gestures or faux pas in performing it' (Goffman 1959: 137). Kicking, punching and smiling were poses predetermined by the staged presence of each photoshoot, the energy of actors (and supporting Copass crew) performing and the momentum gained from previous photo albums. These actions, taking skill, quick-thinking and improvisation to perform correctly, consisted not just of physical labour in putting together bodily movements but also of *emotional labour*, 'to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (Hochschild 2003: 7). In this case, that proper state of mind in others was curiosity, amazement and delight, achieved through the actor's focus on 'the slope of a shoulder, the angle of a glance, or the tightness of a smile' that connected physical comportment with emotional states (Hochschild 2003: 226). Reflecting on the experience, or looking back at Copass's conference photos on Facebook, the actor herself might well be inspired towards those emotional states as well.

In making their new world, the Copass cofounders cleverly built Goodman's notion of 'composition and decomposition' into their marketing strategy. By freely providing marketing materials in a fun environment, they were giving actual and potential customers the tools to decompose stereotypes and truisms of an old world ('I could never easily travel around the world,' 'I could never wear anything except a collared shirt to go to work') and to compose truths of a new one ('I can actually live a more exciting life,' 'I can break out of the work routine I'm used to and try something new'). Composition and decomposition as worldmaking practices are both 'normally effected or assisted or consolidated by the application of labels: names, predicates, gestures, pictures, etc,' and here we see more than one example of this occurring (Goodman 1978: 8). This marketing ritual introduces a new name ('The Copass Hero'), new gestures (punching, flying, holding damsels in distress), new

pictures (of people who can look back and see themselves as a Copass Hero, and who others can see as daring, eccentric or exciting). Finally, for observers online who looked through the Facebook albums posted on Copass's page, they would see a diversity of costumed individuals 'brought together under a proper name' through the album itself: the Copasser (Goodman 1978: 8).

What this investigation demonstrates is how Copass established its presence to onlookers in conference events through the physical and emotional labour of dramaturgical activities and innovative strategies of impression management. Aside from gaining revenue from new potential customers, I suggest that this work was done in order to create the foundations for the startup in what Goffman calls a new 'social establishment.' A social establishment, he explains, 'is any place surrounded by fixed barriers to perception in which a particular kind of activity regularly takes place' (1959: 152). In the case of Copass, this would be the aesthetic universe the cofounders worked to create, 'fixed by barriers to perception' to help audience members focus on what was on stage and now how stage presentation was orchestrated. Putting the focus on these theatrical photoshoots was a way to directly involve spectators in the mystery, fun and allure of the brand—seducing them with the startup's vision of *what could be* without dwelling on the comparatively boring details of how that vision was accomplished. I delve further into this distinction in the next chapter by examining the 'backstage' operations of Copass and how, in work routines using technological tools, the startup was capable of producing a 'front' for customers and others alike that was an airtight performance of fun travel and marvellous discovery.

'Since the vital secrets of a show are visible backstage,' Goffman writes, 'it is natural to expect that the passage from the front region to the back region will be kept closed to members of the audience

or that the entire back region will be kept hidden from them' (1959: 70). Turning humans into heroes was a portable and replicable sideshow that could be relocated and hosted at fixed locations. But crafting the user experience of every Copass customer was a much larger and more daunting task. Goffman continues, 'The decorations and permanent fixtures in a place where a particular performance is usually given, as well as the performers and performance usually found in it, tend to fix a kind of spell over it' (1959: 76). But how is it possible to put a spell over a user's experience of hundreds of coworking spaces in dozens of countries all around the world? This was the dilemma the startup's cofounders attempted to resolve. Now, moving into the hidden backstage region of Copass, we will see not only how it worked to resolve this question but precisely why its work was so carefully hidden: to make a world full of spontaneous discovery, Copass needed to *stage* that discovery from beginning to end.

4

ORCHESTRATING DISCOVERY IN THE AGE OF FACT-CHECKING

"Ah, my friends, a discoverer of new lands is a true inventor! — from this he has such emotions and surprises! But now this store is nearly emptied! Others have seen everything, surveyed everything, invented all the continents or new worlds; we late-comers to geographic science, we have nothing left to do!"

"That's not true, my dear Paganel," replied Glenarvan.

"What is left then?"

"What we're doing now!"

—Jules Verne, *Les enfants du capitaine Grant,* I&9 (in Harpold 2005: 32)

'*GUARANTEE* 20% off? Can we do that? I mean, aren't you worried about that?' Eric asked me jokingly. It was a Wednesday morning, and Sophie, Eric and I had taken up residence in the conference room of Mutinerie. The walls were blue and grey, with sketches hanging on one wall, a miniature sailing ship wheel on another and pastel coloured Japanese paper lanterns dangling from the ceiling. The table was a stark piece of scratched-up brushed sheet metal, the chairs a mix of red felt-lined folding chairs and faux medieval dining chairs upholstered with gold buttons and velvet green fabric. I laughed, looking up from my MacBook screen. A large map of the world hung on the wall behind Eric, full of multi-coloured pins stabbed into different cities. There were many holes where people had previously put them, and rearranged them into new combinations.

The openness of the map contrasted starkly with the compact meeting room. Looking up at the skylight, one could get a sense of clarity in the colours and tones of the space with natural light flooding in overhead, but because the glass was opaque the sky above was a washed out white. The four walls and ambient light brought a feeling of encasement, as if being in an aquarium rather than a workspace. Paper printouts were spread messily around the table, our laptops spread haphazardly between them. We were reviewing text ideas for a new brochure for some upcoming events, with Eric and Sophie giving me feedback on my textual direction. 'English is so enthusiastic!' Eric laughed, 'It doesn't translate,' remarking that this needed to be something that non-native english speakers could relate to. 'You can't be as enthusiastic in French, you'll just sound like a dickhead!'

I leaned back in my chair, and Sophie reread my opening text out loud. I joked back (with an inflected southern accent) that it was like 'one of those good American used car commercials, where they try to sell stuff in big bold letters with sweeping too-good-to-be-true promises.' We laughed at this, and Eric concluded that it was acceptable—'No, but it's good anyway'—and that it was what they needed. I agreed casually and settled back into my work, preparing social media posts for the rest of the week so I could focus on other priorities. I thought momentarily about the situation: Eric admitted he liked how our language had become more aggressive and enthusiastic since I arrived. He told me before that the difference on our website was great, that it made more sense and, in a way, told a story. This was what he was trying to achieve with the brochure we were working on, to make it tell a cohesive story. Much of my work at Copass, I felt, was to help offer a sense of definition to something that was always up in the air, for new users to understand it more clearly. Sophie and Eric broke into an intense discussion in French, and to keep working peacefully I moved to the coworking space.

As I left, I received a message on my iPhone from Stefano. At the time he was in Lisbon working on the startup's next big project, 'Copass Camp Lisbon.' This was a Copass initiative he and I had worked on together for months, and as we had only a matter of weeks to go until it would actually happen, we had a lot of work to do to tie up loose ends. In order to advertise this camp and list its features, prices and marketing content, we created a separate micro-site distinct from the Copass website with a 'camps.' subdomain. The text he developed (which I helped polish) was published there as such:

> Sharing so much more than just desks.
>
> Copass Camps are gatherings of amazing people in great places all over the world to live, work, share and have a great time together.
>
> We love to travel and to fully live the Copass lifestyle wherever we go. It made sense for us, then, to not only stay with just our team when we work on-the-go, but to let anyone and everyone eager to live this way to join us! The camps are the ultimate expression of the Copass dream. They're simply beautiful places where we can be productive, but also have a lot of fun!
>
> So come along and join us for our next big adventure! (Copass 2017c)

'Copass Camps' were the biggest communications projects we would pursue in my year working at Copass. They were one-off special events that lasted for one or two weeks in a beautiful locale somewhere in the world. At these events, people were invited to live, work and play together in co-living and coworking spaces, as well as to share experiences in natural exteriors (such as beaches, mountains, deserts, beautiful cities, and more). Anyone could join upon paying a fee, and as such it was separate from the Copass subscriptions and coworking payments that we normally ran. The Camps would serve as marketing tools to educate people of what it could be like to live their life as a Copass user, travelling the world, making new friends, having incredible experiences and staying productive. This was, as the text makes explicit, *'the ultimate expression of*

the Copass dream.' The idea was largely developed by Sophie, Augustin, Stefano and myself from the outset, with Eric initially sceptical of the idea. He worried it would detract from the overall purpose and experience of Copass as a federation of coworking spaces. As he would express to me in several conversations, the startup targeted 'a core need' of enabling digital labourers to work freely on their own terms, and he wasn't sure if Camps were the best way to support that.

In my fieldwork, I helped organise four camps: Camp Lisbon, Camp Fuerteventura, Camp Valencia and Camp San Francisco. Of these, I also attended and managed on-site Camp Lisbon, Fuerteventura and San Francisco. To give an idea of what was included for guests, the normal ticket price in Lisbon, for example, was €345. This price included eight nights of accommodation, an unlimited coworking pass for the city (so guests could experience the Copass lifestyle by working in its member spaces) and a choice of so-called 'activities.' The activities were the most exciting part of the Camps for the cofounders, as it was a chance to take their lifestyle beyond the workspace. For Camp Lisbon, these activities included a day of surfing at a nearby beach, a sailing trip under the city's iconic red bridge and a guided tour of the city's most unique neighbourhoods. For Camp Fuerteventura, activities included an island bike tour, an afternoon of whale watching, surf lessons or a chartered snorkelling trip to a nearby island. For Camp San Francisco, they included a Cinco de Mayo dinner party, a trampoline dodgeball competition and a day-long whitewater rafting trip and camping experience in the foothills of the Tahoe Mountains. It went without saying that these exciting activities

were as much for the guests as they were for the cofounders—who were passionate about boats, beaches and other varieties of summer fun.

Without much deliberation, Eric quickly became convinced of the value of Camps when they were formulated by Stefano as the apotheosis of 'the Copass dream,' and soon preparations for our first Camp, Camp Lisbon, were underway. From the start, Eric admitted to me how he loved the idea personally speaking (being able to travel to and experience these events at almost no cost thanks to our margins on ticket prices), but he was just wary of not losing track of the central moving force of Copass: connecting people from around the world. As we would later see, the Copass Camps accomplished just this. We would organise four of these Camp events during my time at the startup, beginning in Lisbon, then in Fuerteventura, Valencia and finally San Francisco. They were one of the startup's most effective marketing strategies, and one of our most memorable business projects.

As I sat at an open desk, a small window popped-up on my screen and bounced in rhythm to Skype's ringing jingle—it was Stefano messaging me to speak. This was our first-ever Camp, and we were using this opportunity to launch it in coordination with the Coworking Europe Conference, one of the most active coworking event organisations in the world. Our thinking went along the lines that, if we cooperated with this group, we would be able to leverage that connection to bring people to our camp—to stay with us even, for example, just as a cheap bed to attend the conference—and it would build our presence to a market of people directly relevant to our service:

> Europe's coworking space managers and members. Today, Stefano was planning out a sub-project that he and I were working on that was in cooperation with the Conference: the 'Copass Coworking Space Tours.' As an addendum to the normal conference schedule, we volunteered to lead over two-hundred conference goers on tours of Lisbon's best coworking spaces, to showcase the coworking life the city had to offer. The idea behind this collaboration was simple. To learn about coworking, visitors would attend the conference. But to *discover* coworking in Lisbon, visitors would attend the Copass Tours: these wouldn't be presentations or question and answer sessions—they would be adventures.

A GREAT SIMPLIFICATION

Stefano and I made a comprehensive list of coworking spaces for him to visit the week before while he was still in Paris. Now, he was to visit them in person to judge if they were active, interesting, relevant and home to vibrant communities. As we were the ones organising the tours, we wanted to ensure that each one was top-quality to build strong positive associations between Copass and the fun of coworking. Our plan was as follows: we would include as many of the thirty coworking spaces we pre-listed as possible on five different walking tours, depending on their quality and level of activity. Stefano would go to as many of the spaces as possible to examine them personally, also testing out potential tour route options on foot, while I would map out the most efficient walking

paths from my computer from coworking spaces in Paris to optimise the entire experience remotely. Our Skype conversation began as follows:

STEFANO: Hi Michael
I'm going for a first tour today
I'm trying to check which [coworking spaces] are the most important to go
I'll be for sure at LX Factory and Village Underground

MICHAEL: Hi Stefano
Can you check our Liberdade 229?

STEFANO: yes ok
I was thinking that near ones will be useful too

MICHAEL: How's your trip going generally? Lisbon looks amazing
Did you go to the house yet? [where we would be co-living]

STEFANO: No, I go there around 11 today
Startup Lisboa Tech is a coworking?
because it's not so far from my apartment
Travel is going well, quite hard to plan, meet and visit at the same time…
could be useful if we keep in contact and you guide me a bit
the nearest is Central Station but they are closed :(

MICHAEL: Yes it is

Ah really? Hm…

STEFANO: I draw a line on that map…
[attaches map of Google Maps Lite we started together]
this is the tour I'll try to do today

My job was to provide logistical, directional and technical support for Stefano, our operative on-the-ground in Lisbon. My objective was, as he put it, 'to guide [him] a bit.' Using my mapping technologies to place him between the appropriate coworking spaces, helping him choose the right routes to take between them and giving him feedback from my computer on the status of coworking spaces we already decided to pursue (both from coworking space websites and from various internal documents stored on Google Drive). One of the digital technologies I used to do this was Google Maps Lite. We would continue to use this for future Copass Camps that were combined with Copass Coworking Tours: it was a special online Google service where users could create custom journey maps overlaid on Google's normal Maps interface. The software had passive and active elements. Passively, one could browse the Map, search for specific addresses, access different base maps (Traffic, Map, Satellite, Terrain and Earth) and access street-view. Actively, users could create their own journey maps (featuring waypoints and directions between them) with embedded text and visual information and share them with others.

In this chat, I was to assist his careful roaming—made possible not because he was roaming, as in walking without a fixed purpose (quite the opposite, in fact), but made possible because he had 'switched roaming on' his iPhone, enabling him to use Google Maps and to keep in touch while not

connected to wifi networks as he walked the streets of Lisbon. Normally paying for constant roaming phone data would be too expensive or out of the question, but for Stefano (to accomplish our work), the cost was necessary. This form of techno-roaming, within the contours of the interactive maps we had initially created, and with my support to optimise his journey in-the-moment, was the blueprint for roaming as a style of travelling that underpinned the Copass Camps, the Tours and the overall Copass user experience. The trips were meant *to feel free* and fun to users, to feel spontaneous and exciting, with the infrastructural and technological work that achieved them hidden backstage, 'out of the way' of the final experience, as Eric had once put it to me. But this freedom, a result of our particular genre of excursion, was only made possible with extensive technological backend work collaborating with map technologies tested online and offline, to make sure trips were airtight and perfectly pre-planned. This was achieved by adjusting the map's waypoints that were too far for specific tours, by updating places that were currently marked with incorrect information and, above all, by 'being reactive' to keep finding and fixing problems as we went along. The chat continued,

STEFANO: Res do chao done.
they'll reply by email

MICHAEL: I'm already in touch with them
But that's great, how was the space? And who did you talk to

STEFANO: space is too small and normally have just a monthly plan
but well designed
so not sure to join Copass

can you put those notes on the doc?

what's the next space address?

MICHAEL: Rua pocos dos negros 58

Just a walk down the street for you ;)

STEFANO: name? (space/manager)?

MICHAEL: Just sent you the email

But it's Oficina Colectiva

Don't know the manager

STEFANO: Done! Filipe Carvalho

is an old bakery store

15 desks, opened from 2 years

MICHAEL: :D

Can you give me an email? I'll follow up with them if you want

STEFANO: [.jpg image of business card for Oficina Colectiva]

I think they can join Copass

MICHAEL: Cool, writing to Filipe now

STEFANO: Now I go to meet Lost Lisbon

The footpath that Stefano was taking to discover Lisbon's coworking spaces in real life was being plotted by myself in Paris, using my digital maps to provide him the closest space for easy directions ('Just a walk down the street'). From here, we enlisted more technologies into our work: a separate Google Drive spreadsheet logging notes for each space that Stefano visited, as well as an email I sent to him with all of the addresses of nearby spaces for easy access. And from Stefano's end, he introduced a photo of the business card of the manager he met, enabling me to read the image, transfer the email address and send a message immediately to follow-up, starting with 'My colleague Stefano just visited your space today, I'm writing you on the behalf of Copass…' This allowed me to continue the conversation that started in Lisbon from Paris in real-time, while Stefano continued his walk, to start new conversations in new spaces. His roaming iPhone mapped his footsteps to the accurate internal maps we developed, and by switching on roaming mode we were able to distribute work remotely throughout the rest of the day as he continued visiting more spaces in the city, collecting more business cards, enabling me to send more emails, solidifying connections between us and spaces to build certainty and confidence into the Copass Tours that we would shortly be leading.

For us to organise high quality tours, we needed specific and accurate information about each space to give visitors (the last thing we wanted was to be clueless about spaces, or present factually inaccurate information). We wanted to leverage these tours to demonstrate to conference goers how Copass was a (cool, fun, yet knowledgeable) authority on coworking spaces everywhere—especially ones you hadn't heard of that might surprise you, leaving you wanting to discover more. This was the same logic that Copass used generally to build its worldwide visualisation of coworking spaces. When Copass users in Paris or London would peruse the global map on the

startup's website, they were invited to discover coworking spaces not only in their city, but in Madagascar, in Brazil, in Japan and in Russia. The map was designed to elicit this exploratory reaction from users because when it loaded, it was never location-specific (i.e., showing a close-up view of the current city a user might be in). Instead, it always began with a global overview with Europe at the centre, hinting at users to click around and explore corners of the world to find surprising, fascinating coworking spaces that, otherwise, they might've never thought of. With this design, it would take equal effort to see coworking spaces in your local area than it would anywhere in the world. This element of surprise through exploration (in other words, *discovery*) united Copass coworking spaces, bringing them under the umbrella of the Copass user experience. And these tours were the first city-wide in-real-life manifestations of this unifying—or, more explicitly put, brand-building—practice. So for us, we needed to work hard to get it right the first time.

Through the work of walking around, making telephone calls, updating data, taking and sharing photos, negotiating agreements and more—*a great simplification* was made possible, which suddenly put the world on a stage that was immediately visible and easily usable for customers. To achieve that simplification successfully took a generous amount of backstage work, and in the case of the tours, the final summary of those efforts was crystallised in a spreadsheet. Its completion marked the accomplishment of our fact-checking exercise. While the sheet was marked full of text and many of its boxes made green (signifying that we had achieved relevant partnerships), it became a testimony of mapping successes by visually confirming the efforts of our fact-checking accuracy. These facts included basic elements of coworking spaces such as address, website, size (in metres squared), number of members and founding date, to more detailed elements like description (a summary of what the space was about), space type (coworking, fablab or co-living),

sample event, types of events and types of workers each space was for. Observing this meticulous search for detail in so many spaces, I suggest that backstage, one of 'the vital secrets of [the] show' Copass was putting on for customers was its *fact-checking* capability (Goffman 1959: 70). One of the greatest benefits of using the startup's service was that anyone could look on its website and instantly discover dozens of spaces that were potentially interesting. But for the project to succeed beyond first impressions, spaces had to be correctly classified with well-written information and clearly-listed key features presented alongside high resolution photography.

This great simplification was an effort in Copass's worldmaking project that can be classified as what Goodman calls 'ordering' (1978: 13). 'Radical ordering' occurs when,

> […] constructing a static image from the input on scanning a picture, or in building a unified and comprehensive image of an object or a city from temporally and spatially and qualitatively heterogeneous observations and other items of information. (Goodman 1978: 13)

Building the 'unified and comprehensive image' of Lisbon's coworking scene for the Copass branded tours was an essential exercise not only in demonstrating mastery over knowledge of the coworking scene, it was also a crucial strategy to convince coworking enthusiasts that Copass was knowledgeable about the present state of coworking to, above all, gain their confidence about the future state of coworking. Ordering as a category of worldmaking was essential for the startup to literally make the world in its own image, so that when tour-goers would walk around the city and receive confirmation of the list of coworking spaces on their journey, they would be seeing the

world through the eyes of Copass. In the cofounders' worldmaking project, seeing was believing and establishing belief in the company was a necessary step to convince people of the new world they were attempting to establish through their global coworking service.

Copass was the only service in its class to pay so much attention to ensuring thorough descriptions and representations of spaces. Out of the competition, it was the only network of coworking spaces where one could find characterful, up-to-date, accurate information about spaces from Malaysia to Morocco. It was necessary, then, that this fact-checking ethos was present and *even more thorough* in the Copass Tours, because if something went wrong it wouldn't be just one user who noticed a mistake on the website—it would be a group of 20-40 coworking experts who witness confusion in person. That had the potential to instantly and seriously harm the brand we were working diligently to maintain.

ORCHESTRATING DISCOVERY

The next week, Stefano returned to Paris, and we met one day to finish the tours side-by-side at Coworkshop, a hip glass-fronted coworking space near *Canal Saint-Martin*. I continued working late into the evening with him to finalise the itineraries. He had a map of Lisbon with its tram routes that he brought back from his visit. He unfolded it out onto our smooth matte black table. In the cold, minimalist coworking space where we were working the map glowed with an authentic crinkled charm, covered in pen markings, marked by deep creases and small tears. On our laptops,

we loaded the pixelated pages of Google Maps, continuing to optimise our digital routes. We spent hours looking back and forth between Google's terrain and the paper terrain of Lisbon the municipal government provided, coordinating backstreets and transportation options to minimise walking for each tour. Stefano was managing a detailed excel spreadsheet with the spaces now categorised into separate tours and complete with correct metadata. He routinely updated this spreadsheet when he noticed something was not right, then he would take key cells from each space into another Google Drive spreadsheet to re-upload this more minimal data set into Google Maps, updating the rough draft map we began with into a flawless, fact-checked, fully-mapped journey experience.

We were collaborating not just to visualise, but to *make real* the coworking scene of Lisbon. To make it real for the City of Lisbon in its official directories, in commercial booklets and tourist brochures, but also to make it real for conference-goers who would see these spaces through the mapping work we were spending so much time to elaborate. This process of making real was achieved through all the fact-checking routines we had been collaborating over for the past weeks. Our work, therefore, was work to re-represent spaces by making visible in a way where they could all *co*-exist, whereas previously they existed separately. One space on *this* map (with no address), another space on *that* map (with the name incorrectly written), yet another space was permanently closed (yet still listed on these two other maps), etc. Our goal was to eliminate these material discrepancies through the startup's smooth service. By reducing them all to the least-common denominator of the Google Map Lite custom routes, we were equalising and recalibrating them for the purpose of constructing a city-wide image-network of coworking spaces. To do this, we were

using a selection of maps that brought together enough information for us to select and simplify it all into one new format.

The first map was the typical Google Maps interface, with data I copied and pasted into the search bar to double-check addresses and transport options on-the-go—it was primarily me using this on my MacBook in several browser tabs. On top of this we used Google Maps Lite, the more specific, interactive custom map where we could place waypoints and trace walking routes. This was the key mapping technology in our process, as it enabled us to visually and numerically judge distance, transport options, and to measure spaces against each other by their specific waypoint locations. Third, we used Stefano's map of Lisbon from the city's tourist board, which demonstrated the city's overground tram routes and other public transport options. This helped 'connect the dots' on our Maps Lite, to combine the general locations of the spaces with the transport capabilities of the city's urban infrastructure. Finally we used a commerce map from Lisbon's City Hall that listed the largest coworking spaces. This map was a simplified street map with spaces as numbered dots on the paper, matching a list of around thirty spaces in a corresponding key. The infuriating thing about this map (that caused us a lot of work) was that the space name, logo and website was listed for each one, but *not the address*. It was tricky to navigate Portuguese-language websites to find the precise address, and in some cases we were in dispute as there were multiple addresses listed, where we didn't know which one was the right one. It was the dearth of information on this map (as well as other problems, such as one space that was listed twice, and several spaces that had since closed down) that necessitated our fact-checking energies.

But these tours weren't advertised as the long, calculated, ponderous, spreadsheet-ridden results that they were to create. Instead, we presented them with an air of mystery and fun. Transitioning from the backend production of the event into its front-end staged appearance, there was a hidden trick that kept our labour hidden from observers. Users were presented with an effortless, cool, funny and eclectic selection of spaces that gave off the impression that something new could be discovered. Below are the names and descriptions taken from each of the five tours we operated.

> TOUR A: *Under the Bridge* | You'll encounter spaces full of independent workers that animate lively communities, to smaller, more discrete spaces with teams and small startups.
>
> TOUR B: *The Great Northern Route* | We're taking a venerable adventure—rivalling the Great Sir Walter Scott's expedition.
>
> TOUR C: *Just Walk Tour* | It'll be a fun little adventure through the central of Lisbon, with windy streets and small parks for us to enjoy along the way.
>
> TOUR D: *Wake and Make* | From the hustle and bustle of Vitruvius FabLab to the huge factory floor of FabLab Lisbon […] we can assure you an action-packed tour of some very, very cool places.
>
> TOUR E: *Far Away So Close* | This tour will give you a telescopic view of Lisbon and its coworking culture! (Copass 2017d)

The language of these tours made it seem as if guests might go on a coworking safari in the bush of Lisbon: encapsulated safely in a protective moving shell, stopping to admire prearranged curiosities. These curiosities might include spaces with 'animate lively communities' (like watering holes attracting a herd of zebras), with 'windy streets and small parks' (like delicate water features or tribal gardens), with 'hustle and bustle' of fablab halls (like giraffes gathered around dense shrubbery). Language such as 'venerable adventure,' 'expedition,' 'fun little adventure,' 'action-packed tour' and 'telescopic view' indicated that this guided trip would expose users to just as little or as much as they would prefer, depending on their needs, wants and time restrictions. Some were longer, more epic adventures (that allegedly rivalled those of even 'Sir Walter Scott'), with others being calmer and more relaxing and intimate (sheltered 'Under the Bridge' of the city).

Within this world of hand-holding faux adventurism, one might wonder how exactly the Copass hero from the previous chapter fits into the story? It's no surprise that these tours and many other Copass features were so rigorously fact-checked and systematised: because it was always necessary to maintain our backend fact-checking efforts as an entrepreneurial insurance system to prevent against disappointment, frustration, physical danger, or inconvenience. If any of these things were to happen to guests, it would tarnish the brand value of Copass and would cast into doubt the vision of fun exploration the startup was selling (thus reducing company profits). Therefore, the creation of the hero from the last chapter did not end in the costume or the subscription button—it had to be *continuously maintained through fact-checking mechanisms* in order to keep up a seamless heroic experience. But to maintain this as a means to generate revenue, we had to engage in a backend engineering process to simulate the entire core customer experience: that of *discovery*.

In Copass's emergent world, discovery implied the fun and eye-opening adventure of the term, with none of the risks historically associated to it. To achieve this, *our* discovery was a kind of surprise-through-exploration experience, but on rails. In contrast, to undergo a journey of discovery—at least in the Age of Discovery during the 15th-18th centuries when the term made its philosophical and practical debut—came at a high cost. Sloterdijk notes that,

> Early intercontinental travellers not infrequently had to pay for access to distant shores by enduring bitter asceticisms. These included involuntary fasts and passages drawn out by weather conditions, or the torture of boredom from calm at sea and sluggish sailing. Frequent sleep deprivation as a result of heat, cold, stench, cramped conditions, noise and fear on a heavy swell also wore away at the irritable and delirium-prone crews. (2013: 77)

For the *Copass Tours*, the costs to pay for discovery were threefold: (1) the price of a ticket, (2) the physical effort of walking from one door to the next and (3) the time that could be spent otherwise. This is discovery at admittedly lower stakes than described by Sloterdijk. But we still aimed to simulate a similar anticipatory excitement, a similar potential for transformation, a similar thrill of predicting what's to come in the journey—in other words, the best features the phenomenology of discovery had to offer. To achieve this, we worked tirelessly to secure the constant seamlessness of travel in all aspects of Copass's user experience by (in the back-end) substituting the process of discovery with the process of *sitting in traffic.* For the tours, all movements were planned out. One of the most demanding processes Stefano and I had to manage was the city's traffic circulations, to figure out how we could fit our tour groups into these circuits. To participate in the tours, in short,

was to buy into a *rhetoric* of discovery. While its flowery words and colourful images were fluttering in one's imagination, 'discovery' was only useful to pass the time whilst stuck in a traffic jam at one of Lisbon's crowded roundabouts. Or to forget the delay of the metro train, thumbing impatiently through the lively and rich descriptions of each tour on one's iPhone.

THE MAP-WORLD OF COPASS

This logic of equating a rhetoric of discovery to traffic circulations was not surprising for Copass. Their iconographic and spiritual inspiration, Jules Verne, had perfected this substitution in his many of his *Voyages Extraordinaires*. In his 1874 *Around the World in Eighty Days*, for example, the protagonist Phileas Fogg partakes in the story by simply buying his way into the world's traffic patterns: trains, plains and automobiles—but also hot air balloons and other vehicles. The routes he traverses were already well-established from trade. They had been made and re-made in whichever locality by the humdrum habits of whichever group of locals might happen to be there on a particular day—with little to no consequence for the commuter, for whom experience takes a secondary position to the primary fact of travelling. The message we receive from this style of movement is that 'adventures no longer exist in a technically saturated civilisation, only the danger of being late' (Sloterdijk 2013: 37).

In fact, the entire journey around the world was nothing more than a parentheses in a card game that the protagonist was playing with fellow gentlemen in one of Mayfair's high-society clubs. Mr Fogg

was called into question by his compatriots in reporting a story from one of the city's papers, that the globe could be traversed in eighty days. In order to meet their expectations, he felt it necessary to take on the role of the adventurer to discover if it *could* be traversed in eighty days by proving the representation, printed on the daily paper, true. His unfettered faith in the smooth circulation of global traffic pushed him to stick to the bet of eighty days against the doubts of his fellow club-members. The difference Verne makes in this scheme, in conceiving a modernity as a global traffic scheme, is that the exploratory, discoverable elements of journeying have been lost. After the initial circumnavigations of the planet, technological travellers no longer experience the earth as full of frontiers to unknown zones, blank spots on maps or as legendary far-away kingdoms or territories of *hic sunt dracones* ('Here Be Dragons'). Instead, Verne's earth was a distinctly modern one: 'a mere epitome of situations that the daily papers, travel writers and encyclopaedias have long since portrayed more comprehensively' (2013: 37-8). Sloterdijk continues,

> Whatever incidents may occur, be it a widow-burning in India or a Native American attack in the west, they can never really be more than events and circumstances of which a member of the London Reform club is better informed than the tourist on site.
>
> In Jules Verne's tale, the globetrotter has abandoned his profession as a documentarist and becomes a pure passenger. He presents himself as a customer of transportation services who is paying for a voyage *without* any experiences that could later be recounted. For him, the circumnavigation of the world is a sporting achievement rather than a philosophical lesson—no longer even part of an educational programme. Thus Phileas Fogg can remain as speechless as an athlete. (2013: 38)

From this, we can better understand the three aforementioned costs of the Copass Tours: they resembled the costs of participating in a fitness group more than an expedition team. And this precisely is the kind of hero that Copass supported on its network in practice: *athletes*. The athlete is the muscular, masculine liberator hero put in motion in a simulated world of prepared discovery. One who followed a set of particular movements: to go in-and-out of coworking spaces, to wait in pre-planned queues in airport security, to shuffle through customs stalls at the border and to anxiously walk up and down a street looking for the street number of one's CouchSurfing flat. The fact-checking we worked so hard to achieve enabled *discovery as a feat of athleticism.* No longer were there great physical or intellectual dangers, no existential or spiritual unknowns, no potential of getting truly lost, no chance of deep desperation. To discover was to act out the process of discovery in traffic patterns, while extending one's body in a particular manner in order to navigate its circulations. Discovery was achieved by accomplishing physical movements—for Copass customers, it was a muscular achievement, not a conceptual one.

But there is a crucial distinction that must be made. Discovery in Copass was *not* a feature of the wider social world, but rather specifically the result of our labour that people purposefully bought into. As one of the selling points of the startup was that it enabled a *great simplification*, this simplification leapt off the map and onto the rough terrain where users would be walking. And this is precisely why it took so much effort for Stefano and I to create these tours. Because we were attempting to level, bevel, sand down and square away a real world which was naturally bumpy, uneven and inconvenient, full of steep hills and out-of-commission bus routes into a continuous, polished map-world of Copass. We were attempting to take the smooth, seamless, flat elements of

the map and transpose them into the phenomenal world of users. Thus, the athleticism of Verne and of Copass match at the degree in which, for both of these visionaries, the world of the acting protagonists was *a great simplification* in the flat, coordinate-driven map-like surface of global traffic patterns. In both, the sporting achievement of discovery is achieved in minute, quiet muscular activities of stepping on-and-off of pre-booked transport vehicles, of walking between the carriage-door and the hotel, between the bus stop and the coworking space. The rest of the time involved merely riding different roads, train tracks, sea currents and global wind patterns at set speeds.

This kind of virtual invincibility of travel in the world-made-map is made explicit in a passage from Verne's 1862 book, *Five Weeks in a Balloon.* In this passage, the protagonist discusses his imminent travel plans:

> "Come, then," said the doctor, "what have I to fear? You will admit that I have taken my precautions in such a manner as to be certain that my balloon will not fall; but, should it disappoint me, I should find myself on the ground in the normal conditions imposed upon other explorers. But, my balloon will not deceive me, and we need make no such calculations."
>
> "Yes, but you must take them into view."
>
> "No, Dick. I intend not to be separated from the balloon until I reach the western coast of Africa. With it, every thing is possible; without it, I fall back into the dangers and difficulties as well as the natural obstacles that ordinarily attend such an expedition: with it, neither heat, nor torrents, nor tempests, nor the simoom, nor unhealthy climates, nor wild animals, nor savage men, are to be feared! If I feel too hot, I can ascend; if too cold, I can come down. Should there be a mountain, I can pass over it; a precipice, I can sweep across it; a river, I can sail beyond it; a storm, I can rise above it; a torrent, I can skim it like a bird! I can advance without fatigue, I

> can halt without need of repose! I can soar above the nascent cities! I can speed onward with the rapidity of a tornado, sometimes at the loftiest heights, sometimes only a hundred feet above the soil, while the map of Africa unrolls itself beneath my gaze in the great atlas of the world." (2012 13-14)

Verne's balloon demonstrates the archetypal invincible condition of world-traversing as map-travelling. This hot air balloon performs a smooth, transcendent operation on the craggy facts of global travel. No longer are travellers stuck to the rough contours of the planet's high mountains and steep hillsides; the muddy backroads and floodplains have no slowing effect on the modern traveller. Not even the world oceans, with their vast dimensions having transformed the "heavenly 'above'" into a "terrestrial 'yonder'" for the first global sea travellers, can stop the hot air balloon, floating casually to 'the loftiest heights' while also drifting effortlessly to skim the water like a bird (Sloterdijk 2013: 77). The balloon prefigures the modern condition of travel that Copass was designed with. The Copasser was made able to float above the world, looking down at its continents full of possibilities, awaiting descent as if from a balloon down to pick and choose amongst its many ports of call (for similar anecdotes of the experience of balloon travel, see Holmes 2013). Travel was light, effortless and affected neither by unhealthy climes, wild beasts nor savage men. This was a condition of travel for the affluent, afforded by the conditions of modern technology that allowed travel to be conceived as a floating line between two waypoints—where route conditions of Google Maps bore more importance than the real-time conditions of how one travelled. For Verne's protagonist, 'the map of Africa unrolls itself beneath my gaze,' as the startup's customised Google Map of Lisbon unrolled itself beneath the gaze of conference-goers, who squinted, shielding their screens from the glare of Portugal's bright sunshine.

On the homepage of the Copass website, lines and points land softly on a map-image in a smooth scrolling animation. Using the website's interactive map, pins were plotted on a relief map that illustrated the altitude of the earth's continental features, but having flattened all of its other irrelevant features for the traveller (such as social and economic inequalities, zones of warfare, of disease, etc). This was significant: for the map-world of Copass was indicated visually by barometric difference of altitude (necessary to calculate where to touch-down) as well as difference of negative-space traffic routes versus empty-space 'everywhere else.' These were the two need-to-know features for Copass heroes voyaging through its terrains: one to grasp the surface one's feet tread upon while expending muscular energy between vehicles, the other to install traffic patterns that would transport the traveller from the last discovery to the next one.

5

FORCEFIELDS FOR THE COMFORT ZONE

It wasn't until the very end of my fieldwork when I realised how Copass's notion of *discovery* affected myself as well. Having visited fifty-one coworking spaces in seven countries, I fell into a routine when going to different spaces. First: I looked on the startup's website to see what spaces were in the local area. Second: I spoke to the team about the options to see what they recommended. Third: I figured out my travel itinerary to get from wherever I was staying to the coworking space I decided to work at. Fourth: I arrived at the space, met the manager and found a desk. Fifth: I checked-in to the space using the big green 'Check-In' button on the Copass website, confirming my financial transaction to the manager, as well as confirming the start of my workday to the Copass cofounders, wherever they might be in the world (they would get an auto-notification that I had checked-in for work). Finally, I worked throughout the day, had lunch with other

coworkers, shared a few interesting conversations, occasionally went for drinks with them or attended an event after-hours, then I headed home to wherever I was staying—just to repeat this routine the next day.

Of course I was aware that *discovery,* as explored in the previous chapter, was a marketing tool we were using to sell our service to customers, but I hadn't realised—in the habitual workdays over the twelve months of my fieldwork—just how much this way of moving through the world had become ensconced in my embodied attitude towards the day. Reflecting on my travels, my personal experience of Copass discovery was indeed one of athletic proportions. I spent my days dedicating my mind and efforts to work projects, and evenings taking notes and writing ethnographic observations. Little time or effort was left to figure out where I would go next and how I would get there. Movements between home and transport, then transport and coworking spaces became embodied in a series of walks, waits and occasionally jogs (when running late). I 'discovered' Copass's spaces one at a time, each morning moving swiftly with anticipation for a new experience across the smooth, polished map-world of the startup.

To demonstrate how this occurred in practice for me on a regular basis, below is an excerpt from my field notes on my first visit to a coworking space in northern Paris, Draft Ateliers. In this excerpt, the continuous cartographic lines of Google Maps were laid over my physical walking path—furnishing me with a concrete destination, and transposing the surroundings into colourful decorative elements of the 'discovery' process in precisely the same way we designed for users to experience in the Copass Tours from the previous chapter.

Exiting the old above-ground metro station of *La Chappelle*, I descended to the boulevard. The pavement was packed with people bustling this way and that, rushing to work in one direction or another. An excitement was palpable in the street: people passing out the normal Parisian morning papers, and a group of street vendors already setup with their goods loosely arranged on tarps and blankets. This was the normal fare that one could find in northern Paris: belts, watches, handbags and cheap plastic toys that lit up and played music. I crossed the street heading north, pushing my way through the crowd across standstill traffic that clogged up the intersection with heavy fumes. Passing by a small park, huddled groups of old Algerian and West African men were gathered smoking cigarettes and speaking in hushed morning tones. Two cafés next door were full of people standing, drinking coffee and reading newspapers.

I cut down a side-street, fumbling through my heavy satchel (with my laptop, charger, a book, my notebook and headphones, at this point after two months of my internship at Copass I was prepared to work anywhere). I swiped right on my iPhone to double-check Google Maps, to ensure I was going the right way. This morning I was heading to meet Stefano at one of the city's newest coworking spaces, Draft Ateliers. It seemed like a nice place from the photos I'd seen on Facebook and Copass, and Stefano was keen to get to know them and see what kind of community they had there. I walked speedily up *Rue Pajol*—this street was interesting, because its cobblestone paving was home to two disparate worlds: an older Paris replete with small warehouses and old two-story homes leftover from its countryside-industrial days, and a newer Paris of sleek glass buildings and designer apartments.

I walked past a blue storefront with half-closed shutters. It was lined with shoes along the sidewalk. Doing a double-take, I walked back and looked inside to find brightly coloured shimmering Hindu shrines lit up with incense burning and worshippers with their backs to the entrance in conversation. A mixture of kids and parents stood by the entrance, busy tidying up the space after morning prayer. It looked like it used to be some kind of office. Continuing my way to the coworking space, I passed two bistros at the next intersection busy with activity. The sidewalks were packed with black men in Islamic prayer gowns sipping coffee and laughing loudly. I continued past them and came to an expansive and well-maintained concrete square, splaying out in front of an impressive wooden building.

Resembling a large renovated warehouse of some kind, the building had a massive saw-tooth roof with black (freshly painted) steel beams supporting a modular rail infrastructure that, underneath, housed a large rectangular structure covered in huge slats of beautiful varnished wood. Lined with symmetric windows and exquisite doors of floor-to-ceiling glass, the structure stood out triumphantly from its neighbouring brutalist concrete buildings and aged apartments. Walking across the large square, I scanned the range of shops and restaurants with open terraces and chalkboard signs posted to tempt potential customers. Draft Ateliers was one of these, with large windows covered in semi-transparent vinyl stickers of cartoon characters and faces. In front there was a small smoking area with a low bench, and the façade of the space was framed by two small potted trees. The glass door was propped open and soft music drifted out.

Pushing the door open, I walked to the front desk of the space to meet a young bearded man with thick-rimmed black glasses. I explained that I wanted to check-in with Copass (they had already signed up to the service) but he didn't understand. He introduced me to the manager, a well-spoken casually-dressed woman. I mentioned how I wanted to pay for a day of coworking using the Copass service. She smiled and urged me to find a seat, pointing to the coffee pot and biscuits on a small refrigerator by the front desk. The space was very quiet. The walls were white, the light bright. There were four people working in the front room on two shared work desks. There was a small lounge area with what looked like a handmade coffee table, and a large blackboard behind the front desk was covered in a product list with prices—coworking by the day, and prices for courses and equipment in the workshop.

The workshop was in the back, behind a replica of old iron-work and glass divider reminiscent of 19th century factories. The room extended out to a back porch, overlooking a modern garden constructed with the new renovation. There were two 3D printers, a laser cutter, some sewing machines, mannequins for adjusting tailoring and a woodworking shop. I sat down to work and setup my laptop, and as soon as I started checking through my morning emails Stefano walked nonchalantly through the door with his leather jacket and sunglasses, having parked his motorcycle around the corner. We greeted and both spoke to the manager as she told us about her space.

In all of my fieldwork, Draft was one of the most welcoming spaces I visited. It felt open and connected to the outside world. Comparatively, Mutinerie was a stark contrast (secluded under a nondescript black canopy, with opaque front windows, and an electronic padlocked security code door). Our first afternoon working at Draft was a crisp and clear autumn day, so we walked next door to a Brooklyn-style bagel restaurant built in the same complex, and ate lunch outside in front of the coworking space. The atmosphere in Draft breathed out into the newly built square in front of the building. Conversations faded-in and disappeared as people walked by the front door. People would pop in out of curiosity to see what the space was about and coworkers would step outside for a smoke or phone call. Out of all the coworking spaces I had visited by that point, it felt like a space open to everyone. Draft's website confirmed my sentiment, describing their space as follows:

> The coworking space is open to everyone without reservation [*ouvert à tous, sans réservation*]. Open Monday to Friday from 10am to 8pm, and Saturday from 2pm to 8pm.
>
> Why work in a shared workspace?
>
> Well, it's a good way to get out of your flat: stuck between four walls, your productivity and creativity work in slow motion. Sometimes, it's good to change the air [*il suffit de changer d'air*]… Come and try at least! Next, there's the social aspect: as freelancers and independent creators, we are often stuck with ourselves, without a real relationship with others from our career. At Draft, you'll meet lots of people and share your work, your vision.

> Because it's important to work in comfortable surroundings, Draft provides its coworkers a calm terrace in the back to work, exchange, relax or eat lunch! (Draft Ateliers 2017, my translation)

I came to discover that *'ouvert à tous, sans réservation'* was more of a successful marketing slogan than an on-the-ground reality. I found out at the end of my fieldwork that the building of which Draft was a part had led an interesting history. *Halle Pajol,* it was called, was designed by French architect Françoise-Hélène Jourda, as a monument to embedded environmental architecture (JAP 2013). Before its renovation, this building was a train depot for regional tracks continuing south to Paris's *Gare de l'Est* station. Abandoned for decades, the city took it up in 2007 as a redevelopment project that would, in one fell swoop, provide an opportunity for environmental, geographical and social revitalisation. With 3,500 m2 of solar panels replacing its old roof, the Hall boasted the country's largest urban solar panel collection (Le Breton 2013). This fact of engineering would make criticising the installation of this building a difficult stance for anyone to take.

The mission of this renovation was to bring *'énergie positive'* to the neighbourhood (Le Breton 2013). It was to do this first and foremost ecologically, through its ability to produce more energy than it consumed via solar panels and recovered water recycling system. Even the wood panelling used for the building was sourced from sustainable forests in Scandinavia, with organic paints and natural linoleum. In the construction process—trains were used to reduce construction emissions coupled with the transportation of heavy metals. This renovation, much like the famed *Centquatre* renovation in the neighbouring quarter of Stalingrad (a renovated crematorium-turned-arts centre, in a zone also deemed by the state as appropriate for social and economic development) also aimed to

revitalise urban space, enabling a mixture of (mostly affluent) locals to enjoy and profit from newly established shared space, relieving the city of its unused fenced-off industrial zones and turning it into productive public space. I visited this building after working with Stefano at Draft one day, and got to explore another large urban redevelopment project opening itself to nearby streets, breathing with the controlled comfort of bourgeois life.

In practice, however, *énergie positive* was not shared by all who leisurely enjoyed *Halle Pajol*. During the second summer of my fieldwork, impromptu migrant camps were forcefully removed from underneath the metro line of *Boulevard de La Chapelle*, and left with nowhere to go, around one hundred African migrants moved up *Rue Pajol* and installed themselves on the very same public square of the coworking space. These migrants, temporarily setup without proper resources or means to live comfortably, wrote on a series of signs in English and French:

> We are migrants who have come from Africa to France. The government, as they call themselves (the mayor) has told us to go live in a hotel. They have moved us to the hotel, and have not given us anything. No papers, no accommodation. Then, they sent us to Pajol. (in Orsini 2015, my translation)

A reporter from France's *Le Nouvel Obs* opened an article about the migrants at Pajol with the following,

> Under the balconies of a building, two pensioners observe: 'Nobody wants to welcome them' [*personne ne veut les accueillir*]. They are speaking of migrants who have found themselves on the other side of the street, on the square Natalie Sarraute, in front of *Halle Pajol* (the 18th arrondissement) newly renovated and having become in only a few months a magnet for Parisian hipsters. […] Here, one does not find a proper camp, but migrants have in any case wanted to signal their presence to local residents. (Orsini 2015, my translation)

Upon reading this, the double standard shocked me into recognition: the warm, happy, peaceful atmosphere I experienced in my first and subsequent visits to Draft were little more than a fiction crafted for a very specific type of human being—the same human that Copass was aiming to produce, that of the mannered, moneyed and well-travelled (heroic) coworker. In this moment, I realised that the warm, welcoming feelings I had upon first walking into Draft—after having researched it on Copass, having looked through its photos, having read its description, having spoken about it with other Parisian coworkers—were part of a long, elaborated process of impression-building. The process of impression-building that was under *my* remit to produce for the customers of Copass. The backend work I was doing to build impressions of a carefree world of discovery and travel had, over the course of months, put me in position of an audience member of the startup's own spectacle. In this moment, I was like 'a member of the audience [who] inadvertently enters the backstage' in an 'inopportune intrusion,' observing 'well-kept dark secrets or negatively-valued characteristics that everyone can see but no one refers to' (Goffman 1959: 132-3). The aesthetic universe Copass was constructing—referred to in Chapter 3 as casting 'a kind of spell' (1959: 76)—had affected me as a backstage employee turned front-row observer. Draft—

like Phileas Fogg's journey around the world—was a parentheses in the overall impression-building project of Copass to turn its coworking spaces into spaces of discovery, full of the magic of exploration, rife with the power of opportunity.

The story of the migrants at *Halle Pajol* never came up during my fieldwork. I never heard anything about it in any of the Copass coworking spaces I visited, I never saw anything on social media regarding the fact that it was happening, and Draft never mentioned it on their social media platforms. Upon finding out that this had happened on my own, as I kept digging into the events I realised how Copass's orchestrated discovery hid distasteful elements of the world from the eyes of its traveller in a Vernian manner. Slotetdijk suggests that Verne 'considers it important to note that his hero does not have any experiences,' and in this moment I realised the depth of this suggestion that, from the nineteenth century onwards, 'experience-led travellers were followed by event travellers, who journeyed to remote places in order to enhance themselves *through impressions'* (2013: 37, 38-9, my emphasis).

Copass was building impressions of how to travel through the world, where moving through traffic between one space to the next was an exercise in self-improvement through impressions of the world one received. This is to suggest that, in helping the Copass hero circulate the world in traffic patterns, the embodied process of moving from one place to another was little more than absorbing impressions that were created largely *elsewhere.* The impressions of Draft were crafted on the Copass website and social media pages, just like the impressions of the Camps were created equally through online mediums many days before the events were underway. That is precisely why the hero in Copass was an athletic, muscular one: because there was no longer an intellectual stimulus

in moving around, as one *knew already* what to expect: what kind of experiences would happen (serendipitous meetings, serendipitous after-hours drinks, serendipitous productivity) and what sorts of environments would contain them. There was no great outside and no profound surprise in the movements of guided discovery. But by taking critical distance, I was able to come to a different perspective on Draft and its heroic coworking-adventure circuitry.

It was necessary, in my account of the startup, to gain critical distance from this example, because of how it demonstrates one of Goodman's categories of worldmaking: 'deformation' (1978: 16). Deformation, as a worldmaking method, can be defined as 'reshapings or deformations that may according to [one's] point of view be considered either corrections or distortions' (1978: 16). From the perspective of the Copass Hero from Chapter 3, it may very well be considered a correction to remove migrants from the picture. Because these people, in the eyes of the hero, do not assert their lives with the confidence of a world-travelling muscleman: they seem to wander aimlessly, to lack direction and to not dominate their world as the Hero might be accustomed to. But from an outside perspective, of course this could be seen as a distortion of social facts and human suffering, to hide these unfortunate people so as to not dispel the enchantment of the wonderful, simple and accessible conditions of travel made possible by the new world of Copass.

DISPELLING AN ENCHANTMENT

'Nobody wants to welcome them,' an interviewee of the *Nouvel Obs* recounted (Orsini 2015). This scene—of two retired people observing *Halle Pajol's* scattered square—struck me as such: for Draft, as a space that claims to be 'open to all,' it was poignant that for people in a situation of such extreme despondence at their doorstep, 'nobody wanted to welcome them.' Of course these homeless migrants were not in a position to cowork—none of them had MacBooks, and none of them were likely about to prototype a new product for sale on the market—but the situation raised a point I had already noticed in smaller, localised examples in the Copass network's coworking spaces. Their experience was delicately crafted for a specific type of person, and these migrants were not eligible to participate.

> People would like to help but they think that they can't do anything individually. And yet one can do plenty of simple things: search for boxes at the closing of supermarkets, make the rounds in local bakeries at the end of the day […]
>
> We move them from street to street but that doesn't serve any purpose. That doesn't do anything but wear them out, everything is done to whither down the group and it works, especially when they have to run wounded and with bare feet. We are in the midst of making ghosts [*on est en train d'en faire des fantômes*]. The power that migrants have

> here is to have understood that it is necessary to stay together because if they isolate themselves, it's over for them. (local volunteer in Orsini 2015, my translation)

The man I met sitting at the reception desk behind Draft's front door—although staring through open air into the public square—was a world away from refugees claiming their temporary home. The space between him and the refugees was materially open and unobstructed, but an invisible force kept the inside and outside profoundly separated. Even things such as collecting food and drinks individually were deemed out of sight or out of mind for the heroic coworkers working away in the space, whose heroism apparently did not apply out of bounds. After brief negotiations between a representative from *le Front de gauche* and the head of the district's prefecture of police—in a last ditch attempt to move the migrants to a *'zone neutre'* where they could rest without being arrested—the police moved in to forcefully evict the group. Equipped with heavy riot gear (bulletproof vests and kevlar helmets with protective visors, armed with holstered pistols and expandable batons), they began to encroach upon the group in a straight line, before eventually breaking through the chain of volunteers protecting the huddled migrants. The scene occurred as such,

> Riot police appeared suddenly with reinforcements at 3pm. The assault took place half an hour later, under cries of 'Shame!' and 'Liberty!' The forces of order proceeded then to undertake a methodic evacuation of the migrants, one by one or two by two. The refugees, taken by their arms having been dragged out of the group, passed through the cordoned ropes setup by the CRS [*Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité*]. The bus filled up inevitably. (Orsini 2015, my translation)

The space's motto rings true in this moment, *'Les ateliers connectés,'* except now we realise how they are connected and to whom: white, middle-class Parisian techno-urbanites. For them, discovery was possible. Spaces and their neighbourhoods were enchanted with a charming and peaceful ambiance, charged with calm and prepared with a well-stocked supply of ideas, capital and conversations involved in the opportunity-making processes of a productive business day. To understand the enchanted environment that Draft created for itself, which Copass propagated, below I examine four photographs taken from the space's Facebook page depicting the exterior in several different moments of the space's life. Some are more tranquil, some photos are busy, but they were all posted by the space as proper, approved, strategic marketing representations used to convey a certain kind of impression of the space to viewers (that is, customers and potential customers).

In image one, the viewer witnesses a clean, contemporary, and safe environment that is a blank canvas for whatever project, event, or potential typical workday one might have in mind. The sun is out, and ironically the coworking space seems closed as the terrace next door is packed with people —indicative of the fun and relaxed workspace that you'd be paying for (so fun, in fact, that you might not work at all, having a drink next door instead). A single white woman struts right of the image, independently and boldly enjoying a walk on a nice day. The space's logo floats weightlessly at the centre, with an opening party sticker overlaid as if it was just added, signifying spontaneity and the handmade quality of the space, with people caring about the smallest intimate details. In image two we witness the space open for some kind of event, with fashionable white people strutting confidently in and out of the front door, left wide open for them to discover. Inside, one finds opportunity-making at work, with people standing around (presumably listening to a presenter) either in the midst of learning, sharing, talking, eating or drinking.

In image three, we see the social life of the coworking space spill out onto the square. A quirky assortment of wooden chairs matched with a bright blue ping pong table setup with a lunch feast—this is the coworking spirit in its purest form. Too fun to not eat on a normal table, too relaxed to not be sitting with one's face in their laptop, too laid-back *not* to enjoy a warm, sunny afternoon with friends and work colleagues. These coworkers inhabit the public square comfortably, using it within its acceptable limits to promote a calm, peaceful and tranquil bourgeois sensibility through their bourgeois materials. In image four, we see this idea brought to an even more complete conclusion with the addition of a foosball table, a bar, a grill and a work desk featuring a MacBook. This is another event, this time with both doors propped wide open, to promote maximum circulation of air and people, as locals are invited in to shop at its 'Creator Market.' The fact that the door is the most open in this image than in any other is unsurprising, as for coworking spaces the circulation of air and people tended to correlate to, first and foremost, the circulation of capital.

In comparison, below I discuss images taken from the migrant standoff in front of *Halle Pajol* described above, on the 8th of June 2015. These were published in various news sources, and outside of the strategic representational auras of Draft and Copass—infused with glimmering visions of collaboration, cooperation and a bright optimism for social life—they provide a different perspective on the calm utopian arrangement of *Halle Pajol's* sunny public square.

In image five, we witness the equivalent to image one, but this time the square is covered in trash and papers with bodies slumped up against the organic wooden slats instead of relaxing on a terrace. Riot police interrupt the public space. The building's yellow blinds are closed to the sun, instead of open to their polished windows. This time, a woman also stands at the right-hand side of

the composition, but here she is tense, stern and authoritative, confirmed by her *Police Nationale* badge and large anti-riot shoulder pad. Instead of calmly strolling in a sunny afternoon, this woman is exercising her job as enforcer of the law to discipline out-of-line individuals to return the sunny square back to its non-liminal comfortable conditions. In image six, we witness the same scene but before the evacuation, where bodies stand around in the public space in a very different way than in image two. In that image, the entrepreneurs stroll boldly in and out of the door of opportunity that Draft has left open, moving with certainty and confidence they use to navigate their lives and careers with expertise. In this image, however, the bodies are stuck, cornered, confused and lacking direction in a situation of complete uncertainty against a wall of armed riot police.

In image seven, we see collaboration at work, but in a different sense than what we might be familiar with in coworking. Whereas, in image three, the coworkers might be *picking themselves up* and helping with business advice, or simply chatting about the weather or recent events that have happened in their space—in image seven we see national police literally *picking up and removing* a migrant who has been deemed unable to inhabit the same public space. Finally, in image eight, we witness the only open door for unwelcome migrants: the door to the police bus that procedurally evacuates them, filling up inevitably with inappropriate bodies. In comparison to image four, where the door of Draft is wide open for appropriate visitors as a way to partake in their stockpiles of opportunity, migrants are forced to face their only way out, with physical violence preventing any alternative. Whereas the coworkers are free to walk in and out, explore their space calmly—perusing the grill, grabbing a drink at the bar, playing foosball or ping-pong—these migrants are forcefully shoved through their door on a one-way journey to an unknown destination.

IN THE MIDST OF MAKING GHOSTS

> ‘This place is unbelievable [*hallucinant*]. You really don’t have the impression of being in Paris!’ exclaims Virginie, wearing flip-flops and a beach dress on the terrace of *Halle Pajol’s* New York-style bakery. Enjoying a bagel with grilled vegetables, she observes the elegant wood building, glass and steel, its sheds draped in tapestries and solar panels. (Carasco 2015, my translation)

This remark, from an article quoting a woman describing the nature of *Halle Pajol* as one of Paris’s utopian places [*lieux d’utopie*], precisely sums up the psychosocial status of this place: a hallucination. The above scene and its jutting juxtaposition—inconveniently-located foreign peoples and a calm, technologically assured interior on the threat of being breached—appears similarly in Verne’s *Twenty-Thousand Leagues Under the Seas*, as the *Nautilus* is forced to open its hatches for fresh air after having been stuck in the coral reefs of Papua New Guinea for a number of days. A native tribe has surrounded the vehicle in canoes, armed with spears and arrows, aiming to attack. Professor Aronnax speaks with Captain Nemo about the situation:

> ‘The Papuans?’ replied Captain Nemo, shrugging his shoulders slightly.
>
> ‘Won’t they come inside the *Nautilus*?’
>
> ‘But how?’

> ‘By coming down the hatches that you are opening.’
>
> ‘Dr Aronnax,’ he calmly replied, ‘it is not that easy to enter the hatches of the *Nautilus*, even when they are open.
>
> I stared at the captain.
>
> ‘You do not understand?’
>
> ‘No, not at all.’
>
> ‘Well come and you will see.’
>
> I headed for the central stairwell. There, Ned and Conseil, puzzled and fascinated, were watching a few of the crewmen opening the hatches, whilst cries of anger and blood-curdling howls rang out outside.
>
> The hatch covers were opened outwards. Twenty horrible faces appeared. But the first of these natives to put his hand on the guide-rail of the stairs was thrown backwards by some invisible force and ran off, uttering awful cries and making exaggerated leaps.
>
> Ten of his companions imitated him. Ten suffered the same fate. (Verne 1998: 148)

Captain Nemo had ingeniously electrocuted the central staircase, preventing natives from entering ‘by some invisible force.’ This excerpt serves as a succinct reminder of the violent, self-assured means of force that keep apart the two worlds (the civilised and the savage) in this novel, while also bearing parallels to the use of force to separate the two worlds that clashed on the square of *Halle Pajol*. In both worlds, there was an equalising force that kept separation in place: electricity aboard the *Nautilus*, and CRS police at *Halle Pajol*. The violent actions in both cases were not caused by the protagonists of our story, but rather they were *circumstances* of that separation being put in danger. Part of the general background conditions that enable the *Nautilus* to circle the world at the will of its Captain, much in the same way of those that enabled Copass to circle the world’s coworking spaces at the will of its heroes. As long as this separation was maintained, there was no

need for at length discussion, for deliberation or for change. The means to maintain the separation were always in place, which is more than enough to keep business-as-usual attitudes flowing smoothly inside the hull of the *Nautilus* and behind the doors of Draft.

The *great simplification* Copass achieved in its marketing efforts, that all of its coworking spaces exemplified and profited from, was indeed a great technological achievement insofar as it was efficient and effective, enrolling people into representations of places, turning travel from an experiential enterprise into a rehearsal of received impressions. But just as this success was achieved because of how Copass, as a tool, 'got out of the way' in order to 'let people connect with each other' (as the cofounders often put it), it also had the ability to get *others* out of the way in the process, making people, problems, complications and impediments to the lifestyle and ludic pleasure of the startup's customers invisible. This aesthetic, philosophical and bodily encapsulation of world experience through the orchestration of discovery between coworking spaces had the capacity to *'en faire des fantômes,'* as an observer above pointed out regarding the migrants of *Halle Pajol*. To turn technologies into ghosts led to the ability to unthinkingly turn people into ghosts. No matter how pleasant a user's experience might be designed, to get the tool out of the way was a notion that decoupled the making-of processes which *enabled* certain ways of habitation in the world, from the all-too-real political circumstances of its inhabitants.

6

THE INFANTILE PASSION OF ENCLOSURE

A little girl glares devilishly into the camera lens. Clumsily wielding a weighty flintlock pistol with mother-of-pearl arabesque inlays, she points ambiguously towards the middle of the frame, her smile hiding a sense of forbidden pleasure smirked with a mischievous glare. Grasping the weapon, she sits on one of the Copass uniforms (which, crumpled on her seat, maybe didn't fit her upon first try). She takes centre stage in a strange fantasy environment. Situated on a hardwood floor with a loosely thrown Persian rug, the tacked-on library wallpaper frays at its edges, emphasising repeated horizontal motifs on each sheet of paper that continue back into the room. The yellowed globe, with its political map and meridian lines covering a dense Middle East to the distant horizon of a placid Pacific ocean, sits next to an old iron Remington Noiseless suitcase typewriter—as if to serve reference for some imaginary writer, who in typing might flip the globe casually at the tip of a

A girl photographed for a Copass marketing stunt (Copass 2017f).

finger back and forth, to recall city names, planetary coordinates or to visualise heroic distances in a quick glance. Out of the typewriter pour long orange folded papers, with 'CC' logos and skeuomorphic business cards printed as their main image. Who is the visage of this business card, on the cover of these replicated documents? Upon inspection, it is none other than the 19th century French novelist, Jules Verne.

At first glance, the image immediately calls itself into question with its odd surrealism: Why is there this young girl holding a gun us? Why does she wear jeans, and a top-hat? Why is there an ornate polished globe seated on a rustic storage barrel? Why is there a typewriter that consumes and/or produces orange folded papers? Why are the books affixed to the wall without means to read them? Why is Jules Verne's imaginary business card printed and placed dozens of times over in a typewriter? In short: what is going on in this extraordinary photo? And what does it have to do with Copass, the startup? Given the photo's protagonist, a childlike mischief permeates its composition. We bear witness to this girl's imagined play-interior, a place from which continent-spanning voyages begin, through which sheer-drop mountainous adventures can be pursued and high-seas sailboat explorations can be manned. She is in absolute control of the place and of the external viewer through mastery of her weapon. This play-space, and thus her control, however, seems like something only temporary. Unlike vast castles full of winding staircases and secret passages, and sturdy Victorian mansions full of wood-panelled libraries and heavy drapes, the aesthetic qualities of this room exist only lightly and at the surface.

We witness the thinness of these surfaces at first glance: the girl's face is one of superficial play, rather than deadly strategy. The wallpaper flips up in the light, the rug reveals wood planks, the

surface of the globe betrays its aged demeanour (through a power cable dangling near the barrel). These surfaces illustrate an atmosphere, giving an ambiance to this strange interior. They act as a form of shelter, insulating (even if only superficially) an interior space where this girl has taken complete political, mortal and aesthetic control. With the faces of Jules Verne printed on foldable brochures, we could begin to imagine the space through a setting of one of his adventure novels: sheltered in an administrative cabana or tent, the girl rules over a colonial-era encampment, discovering some faraway land. Charting, analysing, reading, writing and producing, the girl seems indeed in the midst of conducting some kind of productive work in this space, aside from holding us captive at gunpoint. But what is she doing, what is she producing, what are her raw materials, and how does she synthesise everything in this play-room? She seems, in fact, to be producing the same 'CC' icon—Copass's logo—in the typewriter, that she wears on her hat.

The 'CC' logo on her hat is peculiar—it is actually a sticker. We observe a similar sticker applied to the furry orange sombrero behind her, as well as a stack of unapplied stickers on the right-hand side of the image (just beneath the keys of the typewriter, ready to be transposed into the brochure logo in the in-tray). But beyond this sticker's capacity to be removed and applied to objects, there is another peculiarity. The text reads, 'I COPASS.' The business logo of Copass aesthetically stands in for the first part of the word itself. In this circular sticker, there is a referential circularity of name-and-logo that, in writing the name we find the key metaphor of movement Copass offers: *an infinity sign*. The logo, insinuating infinite possibilities, infinite movement, infinite speed, infinite distance, feeds back into the name, recalling its directionality into the name itself. The two feed into each other. The name implies the logo (to complete the circular shapes of its first two characters, C-O) and the logo implies the name (to complete the word implied). Each one feeds into the other,

erasing the distinction between logo and name, between aesthetic and text, instead circulating simultaneously through its own circuit of recognisability.

But, the name-logo Copass also feeds back into the subject, the 'I' of the sticker. 'I Copass' is a condition, it is a statement, it is a symbol. *Copass ergo sum*—I Copass, therefore I am. Important is the omission of an intermediary word. The sticker does not say 'I use Copass' or 'I like Copass.' Instead, there is a direct innate relation between the subject and Copass, with the two objects cycling in reference to the other. Copass is me, and I am Copass. The girl embodies Copass by donning the hat, by pointing the weapon at us. In controlling and believing in her colonial cabana interior, she is given the ability to become something greater, something more playful, something more imaginative—a *Copasser*. And we see this process in action by shifting our gaze to the right-hand-side of the image, to the typewriter. Here, pushed in a pile under and in front of the typewriter, we find the raw ingredients of the Copass user: push-pin buttons and stickers with the startup's logo. These are deactivated, as they lie in a stockpile ready to be taken and personalised in the embodied act of wearing them, but they hint at a progression which is evident in the composition of the table.

While these raw materials sit, as if ready for processing, in front of the productive space of the keyboard, our gaze travels up across the circular keys of the machine, just in arm's reach of the globe ready to be spun, where almost as if a result of one's productive labour, orange folded sheets pop out of the tray of the typewriter. These sheets are how-to brochures that demonstrate how it works to use Copass, with a large image of a global map on the inside and step-by-step details about what to do in order to become a Copasser. These are in the in-tray of the typewriter, with all of the

necessary elements ready to go. All it takes is to sit down, adopt the Copass clothing and become a Copasser by *writing one's own adventure*. The business cards in the out-tray of the machine hint at the tempting premise of what could arrive if one gets to work on Copass, and this is confirmed by the black-and-white business card of Jules Verne. Here, his credentials are listed like a normal Copass user. He serves as the blank-slate character of great adventure whose footsteps users are invited to follow in. Writing one's own adventure on Copass would take Jules Verne as the inspiration to produce something singular and spectacular. What one could rightly call a *voyage extraordinaire*.

And in this, we discover the startup's key metaphor of movement—an infinite circulation—present in the arrangement of the photograph. The girl adopts the 'I COPASS' sticker into her wardrobe, then is invited to sit and through it produce at the typewriter the adventure she wants to live (which, given her mischievous glare, is hard to say she is not already in the midst of doing) to make her own Copass adventure, proving her sticker that, indeed, 'I COPASS.' But as we come to grasp the circular relations that the sticker stuck to the girl's hat applies, we notice yet another sticker with the same text, 'I COPASS' in the bottom right-hand corner of the image. Yet, here, this sticker is digital and has been applied to the photo in post-processing. Even though it is not a physical sticker, its off-centre placement and white peel in the bottom-right corner reveal that it is, much like the wallpaper and Jules Verne business cards, a skeuomorph that has borrowed its material dynamics from real-life sticker counterparts, reproduced in Photoshop and saved onto the photo to mark it as participating in similar cycles of reference.

Not only does the girl signify 'I COPASS,' but now the capturer of the photo also signifies 'I COPASS' through the viewfinder. The photo is joined into this circulation, but we are not quite sure of the relationship between the two stickers. What does it mean that the girl participates in this relationship in alongside the photographer? What happens to the object to which the sticker is affixed? On the one hand, it marks that object as participating in the infinite circulations of 'I COPASS' given in its aesthetic, but on the other hand it is an enrolling device that is applied in order to show off to an observer. Finally, then, what we can see is a three-tiered relationship in this photo. The girl, donning the sticker, points to the observer. The photographer, in post-editing, is enrolled in the gaze of of the girl's sticker by applying a similar sticker of his own. But this does not end with his application, as his sticker is meant to be shown to a new audience: in this case, us, the viewers of the photograph. Taken together, these levels of representation are linked hierarchically to one another, enrolling different observers into the circular logic of Copass, to partake in its circulations where possibilities are infinite, yet somehow neatly contained in the small play-room of this faux-colonial cabana.

THE METAPHYSICS OF STICKERS

This photo appeared in my first weeks of fieldwork. It was added as a header image by Stefano to a private Facebook group for friends called 'Copass Tasters.' The goal of this group was to communicate website updates to elicit testing from users and to gather their feedback at crucial moments of product development and service updates. But it was not limited to business-related

comments. It was described by Eric in 2013 as such: ‘This group is for the ones that help us build Copass by sharing feedback, experiences, ideas and much more.’ The use of the above photo as the group’s header image put people in the place of a Copasser. In this case, the photo elicits a sense of fun, of challenge and adventure that might encourage people to login to our website to begin adventures of their own (while, in the meantime, accomplishing the practical backend task of checking the website for technical errors). Stickers in the image compel the viewer to adopt the position of the girl in this room: becoming a heroic Copasser for a moment with the support of an imaginary aesthetic interior (through the website and Facebook group) where anything could be achieved—calling out through its progressive intertextuality of stickers.

Stickers were key devices to achieve this kind of connection to the startup and enrolment in it as they were transportable but above all, *stickable*—they could be applied to any available flat surface. These surfaces would often be the interiors of coworking spaces: on kitchen cabinets, on food preparation tables, on tiles above sinks, on doors, on windows, in corners, on bookshelves, on table lamps, computer monitors and more. They were never limited to these interiors, however, and could be placed on mobile objects as well—normally this was done on coffee mugs or the back panel of laptops (usually amongst an assortment of other stickers from other startups), but Copass team members also applied them to more extreme objects such as top-hats and off-road vehicles. The stickable feature of stickers gave them a mutable condition where they could flow in and out of environments through which Copass, the startup, circulated its capital and its users.

Copass’s universe—both imaginary in this photographed faux-cabana and real in its network of coworking spaces—was permeated by a sticky intertextuality, where stickers linked imagined and

real spaces. The stickers populated and furnished this universe wherever possible, and activated the infinite movement of Copass, signified in its logo, by engaging and inciting new kinds of circulations of thought, image and capital. This cross-domain circulation was made possible by the combination of three kinds of stickers used at Copass. As the stickable condition of these objects made them appropriate for smooth objects, we stuck them to as many surfaces as they would adhere to.

The first type of sticker was *the real sticker*. These were the circular orange stickers I found in the environments of coworking spaces. In my two visits (separated by eight months) to 90 MainYard, a coworking space in an old factory in London's neighbourhood of Hackney Wick, the 'I COPASS' sticker was still stuck on their blackboard-style kitchen drawers. Between my visits, the space had undergone a radical renovation (with the desk layout of the space having completely changed, and much of the space in my second visit reduced to a construction site) but the sticker remained. Even in dramatic concrete and wire transformations of coworking spaces, our physical presence persisted unfettered (it was also on Jonathan's coffee mug, an avid Copass fan who was based at the space, and this hand't gone anywhere either).

In an 'Acceleration Week' business seminar I attended with Stefano for a public-facing test session of our website, we ran out of business cards faster than we anticipated. Before the last dozen ran out, I suggested to Stefano that we hand out our stickers instead (as at the time we had around a hundred of them with us), to which he hastily agreed. As he continued presenting to users, I quickly scribbled in clear handwriting our website URL and Stefano's email on the sticker's paper peel-off back. For the majority of our testing (we handed out around 60), these stickers became our means of

continued contact with people afterwards, handmade and quickly improvised. Either they would be thrown out, kept in a forgotten drawer or applied to some notebook or water bottle—but the sticky circulation of Copass would continue long beyond the end of our short presentations.

The second type of sticker was *the web sticker*. Originally, in my fieldwork this came from an older version of the pricing plans page for our website. This was the first instance in Copass where I noticed skeuomorphic principles applied to design elements (transforming real-world objects into digital representations of those objects, but lacking their original functional purpose, retaining just the form of the object). These stickers had prices on them—as one might find in many retail environments, a very natural way in France to understand the relation between the price and object that is materially separated through a stickable surface—that, like the real stickers, were bright orange. The skeuomorphic element was denoted through a shadow under one edge of the sticker, as if it was being applied to the surface, not yet fully applied, or being removed. In any case it signified the disjunction between two surfaces: the temporary, sticky one, that attaches itself, and the permanent, structural one which is the canvas to which a sticker can be improvisationally applied (thrown onto the surface, seemingly without reflection).

The third type of sticker was *the Marksta sticker*. This was the most ubiquitous and frequent sticker used in Copass during my fieldwork. Just after the acceleration week, Stefano insisted I download an iPhone app called ‘Marksta’ to apply our customised Copass sticker to every photo we were posting on our social media profiles. He sent me two digital versions of the sticker—the round one, replicated aesthetically from the first two sticker types, and a flat horizontal one, which he suggested I use as it was more space-efficient for photographs. These were placed on all of our

photos we would post on Facebook. On every album that Stefano and Eric would upload, they would apply the stickers (usually on the bottom-right) to every photo.

Stickers for Copass were special metaphysical objects, enrolling several different registers into a coherent world-as-marketing message. They blended offline (in coworking spaces) and online (on Facebook) spaces, bridging the gap of action and representation by sticking a real sticker onto a coffee mug (of a real Copass customer) and by sticking a Marksta sticker onto a photo of a group surfing in Portugal (of equally real Copass customers). They combined fun (in photographic representations) and commerce (in bank transactions) by sticking web stickers onto blog photographs of customers drinking beer at a party and onto webpages detailing the pricing plans of how to join those parties in the first place. They were combined in diverse ways, with threads sewn back and forth between mediums (Twitter and top-hats), between purposes (advertising and plugging a crack in a coffee cup), at different speeds (some on cars, some on building columns) in different places (in San Francisco and in Sofia). Stickers provided a novel means of metaphysical meditation on cosmogony: who one is, what one is doing in one's life, who one could become, what one could be doing in Copass and what the future might be like as a customer of Copass. They provided centres of gravity in touch points to a network of coworking spaces, but also a network of *possibility*, of adventure and of self-improvement laden with a glossy, dreamlike quality.

RENDERING THE FANTASTIC CREDI(TA)BLE

I suggest that the peculiar metaphysics of stickers illuminate a connection between how Copass charted the world and enabled certain ways of living within it, with how Jules Verne charted and converted the fantastical worlds of his novels more than 150 years earlier. Out of Verne's collected works published by Pierre-Jules Hetzel as the *Voyages Extaordinaires*, thirty of these volumes were furnished with detailed maps, with forty-two engravings in total (Harpold 2005: 19). Noteworthy were their celebrated '*cartonnages colorés dorés* [colored and gold inlaid bindings]' that featured in all of these editions elements of, while not fully-fledged maps, 'cartographic idioms' giving readers a subtle yet unmistakable tinge of the geographical spirit of the novel to come (Harpold 2005: 19). These elements are not just added decoration or flowery adornments that sit idly next to the text—they interact deeply with the text to draw out of the reader a specific positionally to the adventure ahead.

> They are the first signifiers the reader encounters when she *surveys* the (unopened) Vernian text: they mark her point of entry into worlds known and unknown. (Opening the book—turning the cover—is then a double opening gesture in this case: she enters the text, into an imaginary whose traits are singled by iconic elements of the covers.) Verne's adventures nearly always begin *in media res*, the voyage already underway, signs of a mystery already witnessed, a letter in need of a reply, a found document in need of interpretation. The graceful, intriguing elements of the *cartonnages* participate in this formal break (another one of Verne's gambits): they

> suggest that the crossing of text and image, of narrative and cartography, has *already* begun at the boundary of the book and the reader's world. (Harpold 2005: 25)

Similarly to readers prying open one of these editions, when entrepreneurs, startups, designers, independent workers, consultants and others would see Copass stickers—be it in their coworking space, at an event or in a Facebook post—they pointed the direction to a world of adventure that was already *in media res*, with proof of its life evidenced in the presence of the sticker itself to the observant passerby. The crossing of text and image, business and dream, opportunity and expense, present and future already began at the boundary of the sticker and the onlooker's world. In the texts I was commissioned to help author for Copass (on its website, social media platforms, newsletters and blog posts), the paratextual elements of stickers served as *metaphysical enrolling devices* that would begin to situate Copass in relation to observers before they had a chance to enter the story—in this case, to learn about the startup, its product offering, cost and features.

But there was another crucial paratextual element in Copass: its cartography. From the three maps on the public website to the hundreds of maps on its private site (including the general explorer map, the profile maps of each user and the maps of each coworking space on its profile page) as well as dozens of maps included in blog posts, created for events, meetups and conferences (not to mention iconographic maps throughout the various stages of the website) and even physical elements like brochures, which would open out in a trifold to reveal a coworking space network map in the hands of the viewer—Copass was replete with maps. Some of them had practical purposes: to find a coworking space somewhere, to navigate and discover new spaces in different cities or even to directly check-in to a space and to pay right *in* the map. But most of these maps did

not serve a practical purpose. They were unnecessary duplicates (such as a world map on every coworking space profile page) that weren't more useful than a general map with many spaces. And many were design elements masked as pseudo-maps, that represented a map rather than being interactive or engaging for users looking to discover something through it.

What united the stickers and cartography of Copass as paratextual elements, was that they were designed aesthetic components that complemented the larger story of Copass—the story of the customers that used it as well as the overall growth and development of the Copass network. In a similar way, Verne and Hetzel collaborated to produce paratextual and textual elements to their full effect: to transform Verne's stories beyond mere fictions into fantastical dreamy voyages.

> In describing their engagements with textual methods and procedures of Verne's fiction as his *cartographies*, I mean to emphasise their complex relations to his texts in support of the spatial imaginaries of his heroes' adventures. This program is clearly discernible in the corroborative and sometimes juxtaposed significance of maps and elements resembling maps (the illustrations of the Hetzel editions), of textual passages that *read* like maps (Verne's taxonomic lists and panoramic descriptions), and of maps and narrative passages that underscore limitations of each form of representation. (Harpold 2005: 19-20)

Verne combines textual and paratextual elements to take the story beyond the confines of the text itself, refracting the potential fiction of a story through imagery, design elements and cartography to break down the boundary of in-text fiction and out-of-text fact. An example of how this works in Verne's works can be observed in a map Verne provides in *Voyages and Adventures of Captain*

Hatteras (1866). This map, called 'Map of the circumpolar regions, drafted for the voyage of Captain J. Hatteras by Jules Verne, 1860-61' signals a strange paradox: Verne did not begin writing this novel until 1863, so how could he have drafted this map for a journey that purportedly took place three years prior? The 'Verne' credited as author in the map's legend implies that this Verne was someone hired by Captain Hatteras, based on records given by survivors of the expedition. This Verne, then, 'belongs to the same (fictive) domain as Hatteras and his companions,' subtly blending fiction with reality in '(the map? the novel?) and the date of the adventure' (Harpold 2005: 18).

We find a similar conflation in the stickers of the girl pictured at the start of this chapter. The sticker of the girl, 'I COPASS' implies that she Copasses, participating in the infinite circulations between her becoming a Copasser and producing her own adventure within Copass, the process where 'I COPASS' begins and ends in a closed circular fashion. But the sticker of 'I COPASS' that is later added to the digital image calls into question this closed, internal circulation—suggesting that Copass circulates in a much wider fashion beyond the fantasy world of this quaint cabana. It calls into question the *fiction* of this fantastic dioramic scene, by blending it with the *fact* of the viewer looking into this world becoming directly enrolled into the 'I COPASS' logic through the act of looking-in. The fictive and strange colonial world in which the girl participates is deeply implicated in the nonfiction reality of a business marketing a product, and we discover that this paratextual element is what *connects the dream-generation of Copass with revenue-generation*.

This method of implicating the real and the fictional in mutual circulation enabled Copass to be at once a *company* and an *adventure*—just as, in *Hatteras*, "the calculated interleaving of fictional and nonfictional realms—'Jules Verne,' the expedition's cartographer, doubles 'Jules Verne,' the author

—is homologous with the map's incorporation of imagined spaces (Fort Providence, l'Île de la Reine) among actual terrains of the Arctic (Baffin Bay, the Davis Strait, etc.)" (Harpold 2005: 18). The location where the girl's photo from the beginning of the chapter was taken was a photo booth setup by Copass for an event that took place before I arrived at the startup—a conference on entrepreneurship and the sharing economy in Paris in March 2014. This photo booth, concealed through the lens of the photographer and the carefully constructed scene, provided a fantastical non-place that, through the circulation of stickers, was connected and embedded back into 'actual terrains' of everyday life (one's Twitter feed, one's Facebook) and spun in circuits that connected this portable playroom to the mobile offices of Copass's coworking spaces—infusing the network with a dreamlike quality of adventure and wonder.

Putting so much effort through aesthetics to achieve a recasting of the real sustains both sides of the Copass project: its dream dimensions and its profit potentials. The circulation of stickers resolves potential ideological quarrels by sewing paratextual elements of maps and stickers through the otherwise separate fabrics of childlike imagination and financial transactions (Harpold 2005: 18). In both cases, parallelism of fiction and the real achieve *verisimilitude* that gives each example its provocative and powerful draw. Verne's story becomes all the more gripping with its combination of real and fake places, of dubiously true name attributions and pseudo-cartographic imagery that encourage the reader to find the narrative at the edge of the book as much as at the heart of it. Copass became all the more compelling through its combination of productive coworking spots and imaginative colonial tents, of many stickers and pseudo-utility maps that drove the user to discover Copass on a sticker slapped onto the hood of an off-road vehicle in the desert as much as on the

large green ‘Check-In’ button on the website that transferred funds from a user’s bank account to the company’s.

In both of these cases, paratextual reality-bending ‘inflects the actual with an influence of the unreal, so that signs of the former are treated no differently from signs of the latter’ (Harpold 2005: 18). The result of doing this, then, is ‘to entangle that imagining with a textual (and graphic) apparatus that *renders the fantastic credible*’ (Harpold 2005: 18, my emphasis). For Copass, this act of rendering the fantastic credible has a double meaning: it sells a logic of adventure by using a constellation of paratextual elements to make it seem possible, but it also makes the fantastic *creditable* by leveraging these elements to garner subscriptions and increase revenue. This combination of credit and credibility is revealed in the words of Simone Verne, who writes, ‘Jules Verne is not only a purveyor of prophetic machines; he is above all a merchant of dreams’ (in Evans 2013: 130). Merchants of dreams make their wages in achieving credibility for the worlds they purport to open into—and as such they connect the circuits of capital with those of imagination.

WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU GO

In preparation for Copass Camp Lisbon, we had customised brand flags, coins, identity cards, keychains, instruction manuals, jewellery, apparel and the branded workers’ uniforms. After our last day of laser-cutting these materials, closing the door of Draft behind me, I reached into my bag to put on my headphones for my nightly commute, and jotted a note into my iPhone: ‘what kind of

startup is this? What's going on here? This is all a bit mad.' Eric told me, before I stepped out, with a smile across his face: 'This is your first real Copass adventure, isn't it?' He added, 'your first expedition with us!' I confirmed his suspicion, admitting I was really looking forward to it. At this point, I didn't know what to expect from our first Camp, but I knew it would be a seminal moment for the startup. The term 'Camp,' from the beginning, seemed like a change in linguistic register for Copass. Normally, Copass was a federation, a network, a hi-tech globetrotting digital service. But 'Camp' seemed to take a step backwards, isolating oneself and stepping out of high-speed tech networks into the peaceful darkness of a hilly forest.

This shift in tone between 'Camp' and 'Network' was captured in Stefano's adjustment of the logo for the Copass Camps. The 'A' in each word was crossed in the shape of a tent, or two sticks in preparation for making a campfire. The phrase was imbued with the spirit of a rustic Americana summer camp sign, one with a rounded font to resemble the etched lettering burned into wooden planks over the dirt-road entrances to summer campsites. These 'A' designs, which became a new logo fixture in the startup's iconography, began to make me reflect on the idea of a camp (rustic, naturalist, surrounded by wilderness) and the idea of the Copass community which I had been hired to help make (techie, urbanist, surrounded by wifi). Creating an interior in the 'A,' an intimate shelter, a warm centre, something that welcomes and comforts people from the hugely large and intimidating surroundings, was what these Camps were about. They weren't first about travel or movement—these features, in fact, were almost incidental. What was really at stake, what we were really selling and what would come to define these camps as moments in my fieldwork, was that they were (in Stefano's terminology from the Camps website as seen in Chapter 4) 'gatherings.' In these gatherings, people would 'live, work, share and have a great time,' they would 'not only stay

with just our team' but if they were 'eager to live this way' they could 'join.' They were 'beautiful places.'

These sheltered gatherings were crafted through the contours of the marketing materials we spent so much time working on beforehand: Copass brand flags, coins, cards, chains, manuals, jewellery, etc. These materials were the infrastructures that made a 'gathering' possible in the first place: they provided the structure through which co-habitation was organised and made possible in the form of a gathering. This gathering was neither a community (fixed in permanent surroundings) nor a network (distributed at long distances). It was by your side, maybe by accident, but to good effect. What I realised through these trinkets and toys we spent so much time working on, in response to my question—*what's going on here?*—was that they were means of creating a material interior that was light, transportable to different locations and transposable to different groups of people. Much like the Copass workers' uniform photoshoot from Chapter 3 was easy to pick up and recreate in different environments, these materials enabled brand building to happen anywhere with ease.

At this point of developing the startup's first Copass Camp, I realised the cofounders' expansionist project of building a global network of coworking spaces was much less of a reaching-out than it was a pulling-in. Rather than merely bringing people together, they were bringing people into an interior: into a particular way of inhabiting the world, of imagining its possibilities and valuing its circumstances. The girl's photo at the beginning of this chapter was one of the several complete expressions of this interior-building disposition: it was a paper-thin temporary shelter that enabled certain kinds of ludic comportments between people, lived by sharing costumes and laughs, and saved by transforming moments into photos posted on Facebook. It was *not* in the outdoors, it was

inside a temporary imaginary space cut-off from the rest of the world, within which one's imagination could run at full speed in the material-dream infrastructure of trinkets, papers and costumes that the startup provided. It was a *camp*, in the most inclusive sense of the word.

This interior-building impulse was most fully realised at the end of my fieldwork at the OuiShare Fest 2015. One year after the cofounders setup their Copass Cabana (my term) that opened this chapter, they wanted to do something different that would engage conference attendees in a similar way. This time, they decided to host a 'Copass Pop-Up Coworking Space' inside the venue. The conference was hosted in a large red 19th century-style circus tent in Paris's *Parc de la Villette* (which, with its hint of Vernian nostalgia, circumstantially completed Copass's fantastical interior-making ambitions). The day before the conference began, Sophie, Stefano and myself rented a large van nearby Mutinerie. We drove to seven Copass coworking spaces in Paris to collect individual pieces of furniture from each space. After having filled up the truck, we arrived at the Festival and set up the pieces in an array of desks and chairs, art pieces and lanterns, couches and handmade tables from each of these spaces under one roof (the red draped canvas of the Festival's tent). On top of this, as a final touch, Stefano climbed on top of a chair, and hung a floating box with 'CO-WORK-ING' etched into its sides in the middle of this 'pop-up' coworking space, to seal the magical interior that we presented live and in material form for attendees.

This wondrous real-life instantiation of the Copass universe, constructed from the actual furniture of its coworking spaces, enacted on a miniature scale not just the kinds of spaces but the kinds of *opportunities* one could experience on the network by joining. As the Festival was underway, more and more people came to sit on couches and chairs, talking with others, overhearing conversations,

making introductions—this was the pragmatics of happy accidents at work, in a highly engineered, simulated Copass micro-world. All the while, company brochures were spread around the tables for people to pick up and peruse, as well as brand stickers, business cards and pins. This was encapsulated by a piece at the centre of the pop-up space, Stefano's flat-screen TV displaying a slideshow of his high resolution photography of travelling and working on Copass in its many spaces around the world, infusing the practical benefits of this free, temporary coworking interior with an electronic dream portal to a world one could access by signing up and adding one's credit card.

Beyond these two small-level experiences of the Copass Cabana and the Pop-Up Coworking Space, however, the Camps needed a different and more compelling infrastructure to enrol people in an interior. As the cabana room and tent were provided at the Festivals, this was not as much of a problem—but for Camps around the world, different materials needed to be produced to achieve a similar effect, coordinated around the iconography of the 'As' of 'Copass Camp' Stefano added to the startup's branding. At this point, it became more clear that the *work* Copass was doing for its customers was not so much providing the potential for transport or movement; rather, it was providing *a means of shared habitation in the world.* The slogan Stefano cheekily added to the luggage tags (which would normally circulate on the transit networks of other companies, not ours) read, 'COPASS: WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU GO.' Now, even one's luggage was enrolled into the Copass universe, reminding the owner that Copass is with you wherever you might be in the world. The emphasis is not on the movements (i.e., not 'Copass: Taking You Wherever You Want To Go') but it is instead on the *fact* of habitation in permanent condition of global travel (i.e., 'With You Wherever').

With You Wherever You Go signalled a condition that was undoubtedly Vernian. In his many voyages, it is often merely incidental *where* his protagonists venture from one page to another. His fictional adventures of characters being spurred on by mysterious notes, bets in high-society clubs or sightings of unbelievable creatures, recount the lives of these individuals as they travel outwards, to 'claim vast unknown territories of land or learning' (Unwin 2006: 33). But what unites these tales is that movement outwards is 'clearly accompanied […] by the sense of a return—a return to the physical point of departure, a return to the already said, a return to the already known' (Unwin 2006: 33). Verne's *mondes connus et inconnus* always stand in opposition to each other, with each journey transforming discovered places into facts that *become known* by being 'claimed and articulated,' therefore 'shuttled into the territory of the known' (Unwin 2006: 33). The miraculous curiosity in Verne's writing arises when the unknown becomes known, and how the then already-known is discovered to contain 'the thrilling promise of new futures' (Unwin 2006: 33). This is one of the compelling reasons for why his works were so successful under the moniker, 'Extraordinary Voyages.'

LA PASSION ENFANTINE DES CABANES ET DES TENTES

The Copass Camps were updated versions of Vernian *Voyages Extraordinaires*. In Verne's *Voyages*, the various narrative structures of going-and-returning matched those of the Camps, where different customers would buy their ticket, then come-and-go back into the flow of their normal life. In each of these cases, what was important was not particularly the scenic and specific qualities of each

locale, vista, portrait or mini-adventure that took place within them—but rather the overarching coming-and-returning story that they told, and the regularity in which they did it. Harpold explains in the case of Verne,

> As Michel Serres has observed ("Loxodromies," 208-09), Verne's balloons, sea-and airships, trains and automobiles are, properly speaking, devices that enable temporal and psychic transformation of his characters in parallel with their spatial movements. Thus the general significance of the circuit by which the Vernian adventure is achieved: going forth, arriving—or, more often, *nearly* arriving—and then coming back. The journey's formal structure matters more to the literary effects of the novel than do the details of the itinerary or the means of travel. (2005: 28-9)

The stories in both cases are closed loops, circular environments that loop back on themselves and take the characters back to where they came from. What is at stake in each is not the danger and thrill of the adventure in itself, but the act of making the unknown known, which has less to do with travelling to the farthest distances than it does in *translating* those distances into something relatable to the traveller—a process of appropriation. This claiming and articulation of space (or of knowledge, of creatures, of peoples) that is apparent in Verne's work is 'always procedurally determinate and narratively capricious as a wild-goose chase' (Harpold 2005: 27). The literary fascination in his works comes from how his characters *furnish* their worlds, rather than how they *explore* them. Roland Barthes explains,

> The profound gesture of Jules Verne is therefore, undeniably, appropriation. The image of the boat, of utmost importance in the mythology of Verne, does little to contradict this—actually to the contrary: the boat could well be symbol of departure; it is, even deeper, of enclosure [*chiffre de la clôture*]. The pleasure of boats is always the joy to enclose oneself perfectly, to keep under one's hand the largest possible number of objects. To have at one's disposal an absolutely finite space: to love boats is first of all to love a superlative house [*une maison superlative*], because it closes without forgiveness, and not at all through hazy distinctions: *the boat is a fact of habitation before being a means of transport*. (2014: 88, my translation)

Stickers, cards, jewellery, top-hats, coins, flags and workers' uniforms: these were materials that furnished the Copass world, appropriating the environment in order to bring it inside as a fact of habitation [*fait d'habitat*]. And here we find the two key logos of the startup running in sync: the infinitely circular 'CC' logo of Copass, and the stable, settled enclosure of the 'A' of the Copass Camps. The first logo takes in account the constant connections being drawn between the fantastical and the practical, between the present and future, between potential and actual, between dreams and profits. But the second logo signals a halt, a peaceful movement and a coming-in. A quiet gathering around a campfire, a group of hushed voices under a tent, flashlights darting back and forth on the fabric. Both of these signify the condition of *appropriation* that Copass created, dragging coworking spaces and adventurous ambition into one realm, a new world of possibility made accessible by purchasing a subscription. This world was not so much opened up to customers as it was strategically closed around them: eliminating the background noise and simplifying the

interface in order to put people in touch with the world (meaning, to give them a game board to interact with).

Both logos acted as ‘weighting’ forces in Goodman’s theory of worldmaking, as metonymic images that sorted the ‘important and unimportant features’ of the new world they were trying to bring about (Goodman 1978: 12). By emphasising the enclosure of their world (in the infinity-sign logo which turned one’s movement around the world in on itself, and the Camp logo which emphasised the intimate gatherings that simplified questions of belonging into a comfortable community), these logos and Copass’s other brand materials weighted the world around a sense of total appropriation. At the point of purchase, customers could gain access to this new world weighted towards inclusion for all paying users, that was automatically comfortable, easy and welcoming in hundreds of coworking spaces around the world. Simply put, in this new world, loneliness was irrelevant, because seeing as the Copass network covered nearly the whole world, the whole world was one’s new home to feel good in at every destination. This fact was emphasised at any point where one might see a Copass logo—whether on the website, or on a sticker on the back cover of a laptop in one coworking space or another.

Verne is most clearly the spiritual ancestor to Copass in this gesture of appropriation. Going to work using Copass, in one of its many collaborative workspaces, was not so much a departure and arrival from one place to another, as it was a form of continual habitation, living under the global roof of spaces held up by its fluorescent orange map pins, stitched together by the weightless white lines of transport that connected them all. The pleasure of Copass came not from having new experiences or taking adventures (things that one could do without a subscription, without a computer and without

a job) but rather from participating in the closing-in of the world around a controllable interface, where at any moment anything was possible and you could go anywhere tomorrow. The world was made into a surface that was comfortably accommodating and easy to explore, that—while being a fact of enclosure—projected an illusion of the open totality of one's surroundings by exploding it with possibilities. This explosion took place in the maniacal plenitude that one would experience when using the startup's service, again mimicking the literary techniques of Jules Verne:

> Verne was a maniac of plenitude: he never stopped to finish the world and to furnish it, to make it full in the style of an egg; his movement is precisely that of an encyclopedist of the 18th century or of a Dutch painter: the world is finished, the world is full of countable, neighbouring objects […] Verne wasn't searching at all to enlarge the world according to romantic paths of escape or mystical maps of the infinite: he was searching—without end—to retract it, to fill it with people, to reduce it to a known and enclosed space, where man could then inhabit it comfortably. (Barthes 2014: 87, my translation)

The most important takeaway from the marketing iconography of Copass, the combination of the 'CC' and the 'A,' was that the startup did not aim to sell itself as a departure or going-away into an out-there torn open by 'romantic paths of escape or mystical maps of the infinite.' The world of Copass was neither infinite nor evasive, it was quite the opposite. It was complete and perfectly articulated, in a set of soft movements that comported to a continual centring. Work done at Copass was an effort to bring the world into a set of easily interact-able circumstances (*à le rétracter*, through its homogenous coworking spaces where diversity was reduced to a smooth feature of spaces, rather than a rough condition of existence) to fill it with relevant and inspiring people (*à le*

peupler, through its blog, through profiling our best customers) and to turn it into an wonderfully navigable ludic environment where going to new spaces was a matter of collecting markers on a map (*à le réduire*, through using its network). The map was little more than a continual process of completion where cities were tapped for coworking potential, listed and confirmed with photos, text and reviews.

The world was drawn inwards toward a constantly mobile centre of the Copass customer, who could not exist at the margins of the world on the network, as the startup was 'With You Wherever You Go,' furnishing the world with a comforting assurance where the customer 'could then inhabit it comfortably.' In setting out a world so complete, Copass 'constructed a kind of cosmogony closed on itself, that had its proper categories, its time, its space, its plenitude and even its existential principle' (Barthes 2014: 75). Time was accomplished by the green check-in button, signalling the commencement of a workday. Space was filled by the world map, the photos of coworking spaces and the flat, smooth connections that brought them together across borders and inequalities. And the startup's existential principle—like its organisation of time and space—mirrored that of Verne's literary oeuvre: the continuous gesture of enclosure [*le geste continu de l'enfermement*].

> For Verne, the imagination of the journey corresponds to an exploration of enclosure, and the agreement between Verne and childhood does not come to a banal mysticism of adventure, but conversely an ordinary happiness of the finite, that one rediscovers in the infantile passion of cabanas and of tents: to enclose and install oneself—such is the existential dream of childhood and of Verne. (Barthes 2014: 87, my translation)

Looking back at the opening photo of this chapter, we find this 'infantile passion of cabanas and of tents' with a girl pointing a gun at us, under a Copass cabana. This was the attraction, the lure and the core spiritual movement the cofounders were accomplishing for customers through their work. A childhood joy for enclosure. Of sitting quietly inside a tent—be it a teepee in woods surrounded by chirping crickets and the soft drizzle of a spring shower, be it a pillow fort in a living room illuminated by lamps shining under thin blankets—in a position to have a world all to oneself, perfectly closed off and imaginatively sealed by a sheer thin fabric, and at the same time outwardly projecting infinite wondrous possibilities of the Other Side. Between the gentle warmth of the interior and vast freshness of the beyond lies the dream of Copass: to be intimate, wrapped-up and profoundly implicated with oneself and others in a continuous interior, where, between you and everything else—that includes all possibilities, no matter how fantastical and outrageous—the only thing that separates shared warmth with wondrous imaginings is a piece of fabric, an interface, a brochure, a sticker.

The infantile passion that comes from this situation, for the child in a tent, Verne, and Copass, arises in the *thinness* of the separating material. In tearing down the blanket fort, the child encounters no longer the forever-expanding and majestically-projected externalised interior imagined from within the confines of his enclosure, but instead—a bland, everyday living room. In closing the book, the pages disappear back into the cover, and the deceiving paratextual maps and iconography, the highly detailed descriptions of worlds far away, are closed within the thin confines of pages pushed into a bookshelf, leaving the sounds, sights and smells of one's everyday life. In logging out of Copass, the interface on one's laptop disappears instantly into a browser history, and the customer is jetted back into a normal world, of taxes, business problems, startup stresses and relationship issues.

What each of these examples offer that is so unequivocally powerful, is the ability to escape—not towards an outside, or an exterior, or an out-there—but towards an *interior*, a childlike dream condition where, looking out through a canvas tent wall, the world beyond is remade in the colourful play of lights and shadows in the swinging branches of trees at sunrise.

7

LIFESTYLE PORN, AN ARMS RACE FOR THE NEW ARISTOCRATS

On each side I had a window on the unexplored abysses. The darkness in the salon made the light outside seem all the brighter, and we watched as if this pure crystal were the window of some enormous aquarium. The *Nautilus* seemed to be motionless […]

In a state of wonder, we propped ourselves up before the display windows. None of us had yet broken our stupefied silence, when Conseil said:

'You wanted to see, friend Ned, well now you *can* see!'

'Amazing, amazing!' said the Canadian, who had become irresistibly engrossed and forgotten all about his anger and ideas of escape. 'You'd go a long way to see such a fantastic sight!'

'Ah!' I exclaimed. 'Now I understand this man! He has built a world of his own which reveals its own astonishing marvels to him alone!'

—Jules Verne, *Twenty-Thousand Leagues Under the Seas* (1998: 103)

The *Nautilus* would be an appropriate literary analogue for Copass's product: a world-enclosing device that makes distances irrelevant, comfortably housing tasteful commander-entrepreneurs to peruse a curated collection of earthly delights. Like the Nautilus, we've seen how Copass rid the world of inconveniences, disturbances, aggravations and annoyances to showcase the hand-selected lovely delights of World Culture, or the sweet confectionery of complacent diversity. A question that comes to mind, after having explored the aesthetic delights and existential pleasantries from previous chapters, is *who could blame someone for wanting to design such a marvellous World 2.0?* Like the Nautilus, Eric, Stefano, Sophie and Augustin together 'built a world of their own' for themselves and their actual and potential customers, in which they could collectively treasure 'astonishing marvels.' Separated from the outside by a thin layer, cultivating the glee and satisfaction of an improved 'fluid user experience' (as championed on the website), one could imagine Captain Nemo and the Copass cofounders united as interface innovators: building tools that enable new ways of living in a world that, the second time around, lives up to expectations. Where every change of course is a change of adventure, where every personage is a new mystery, where every location is a new backyard for world-ambulating adventurers of the 19th century and of the 21st.

Copass (as I hope to have conveyed by now) was building an empowering fantastical universe. Empowering because it showed lonely entrepreneurs new, uplifting ways of being with others in the world (in a community and as heroes, Chapters 2 and 3), fantasy because it relied on a completely engineered set of itineraries and terrains that were purged of bad facts (like incorrect facts and inconvenient migrants, Chapters 4 and 5) and universe because it was a cosy shared interior brought to life with childlike enthusiasm through the thinness of its separating materials (such as stickers,

Chapter 6). And from this perspective, it was a tremendous success. Although the startup never achieved wild commercial prosperity during my fieldwork, it made imaginary dividends by enlivening the minds of users and enthusiasts. In my field travels, whenever I would speak about the business with others, show them the website or our social media photos, people were fascinated. Smiles washed over faces and eyes wandered, imagining the adventure potential. Independent workers I met were seduced not by the technical tool we were building (which was technically rudimentary and already used by competitors). They were seduced by *the world we were promising*. And thus Copass, while not having achieved worldwide acclaim, tapped into the underlying dreams and ambitions of those it tried enlisting as customers.

One year after I finished my fieldwork, I met with Stefano in a restaurant near one of the coworking spaces in northeastern Paris where we used to work. He admitted that he'd been reflecting extensively on the past, present and future trajectory of the startup. Beginning his analysis, he suggested that we did build 'something really cool,' that nobody else was doing at the time. It was a tool to connect people from around the world in unexpected and surprising ways. But the problem we had, he told me, was that we were collectively under the impression that we were building a tool that fit how people's work and travel habits were changing. We *thought* that Copass was the solution to a problem of a growing number of people who were becoming more and more location independent, running businesses on laptops and seeking networks to plug into. We thought Copass was the tool that would bring these people together then 'get out of the way' (as Eric put it) for them to do business, make friendships and share experiences. We thought these people were enthusiastic, highly mobile, fully independent tech-savvy self-motivated businessmen and women

with nomadic tendencies. But, according to Stefano, we had been too optimistic and not careful enough to define who we were talking to, which led to his conclusion:

> We were building a network for how *we* wanted people to work, not how *they* wanted to work. It was more of a social project than a startup.

The cofounders believed that Copass was a tool that fit the needs and desires of a new world workforce. What they didn't realise until afterwards was that we weren't doing this at all. Instead, we were building a tool for how we *wanted* people to work (or more specifically, how *we* wanted to work). It was a result not of descriptive research, time-intensive surveys or questionnaires, but the opposite: a *prescriptive* programme meant to install a way of living into a fantastical non-existent consumer, the 'Copasser.' (In retrospect it's no wonder why we used our own terminology to refer to our market all the time, instead of other categories, because there was no corresponding external group that matched the startup's overwhelming vision). And so we spent a significant amount of time and effort to put in place the material infrastructure for an incredible world full of wonderful experiences, but with few permanent inhabitants. This conclusion brings Professor Aronnax's remark of Captain Nemo into full focus: 'I understand the life of this man; he has made a world apart for himself, in which he treasures all his greatest wonders.'

This realisation highlights the idealised fantasy world described in the previous chapters. The heroes in Chapter 3 were inspiring, awesome beings that the cofounders would enjoy spending their time with. The discovery in Chapter 4 and 5 was a way travelling that wasn't strictly tourism,

because the cofounders dressed travel in a fun game of hide-and-seek. The enclosure in Chapter 6 was a way of making the cofounders at home everywhere, instead of just being stuck in a workspace. Looking back at this World 2.0, one can see how it was a result of the externalisation of desires from the cofounders as suggested in Chapter 1—wanting to fashion the world in a way that pleased them, that they thought could please others—instead of, as we thought at the time, the natural consequence of market tendencies. But this amazing-sounding way of life they crystallised through their work efforts was *not* a mere collective self-delusion or madness-inducing world dissociation. Even if it didn't have many users, there was still a powerful force that came with the utopia the cofounders constructed. The universe they made was the ultimate artistic expression of *lifestyle pornography:* the collection of picture-perfect photos, fun-overloaded videos, overly-enthusiastic texts, too-cool-to-be-true events and mind-blowing impressions we sold of this incredible, impossible life.

Lifestyle porn was a term Eric used in the field—tongue-in-cheek, but with serious undertones—to define the over-saturation of media to glorify an absurdly fantastic way of life. The term highlights in a satirical tone the gross, grotesque content of this representational strategy. After seeing dozens of Facebook albums highlighting someone's surf experiences in Bali, for example, one could refer to that person's ever-growing media sensation as a *pornographic* event that pushed their own self-touting lifestyle of daily beach-going to its furthest possible extent—where one would doubt that this person could have a single boring moment in their life. Their lifestyle would be so visualised, so worked, so edited and so well-marketed that it left no room for the mundane, for the bored, for the pragmatic or for the nonbeliever. In my fieldwork, instances of lifestyle porn such as this begged the question, if translated into a textual form, '*do you know just how cool I am?* Because if

not, well you're going to find out.' And as much as we critiqued this notion between team members at Copass, we all also tacitly agreed that, not only was it an effective marketing tool we could use to increase subscriptions, but it was also an inspiring dream-experiment that helped us realise how, personally speaking, we *could* do more cool things and live a more fulfilled life: that is, a life filled with the steady accumulation of cool moments.

So, understanding Copass as an ongoing aesthetic expression of lifestyle porn—enrolling people into this World 2.0 through imagery of making connections, becoming heroes, discovering places, and of feeling at home everywhere—we can begin to see the prescriptiveness of the project. To make this unabashedly clear, below is a blog post written by Eric in April 2015. Instead of reading it like a spontaneous blog post meant to offer casual observations on general changing conditions of labour or market developments, I suggest reading it as the opposite: as what I would call a *Copass Manifesto*. With this framing in mind (I have reproduced the text unedited to stress the description-prescription doublespeak of its language), the post appears more *prophetic* than cursory, offering revelations on a world that's to come rather than remarks on the world currently in-progress.

[THE COPASS MANIFESTO]

SOMEHOW, WE'RE ALL GOING TO BE DIGITAL NOMADS TOMORROW

To be correct, many of us who do most of our productive work on a laptop are going to be "digital nomads." But not nomads in the way we usually picture it. Not always on the go, with

no homebase, minimalistic with all of our belongings in one bag, no family, no friends to have for more than 6 months.

Those people exist and there will be more of them for sure, but they are an extreme version of what many of us will become.

They just understood that today, work is no more where you are but what you do. Technology enables us to redefine work and what role we want to give to work in our lives. Like we said in a previous post—*it's not about work anymore*.

Clearly we're not all ready to sell our stuff and hit the road. Still somewhere in the back of our head, many of us love the idea of travelling the world, *calling every place our home and turning our life into an adventure.* Many nomads actually make a living by explaining to others how to become a nomad! There is a kind of ponzi scheme here :D

But many non-nomads read that because it makes them dream. *It's something that I often call "lifestyle porn" or "freedom porn."* It's not that they really wanna live the same life but it tickles them, scares them and excites them at the same time.

SAY HELLO TO THE AGE OF WORKATIONS!

What's at reach for all of us though, is the ability to change scenery and to go work from other places once in a while.

This can happen in several ways:

You might want to take 2 weeks with your team to focus on a project in a different environment (like the Surf Office [in the Canary Islands] or Hubud [in Bali]), you might settle for a month in the French countryside to finally write this book you've had in mind for a long time (at

Mutinerie Village), you might wanna take it easier and *work in the morning while exploring places or learning to surf in the afternoon…*

So what's stopping you? Come along with us and join the ride—because, after all, you'll be on it sooner or later. (Van den Broek 2015a)

This prophet from the future (or, alternatively, a textbook entrepreneur) delivers a clear message: 'come along with us and join the ride,' but do it now while you still have the choice! Somehow (delivered in a delightfully divinatory tone), 'we're all going to be digital nomads tomorrow.' Instead of dismissing the 'ponzi scheme' of nomads selling to others their catalogues of lifestyle pornography, Eric participates in the exercise with them. Lifestyle porn, far from being gluttonous, has a special effect on non-nomads. Not unlike other kinds of pornography, it 'makes them dream.' Such dreams include focusing on a project in the Canary Islands or in Bali, settling in the French countryside to become an author, or (as if that was too exhausting) taking it easier, working only in the morning hours while 'exploring places or learning to surf in the afternoon.' If planetary proletarian revolution was the call-to-action of *The Communist Manifesto* 160 years before it, *The Copass Manifesto* calls workers of today to 'call every place our home,' and to turn 'life into an adventure.'

If that previous manifesto was concerned with raising the global class consciousness of factory labourers, this one is concerned with awakening a universal dream consciousness of digital ones who 'might wanna take it easier.' If Marx's call-for-consciousness was found on factory floors and public assembly halls, the ritual grounds of this dream-state could be found on the smooth surfaces

of a World 2.0: at work in the morning, but 'learning to surf in the afternoon…' For, in contrast to *The Communist Manifesto*, the leading world-spirit transformation of this one comes in the Manifesto's third paragraph: *'it's not about work anymore.' The Copass Manifesto* demonstrates that the project of a world federation of coworking spaces was never about work, changing work patterns, the innovation of office environments or a global workforce. It was, as Stefano put it, 'a social project:' an attempt to raise a new class consciousness of affluent independent workers through the dreamy enticements of lifestyle porn and the proliferation potential offered by social media networks. It was an insurrection to give daydreams priority to dull moments of the office, a call-to-arms for vacation visionaries seeking an escape from the chains of responsibility, an uprising of startup soldiers against the tedious trappings of their own boredom.

This phrase was the most brutal wisdom on Copass I would receive from the cofounders in my fieldwork. It validated that what we were doing in building a brave new world of global workspaces, or in championing the daydreams of an oppressed group of bored workers—which, somehow became more about attending Berliner summer parties, making road trips and taking surf lessons—was indeed *not about work anymore* and, since its beginning, never was.

A LIFE-STYLE THAT TICKLES, SCARES AND EXCITES

The lifestyle porn that Copass handed out to its regulars and admirers was not meant to be an instructional tool, but rather a source of inspiration. Because, for non-nomads, Eric suggests they

don't want to live the life of a constantly on-the-go surfer-programmer travelling Indonesia by sailboat. His suggestion is appropriate, because the fact was that many we spoke to were weighed down by pragmatic concerns, such as families, salaries, property investments and other place-based sentimental attachments. The result of the lifestyle porn we were selling, he openly admits, was that 'it tickles them, scares them and excites them at the same time.' The thought of beginning a novel in the French countryside tickles the non-believers (i.e., the fun of doing something creative with one's life), scares them (i.e., the vertigo of realising that one's current job was not the only way to live) and excites them (i.e., the thrill of radical change). The point was not to encourage people to quit their jobs and to take up a pen and paper in the pursuit of literary success, but to achieve an *affective response* from the realisation of the alternative possibilities that one could follow in simply being.

Chapter 2 explored the increased concern with loneliness amongst my informants, because of the feverish explication of coexistence strategies by entrepreneurs-turned-'secret sociologists.' I argued that there was an unabated obsession with emphasising social relationships through their visualisation in products (communities, networks, associations, spaces, etc.) which one could buy into. This was defined as 'applying violence neither to persons nor things, but rather to unclassified cultural circumstances' (Sloterdijk 2016: 152). The implicit act of being together was rendered, in the society-product of community explored in Mutinerie, as an accomplishment made possible through objects and brand mascots—of which, once one was 'connected' as a part of the community, could affirm the value of the purchased product. In short, this urge for social explication demonstrated how being in a room with others could become a product. In Eric's enthusiasm for lifestyle porn, there was a similar process of explication underway on the facts of *life itself*. Because by encouraging living not as an act of waking up, accomplishing a number of

daily routines and going to sleep, but instead as an ongoing result of ‘lifestyle design,’ suddenly humans became human life designers.

The word itself gives an indication of this phenomenon: life-*style*. In the Copass world, life was no longer an immanent biological process of molecular determinism, nor was it even the controlled phenomenon of some free willed soul: life was specifically a result of design, much like interior or industrial design. Life-style indicated that one’s life was the result of a series of options that could be purchased, upgraded, swapped out or uninstalled. And when this modular design conception was normalised—as one can clearly see with the ease of which Eric uses it in his blogging discourse—then companies could introduce their products to be bought and sold as appealing replacements. The startup’s first-ever blog post was dedicated to this concept, enshrining the crucial importance of lifestyle for the startup’s customers or other interested parties. The title of this post is ‘Designing Lifestyles, Toward a New Way to Live and Work,’ from November 2013. Its opening claim demonstrates the crucial centrality of lifestyle in the company’s vision:

> Every good project starts with a vision. The vision behind Copass has been clear from the very beginning. We’re all about designing lifestyles. Or more precisely, about letting people design their own lifestyle by providing them with tools that would enable a completely new way to live and work. A lifestyle that would be more fulfilling, more efficient, more collaborative. (Van den Broek 2013)

One might imagine that the first blog post of this startup—or at least its vision, 'clear from the very beginning'—would be focused on the changing nature of *work* rather than desired lifestyles. But no, the reader is told that the company is actually 'all about designing lifestyles.' At this point, it is pertinent to highlight two concurrent messages Eric presents about Copass. On the one hand, we have discovered that Copass *'is not about work anymore*,*'* and on the other we've learned that it is 'all about designing lifestyles.' This is a double confirmation that startup's vision was much less about coworking spaces or connectivity than it was about 'letting people design their own lifestyle by providing them with tools.' Thus, the universe of Copass outlined in the two introductions, explored in each subsequent chapter, can be recast in a new light: it was not a descriptive product to house a global workforce of changing needs—it was the prescriptive desire of the cofounders to give people the means to achieve a certain life-*style*. Creating heroes, orchestrating discovery and spreading a global comfort of home were means to an end in transforming life into a lifestyle. Under this condition, believers were no longer living their lives, they were in control of their lifestyles. However lifestyles could always be 'more fulfilling, more efficient, more collaborative,' and products (like Copass) were marketed as solutions to make it so. Hence, these lifestyles were, by default, always in need of further purchasable upgrades.

With the constant potential for upgrades, in my field startups and coworking spaces competed against each other in what I would call a lifestyle porn *arms race:* each brand pitting their own lifestyle pornography against competitors, collectively raising the ceiling on the most unbelievable, fanciful designed life. The underlying enthusiasm of consuming lifestyle porn was universal in marketing efforts for these organisations, each of them connecting their life-enhancing products with an exhausting, yet unquestioned drive to constantly improve oneself. (Hence, this was an arms

race on two fronts: between various enterprises each trying to one-up each other's brand, as well as inside each consumer, disciplined to continue pursuing and self-elevate their styled life through trendy brand choices). What I observed in this infatuation of life-style over life was the opening of a new domain of self-work that had not yet been made completely explicit. To admit that one now had a lifestyle, was to admit that now living was accompanied by the job description of a well-qualified designer; in other words, to live was now *to design one's life*. The startup admitted regularly in its marketing rhetoric that work and play were mixing like never before and that independent workers should embrace this change.

Making work into a kind of play (through ping pong tables and after-work vodka shots) was paired with making play into a form of *work*—where, by working on one's lifestyle, one could be more free and more exceptional (by using design principles). In other words, the fun, freedom and exceptionality of one's life ought to now be designed, engineered and implemented by oneself as one's own existential contractor. To be free was to build the material infrastructure for one's own freedom, but this required time and energy to pour a concrete psychological foundation, to setup cognitive framing and to install deep-padded emotional insulation against the new atmospheric differential of compressed, internal freedom and the voices outside shouting for constant new renovations and upgrades. In an interview with two famous digital nomads on the Copass blog, the interlocutors explain the potential for designing exceptional lifestyles:

> We see this decade as a kick off for more freedom and individual fulfilment. People do not want to just work anymore, they want to do something meaningful. It is the best time ever to start living your dreams and go on the road as a digital nomad. […]

> Not everyone wants to travel. The coming generation Y loves personal freedom and puts this over possessions and status symbols. (Meurer & Hargarten 2015a)

Their statement that this generation 'loves personal freedom' is an overstatement hidden in a marketing message, because the two interlocutors run a digital nomad conference (and hence cry the shouting voices!) It is interesting to note the similarities in Eric's emphasis on 'living your dreams' that come from the lifestyle pornography of other people (like, as he admits, in a 'ponzi scheme')—except that here, these nomads suggest that 'personal freedom' has replaced 'possessions and status symbols' important to more outdated generations. The rise of personal freedom, however, has done exactly the opposite of replacing these things: personal freedom for these entrepreneurs has come instead to *embody* 'possessions and status symbols.' Eric's fictional author who retreats to the French countryside to write a novel is one who *possesses* personal freedom, and wears it as a status symbol in the continual pyramid scheme that lifestyle porn encourages. The distinctive symptom of lifestyle porn is the perplexing call to 'do something meaningful,' (also discussed above at the end of Chapter 2) as if meaning was achieved solely through the exhibition of a performance that is called 'living your dreams.' Lifestyle porn was dreams made manifest in the form of shareable media, proof of which could be verified through the audience of others as images became 'status symbols' and exotic experiences become 'possessions.'

The arms race frenzy of lifestyle porn marketing fuelled the nomads' general assessment of individuals frantically searching for 'more freedom and individual fulfilment.' But while many might have missed that 'the medium is the message,' where lifestyle porn was the grand pyramid

scheme of buying freedom that was never enough, the medium continued to multiply its brands, vacations, city breaks, special offers and subscription deals (McLuhan 2001). As a first example, a specific masterpiece of lifestyle pornography was the marketing advertisement that an external videographer made for Copass's first Copass Camp in Lisbon.

The video begins with a series of guttural verbal exclamations from three event subscribers: *'Whoaaa!' 'Tch-tch-tch-tch-tch'* and *'a-wha, a-wha, a-wha!'* The onscreen guests jump into frame, gaze wildly into the air and smile playfully in accompaniment, as if to ratify the utter inexpressibility of the amazing lifestyle experience of the event. Cutting to street shots of a picturesque, exciting Lisbon city centre, an upbeat electric guitar riff with quarter note high hat accents increases volume until it reaches a rowdy crescendo in a rock and roll chorus. Now viewers are prepared to see the city through its speechless customers—because this isn't just Lisbon, it is an incredible *life that is styled* in Lisbon. In the shots that follow, the camera cuts between the group of 'Copass Campers' posing in different places: on a boat, on a beach, in a coworking space, in a kitchen and in a salon. Visually and sonically, we bear witness the intense and unique surfing, sailing, partying lifestyle of these independent workers. This is made evident from the first thirty seconds an incredible variety of places, colours, activities and dispositions displayed at a rapid rate. A series of customer testimonials are mixed in next. Each up-close-and-personal camera shot captures each customer and their excitement for different elements of the Camp:

> 'It actually felt like we were in a TV show! Like, you know you put thirty people together in a big house and you see what's gonna happen!'

> ‘Staying at the house with everybody? It was awesome!’
>
> ‘Amazing tour of some fablab spaces which was really cool! We had so much fun bringing everyone together in solidarity to survive this epic storm that ripped through Lisbon!’
>
> ‘It’s kind of a professional Erasmus, you know. You come here to work, but in the meantime you meet these people from all over the world.’ (customer testimonials, in Kosobokova 2014)

The artificiality of the styled life in this piece of lifestyle porn is made clear from the first customer review, likening the experience to ‘a TV show.’ This wasn’t a group of thirty people hanging out together; it was, as our website text described it, ‘a gathering of amazing people in an amazing place’ that had the thrill of co-living with others like characters in a television series. The analogy is less far off than one might think. Much like the syndicated show, ‘Big Brother,’ Camp Lisbon was continuously monitored by Twitter feeds, tagged Instagram photos and even a camera crew holding interviews for the video above. Here, ‘staying at the house with everybody’ was no longer relegated to the boredom of being *stuck* in a house with others. As it was something people paid for, they chose very deliberately to be stuck, and because of their (designed) choice to commit themselves to the Copass lifestyle, for them, ‘It was awesome!’ This adds a level of nuance to Heidegger’s observation of the house as an agricultural waiting room: because now, waiting can be framed in exciting terms and sold to thrilled customers. Likewise, being in a storm is no longer an inconvenience when it is an ‘epic storm that ripped through Lisbon.’ These two comparisons demonstrate the distinction between life and lifestyle: in the designed fun of lifestyle, waiting and being rained on become incredible achievements to share with others, as long as one has paid the price of admission.

In Copass's worldmaking project, this emphasis on lifestyle was a strategy that could be grouped under Goodman's category of 'deletion and supplementation' (1978: 14). He explains that 'the making of one world out of another usually involves some extensive weeding out and filling—actual excision of some old and supply of some new material' (1978: 14). This was precisely the goal with the startup's obsession with lifestyle: it was a new way of life that could be purchased where by being empowered to *design their own life,* people would be compelled to purchase a subscription to Copass to be able to achieve their dreams. Because in this new world, by adding the concept of lifestyle as a key ingredient, life was no longer something passive that one would experience but lifestyle was something one accomplished through a series of choices defined as purchases. Being able to have amazing achievements, to feel like a celebrity, to travel like a hero, to be at home everywhere and to 'do something meaningful' was a choice that one had to make. And, importantly, it was a choice of buying a product that was being marketed. Thus, just as the scientist strives 'to build a world conforming to his chosen concepts and obeying his universal laws,' Copass strived to make a world that would obey its chosen concept of lifestyle, and the universal laws of consumption that came along with it (Goodman 1978: 15).

SECURING SUPREMACY IN LIFESTYLE WARFARE

The Copass Camps, beginning in Lisbon in November 2014, were the most active and lively on-the-ground moments between the Copass team and small collectives of Copassers. The normal use of the service-product of the startup often kept individuals separate from each other, as they would

access the website privately and follow their own travel itineraries to visit and work from different member coworking spaces. But Copass Camps were the first events where brand enthusiasts could be gathered and put side-by-side in real life for an extended period of time. In this sense, they helped to confirm to guests the lifestyle porn we were selling, because Stefano would take hundreds of photos and videos to be posted to our Facebook page and YouTube channel. As guests would be tagged in these media, they would often share it to their friends and confirm the pornographic impression we were building for our wider audience. But this was only a small part of a phenomenon that united Copass's coworking spaces, which was the general production of lifestyle porn as a marketing tool. Even though these spaces often had different markets and client bases (some tailored for programmers, others for artists, others for designers), they all used highly saturated media stockpiles to raise the stakes on impossibly fantastic lives.

One Copass space in Lisbon, Village Underground, was an exceptional example: it was a coworking space made from used shipping containers and double-decker buses. The space is self-described as 'a certificated creative incubator space, a coworking community and a creative events destination' (VU Lisboa 2017). Landing on their website, one immediately finds a highly filtered set of fast-cutting video clips that demonstrate different aspects of the space, notably graffiti-covered shipping containers, outdoor parties, dancing, DJs, club lights, Heineken umbrellas, champagne glasses, fashion catwalks and buzzing atmospheres of excited, happy people. This emphasis on the ludic elements of work recalls the fun, upbeat imagery of Draft coworking in Chapter 5, except that here we witness a fun *overload*. Photos from the space's Facebook page demonstrate this pornographic play-at-work attitude by emphasising how this apparently productive, pay-by-subscription workplace was, at least in its life-styled perception, a play-place. In

many pictures, the red shipping container offices are closed (with no windows or doors in the photo we have a hard time telling that they were places to work at all), the assumed workers are outside drinking beer and dancing to a DJ. This afternoon party is a testament to the lifestyle porn of the space more generally, inverting usual anticipations of productivity—where we might see someone working diligently on their laptop—with barefoot dancers having the time of their life. *This* is the attraction of the workplace, and Eric would be right in adding that *'it's not about work anymore.'*

Another Copass space well-equipped for the lifestyle arms race was Surf Office, in Gran Canaria. Visiting their website's homepage, one is met again with a styled filtered video composed of two-second clips. These include birds flying over a beach at sunrise, friends standing around a barbecue, a chef laying a fresh fillet of fish on said barbecue, a blond woman swimming out to sea on a surfboard, another blond woman taking a sip from a bottle of beer (alone with a man ambiguously blurred in the foreground) and a group of white people talking around a conference table with windows open wide to a bright afternoon. Two seconds of the ten second looping video demonstrate the only footage of people working, with the other eight seconds dedicated to beach-going and barbecues. This is demonstrative of an expert strategist in lifestyle warfare, as the Surf Office dedicates 80% of its time to play, suggesting that by paying to work at the space one will only work 20% of the time. The space's fantastical vision of sunset beach parties with blond women who accompany life's permanent vacation is a telling demonstration of the pornographic quality of this type of media strategy: it accentuates the potentially fun moments of being a worker at their space to a point of absurdity. Much like Village Underground and Draft, these workspaces sold an Instagram-filtered dream that was mainly one of play-spaces. The Surf Office sold merchandise that materialised its vision in pencils laser-cut with the following two slogans:

FUCK EVERYTHING, BECOME A PIRATE

WORK IS BETTER WHEN YOU SURF

VOLUMES Coworking was a Parisian space where I spent time near the end of my fieldwork. Here, they also mastered a well-honed media means of marketing themselves by claiming to be 'a laboratory of experimentation on transdisciplinarity and new ways of working' that is, at the end of the day, 'a leader of social change.' A key selling point of this space was that it hosted a 'FOODLAB' in the form of a kitchen rented by the hour, day or by longer term subscription. This kitchen was essential for 'culinary design,' a sub-discipline of lifestyle design, where cooked food was no longer the result of preparing ingredients, but instead of the schematic willpower of a freelance food-designer (which is to say a client that would rent out the space for paid cooking events that members could participate in). This feature opened the door to the recent aesthetic ancestor of lifestyle porn, food porn, a popular art form based on applying the over-saturation of hues and too-good-to-be-true proportions and lighting conditions to perfectly presented plates of food. A series of photos demonstrate this excellent advantage: piles of delicious homemade double chocolate cookies set the scene, prepared and ready for the taking, in front of plates loaded high with springy green leaves of handmade caesar salads. This aesthetic strategy worked by calling attention to one's normal lunch, suggesting that those whose lives were *designed* had a choice to make: and the lifestyle with more, better cookies (or, for the calorie-concerned, with bigger, fresh leafy salads) was clearly the one to buy into.

L'Annexe Yelloworking was one of the most extreme examples of one of those winning the lifestyle arms race: it was a coworking space in the back of a yellow van. Their Copass description was written as such:

> From the perspective of working even more freely, we have created a mobile workspace to complement Yelloworking [their normal, fixed cowering space]! L'Annexe can welcome three people, and it is equipped with two work posts, a 4G modem, a dedicated battery and a reserve of 20 litres of water. (L'Annexe Yelloworking 2017)

Taking the earlier nomads' claim of how Generation Y 'loves personal freedom' seriously, one would arrive at the conclusion of l'Annexe Yelloworking: a mobile wifi-equipped surf van disguised as an office! This was the ultimate freedom one could have, potentially stretching the notion of the office (and of work) to the furthest possible extent before conceptual breaking point. The van—accompanied by a brilliantly strategised video on their website—was created with one objective, 'our goal: to make you perceive work differently' (Yelloworking 2015). With the literal focus on perception [*percevoir*], the marketing text prepares viewers for how they should watch the video. Thirty-five seconds long, it begins with a hovering shot of a beautiful blue sea and fluffy white clouds. Moving toward the ground, a beach reveals itself under crashing white surf. A slow funk song scores the scene, suggesting the fun and sexiness that comes with imagining 'work, done differently [*le travail autrement*]' (Yelloworking 2015). The camera swivels as a small group of beachgoers comes into view in the distance, before lowering to the bright yellow roof of the van, complete with an empty surfboard rack (one wonders: have the workers already gone out to surf?)

Finally, we witness the big reveal. The camera lowers to focus in on the van's wood panelled interior with two rolling wooden office chairs and desks. One man leans over his laptop, plugged into a wall power outlet. A surfboard leans against his desk, materially bridging his workspace (*planche à pain*) and his surf space (*planche de surf*).

For a final example, after the end of my fieldwork Eric and Sophie worked in a collaborative workspace that was a catamaran, called Coboat. In the Copass Facebook album recounting their experience, they write: 'We decided to push coworking and the location independent lifestyle one step further […] sailing the Cyclades islands in Greece back to Athens.' Coboat's website describes their product as such: 'You will work, sail and explore together. One anchorage at a time' (Coboat 2017). Indeed, Coboat seemed to be a nautical cousin to Copass, as a company that promised its customers a life 'exploring local cultures, beaches and places you cannot reach from land and meet up with coworking communities' (Coboat 2017). After their trip, Eric posted ninety photos on the Copass Facebook page illustrating their voyage. Notably, only four of the ninety photos included people working, the rest were of dramatic scenery, seaside dinners, back alleys of island villages, sunsets, blue seas, sunglass-wearing sun bathers and infinity pool swimmers. This was one of Copass's best media barrages of shameless lifestyle pornography: admitting that the album was an existential test to redefine the contours of modern work—after all, they claim, they wanted to push coworking 'one step further'—and proving their point by posting vacation photos. Such a test was one further experiment validating the idea that to sell new ways of working, one should employ media that eliminate work from the equation in innovative and creative ways.

From this brief survey of companies aiming to secure supremacy in lifestyle warfare (for, at the end of the day, the Surf Office and Coboat were still enterprises competing for adventure-seeking life designers), it can be made clear once and for all with a degree of certitude that, indeed, it is *not* about work anymore. This shift into a mixing of work-and-play clarified that what coworking companies everywhere seemed to emulate, to my informants, was a progressive, revolutionary change for the better in lifting people out of soulless corporate jobs into a state of permanent semi-vacation. But, I suggest that something else was going on here that companies did not dare to mention in their marketing rhetoric. Before getting swept up in the pretty pictures of sunsets, surfboards and sailboats, one must ask the question: *whose* revolution is this? Because, it could not be more obvious that this did not signify a general change in society—at best, it had a chance to affect middle and upper-class white laptop-owning well-educated corporate dropouts.

Its aesthetic effects had the ability to grab headlines from several major news outlets, and it has perhaps inspired changes in affluent service sector work more generally as part of the ongoing ludification of the workplace (for an overview see Dymek & Zackariasson 2016, Savignac 2017). It was a highly appealing and hope-inspiring tool for people who needed imaginative channels to circumvent their depressing cubicle work setting, and it helped people realise that they didn't have to continue working in their mediocre job if they wanted something different. But it cannot be emphasised enough that this was not a revolution: it was a market shift towards the increased desirability of vacation products. It was not a breakdown of work and play, it was a reorganisation of regimes of discipline that made work more playful (i.e., situated it in new contexts) and that made play more laborious (i.e., made fun something one should aspire to, like community belonging from Chapter 2). And, notably, this mixture of work and play is a phenomenon that has

been observed historically in many examples—specifically with the rise of *aristocracies.* For new aristocratic classes in different epochs and countries, domains of play (such as galas, balls, receptions) became environments where productive work was undertaken in comparison with the well-defined contours of bourgeois bureaus, offices and conference rooms.

What some called 'The Coworking Revolution' might be better understood as the rise of a new aristocracy who benefited from its wealth of resources and education to secure a new way of life. And for a hint on how this change took place, one suggestion is that—if anything—*it was not about work anymore*.

THE NEW ARISTOCRATS

While aristocracy might be a strong word, it wouldn't be out of place for a class of affluent global lifestyle designers who admit their status as 'Global Winners.' One night at our Lisbon Camp I spoke with Maxime, a professional 'connector' from OuiShare (a French sharing economy organisation) about the changes that coworking and the sharing economy were bringing about in contemporary society. He was a soft-spoken man in his late 30s, with striking blue eyes and a gaunt face with a constant five o'clock shadow. His job was to organise events that connected sharing-concerned people with other likeminded sharing-concerned people they hadn't yet met. Maxime studied economics at university, and used to be a fervent left-winged political activist. But since then, he had children and moved into the world of coworking in 2011, at its European debut. He

was fascinated by the power of coworking as a movement, and its potential to offer change in a politically jaded society. Since he had grown older, he explained that he no longer wanted to participate in an organisation that was ideologically dissident or violently oppositional. He adopted the idea, like many other of his coworking compatriots, that coworking could transform a largely undesirable system from the inside-out. In short, he went from a 'revolutionary' to a 'reformist.'

He admitted that he was fatigued from fighting for years against a political system that offered very little progress for his efforts. Now he dedicated himself to foster connections between coworking communities, with confidence that in time it would help transform the current dominant structure into something new: a systemic hybrid of collaborative and capitalist features. He emphasised to me that 'not all features of capitalism are bad,' and that when used in conjunction with collaborative principles espoused in coworking, he believed 'it could be an amazingly resilient system.' My question to him was what first steps could be taken to achieve this combination, from which afterwards I quickly jotted the following field notes:

> He wants a 'new social contract' for what he calls 'THE GLOBAL WINNERS:' 'Coworking is a movement that's a small proportion of these global winners that will never, in my lifetime expand to change the world.'

The Global Winners: an unsurprisingly trendy name for this brand-building troupe of permanent vacationers. Maxime recognised himself and the others in the room, in a sweeping gesture while speaking, as belonging to the group of 'Global Winners.' These were, in his eyes, well-educated,

moderately wealthy Western Europeans and Americans. The 'small proportion' of them he mentioned to form a new 'social contract' were the coworkers. Listing off their qualities, he suggested that they were entrepreneurs and freelancers working side-by-side in shared workspaces, advocating new values, new ways of sharing resources and new ways of working within the terms of the capitalist system. But he paused to put everything in perspective, admitting that 'who we are and what we do is a result of our luxury politically, economically and socially.' Maxime and the others at our Camp, he suggested, were 'winners,' in the sense that they 'had the cards dealt well' to them, he explained. They were collectively living a shamelessly agile, cosmopolitan and well-to-do lifestyle. His comments struck me this evening, as it was the first time that I heard such a degree of reflexivity on the inherently moneyed nature of coworking from my interlocutors. To be able to afford a desk in a space, one must have enough income to support not only the normal high costs of living in one of Europe's globalised metropoles, but also to pay for their subscription—which could be easily upwards of €500 per month, depending on the space and desired accessories.

But why in particular should we consider these Global Winners an aristocracy? The key reason to situate them in this social genre is because of the utmost attention to one's lifestyle above all else, which has been a long-standing hallmark of French aristocratic society since the middle ages. This is lifestyle in two senses: as something to achieve for oneself (in other words, the interest in achieving a way of life over one's means to live it) and as a sphere of life-turned-into-labour that opens up in the unfolding dimensions of the disciplined subject (as discussed in Chapter 2). Historians agree that arriving at a general accepted definition of French aristocracy is difficult (aristocratic families, however, are easier to pinpoint with their lengthy historical lineages, such as *Les Montmorency, La Trémoille, La Rochefoucauld* and others), but there is one generally accepted

criteria for how to identify historical groups as distinctly aristocratic (Bély 2008: 62; see also Saint Martin 1993: 290 as well as Pinçon and Pinçon Charlot 1994). This criterion—from the 15th century onwards—is *lifestyle*, both as a goal for life and a means of discipline to achieve it.

> In general, the aristocracy was essentially associated with a lifestyle, and it came first and foremost from social acknowledgement: to be an aristocrat was to live nobly and to be recognised as such. This lifestyle led itself according to a notion of departure [*dérogeance*]: a noble would lose his quality if he gave himself to 'vile' activities—above all artisanal and commercial. The gentleman should not be obliged to work in order to live. (Bély 2008: 62, my translation)

Access was granted to the aristocracy by lineage, and although this is a strong determining characteristic, it is one of the few differences between the world of independent workers and coworking spaces amongst whom I spent my fieldwork. Like the nobility, these independent workers were 'essentially associated to a lifestyle' and required 'social recognition' to be considered as such, both of which were made evident to me in the arms race of producing and consuming lifestyle porn. Like the nobility, for these independent workers, being one amongst their ranks was an act of living 'nobly and being recognised as such,' in the ongoing 'ponzi scheme' (again, Eric's terminology) of participating in the disciplinary regimes of being a well-travelled, exciting, successful life designer. Like the nobility, independent workers defined themselves in their lifestyle as a form of departure (*dérogeance*) from other ways of life where they would 'lose their [noble] quality,' such as 9-to-5 corporatism or other forms of office living deemed unacceptable because they were not considered (in the words of the two digital nomads above) 'something meaningful.'

As the French nobility defined themselves against the activities of 'craftsman and the businessman,' European independent workers defined themselves against the consultant and the banker.

Finally, like the nobility, these independently wealthy independent workers 'were not obliged to work to live'—which is to say they chose how to lead a certain lifestyle with monetary concerns raised after-the-fact to make their way of life possible. Money was no object in the sense that independent workers, in choosing to leave behind the trappings of corporate life, chose to live a life not defined by money, but one defined—as an aristocrat might shun the degrading prospect of life as a craftsman—primarily by lifestyle: to live in a highly ritualised manner and to be recognised for it (in the complex representational practices of lifestyle porn). But there is more to this similarity than merely suggesting a connection based on their totalising concern for lifestyle representations. The pursuit of lifestyle infiltrated a wide range of physical activities that inculcated certain values for being an independent worker, in the same way as aristocratic activities of the French nobility. For example,

> The practice of certain activities that affirm themselves as selfless, whether they be sportive like horseback riding, hunting, fencing, religious like ceremonies or processions, political like the post of a mayor or advisor, social like the ancient works of charity or the new forms of humanitarian action, it is not without reinforcing in the descendants of aristocrats the sentiment, indeed, the conviction to take part in an 'elite' that they believe to be entirely 'natural' […] The tranquil affirmation of their superiority would be, without a doubt, hardly possible if it was not accompanied—like so frequently is the case in aristocratic families of the country in particular —by a celebration of values, of moral qualities and specific duties that the category entails. (de Saint Martin 1993: 131, my translation)

Aristocratic pleasures—notably of horse riding, fencing, hunting—match with precision the pleasures of independent workers with regards to their cultural pastimes: surfing, sailing, hiking, off-roading and yoga. This constellation of sports that independent workers pursued reinforced in them a 'noble sentiment,' made evident in Copass's interview with two digital nomads excerpted above. In this interview, they demonstrate their moral superiority with precision in suggesting workers of yesterday (and very much of today) who were (are!) *not* independent workers travelling around the world surfing, sunbathing and scuba diving, were (are) somehow *doing something less meaningful*. One of the digital nomads interviewed by Copass mentions in another article (on the topic of their achievements in lifestyle design), that 'A happy (work-)life starts with feeding and nourishing yourself. We start with a morning workout and meditation every day. Next to that, I'm a fanatic boxer and Feli is a yogi, biker and kite surfer' (Meurer & Hargarten 2015a). Meaning, for these independent workers, was derived not from the corporatist (aristocrats might say *vile*) pastimes of yesterday such as football, baseball or other institutionalised, mass market sports. To find something meaningful for them, one must be a 'fanatic boxer' (not to mention, as one of the nomads adds on his website, a Krav Maga practitioner and rescue diver) or a 'yogi, biker and kite surfer' (Meurer 2017).

These sports are the interests of a new elite that can be seen in the progressively more nuanced lifestyle porn desire to be *competitively interesting:* no longer is being interested in darts good enough, one must find a passion for Bikram yoga for fear of not yet doing 'something meaningful.' And this isn't even to mention other physical activities of independent workers: networking rituals, conference presenting procedures, event formalities and more—all complimentary physical routines through which they are able to arrive at 'the conviction to belong to an "elite" that they willingly

believe is "natural."' Not to mention the independent worker's replacement for aristocracy's lineage-obsession, the society-obsession, as documented in Chapter 2 (see Bély 2008: 62-3). But this might be the least surprising of all of these connections, as the very formatting and posting of lifestyle pornography is a continual confirmation of an 'elite,' as in superior, way of life that arrives to one as a 'natural' result of correctly following the routine. Lifestyle porn encapsulates in the media itself a 'calm affirmation of their superiority' against those who refuse to self-express on these terms. Calm superiority such as this was built-in to the 'natural' common sense of this way of life, as expressed by the two nomads in yet another interview:

> We started the lifestyle as digital nomads to become location independent and set us free. We both had the feeling that we could give so more value to the world than just sitting in an office from 9 to 5 and work for someone else dreams. (Meurer & Hargarten 2015b)

To be 'set free,' for these nomads, is 'to become location independent.' Which, in other terms, is to say that anyone who has not done so is still locked up. As de Saint Martin pointed out, such a 'celebration of values, of moral qualities and of specific duties' has long been a feature of French aristocracy. Notably the easy denigration of other lifestyles as something where 'a noble would lose his quality if he gives himself over to certain activities,' such as (in our case) choosing to not be location independent. Because deciding to travel or not no longer carries the mere weight of practical benefits: it is a matter of freedom as a value, and also one's capacity to *give* value to the world. Here, there is no longer subtle resemblance between the two categories of aristocrats and independent workers, but overt similitude: social recognition of one's lifestyle (worked tirelessly

into a complex scheme of disciplines and representations) conducted all further value judgments on their worth, where the good and righteous lifestyle design strategies were sustained with a calm superiority.

Indeed, anyone who committed to ‘just sitting in an office from 9 to 5,’ working for the dreams of another clearly did not carry the same worth as globetrotting, digital nomad, athlete lifehackers. Because, for some, the spiritually impoverished office worker pales in comparison to the enlightened nomad technopreneur—just as, for others, the vile practicality of the craftsman pales in comparison to the dignified, jobless aristocrat.

8

ONE GLOBAL DWELLING, THE POP-UP SOCIETY

Recalling the remarks of Gaston Bachelard which close Chapter 1, he writes that, 'Housed everywhere but nowhere shut in, this is the motto of the dreamer of dwellings' (1997: 62). In the preceding chapters, I have presented ethnographic examples illustrating how the cofounders grew their startup less like the careful, financially responsible deployment of a business plan and more like an aesthetic and practical enclosure of space, travel routines, ways of life and conceptions of self- and community-based identity. The world of Copass was not one laid over the geography of planet earth as much as it was turned in towards itself, providing customers with a comfortable, carefully enclosed existential orientation. It was a place where 'Be There. Anywhere,' as the company's marketing slogan went (or, equally, their other slogan of 'With You Wherever You Go'), offered a rephrasing of Bachelard's observation, 'Housed everywhere.' The startup's world was not

found out there in the world, dominating markets and enlisting customers across the earth. It was instead, as Barthes explained in reference to Jules Verne's novels, driven inwards by a particular 'fact of habitation' *that brought in the whole world around itself:* 'to retract it, to fill it with people, to reduce it to a known and enclosed space, where man could then inhabit it comfortably' (Barthes 2014: 88, 87, my translation). In this chapter I discuss this enclosure in its most explicit form, illustrating how the startup's in-real-life events—the Copass Camps—turned living on earth into visiting a holiday home.

The Camps epitomised how Copass customers were 'housed everywhere' using the service, as previous chapters have illustrated: in designing a startup as a space-making machine (Chapter 1), making explicit new social structures to inhabit (Chapter 2), fitting customers inside brand archetypes (Chapter 3), situating them in the orchestrated traffic routes of discovery (Chapter 4), making them comfortable within forcefields that blocked out disagreeable environmental features (Chapter 5), providing them an existential fascination with the enclosure of tents and cabanas (Chapter 6) and encapsulating them in a class of 'Global Winners' playing representation games of lifestyle one-upmanship (Chapter 7). The Camps were described by Stefano as 'the ultimate expression of the Copass dream,' and I suggest from an analytical perspective that they were equally the ultimate expression of Copass's desire for enclosure. Each event put customers in relation with local environments like coworkers visiting Copass member coworking spaces. Customers were migratory guests who didn't belong to their current location, but through a certain infrastructure—the product service of Copass—they were made to feel at home. For customers visiting a coworking space, they paid to gain access, but as they were *paying guests* they felt (and indeed in the logic of the startup they were not wrong) certain things were *owed* to them. That

might include working wifi, fresh coffee, companionship, air conditioning, printer credits, meeting room facilities and more. But in the case of Copass Camp guests, one might have the impression that planet earth was owed to them.

The coworking analogy is a fruitful one. As much as the cofounders focused on having experiences, making discoveries and living life as a series of one amazing moment after another, they made it very clear that visiting Copass's wonderful coworking spaces was, at the end of the day, a market process of customers purchasing products. For coworking space pages on Copass's website, the cofounders specifically redesigned the interface during my fieldwork to make the daily cost highly visible. Stefano, Eric and Sophie discussed at length how to combine symbols and text to render the cost and *what that cost would get customers* with no ambiguity. The template for coworking space pages was as follows: a bright green 'CHECK ME IN' button stood out from the dark background, and below it was the daily price in bold white contrasting letters with corresponding icons: a laptop (indicating the cost included access to a coworking space) and a house (indicating the cost included accommodation per day). Below the space's photo carousel and description was an 'ADD-ONS' section listing itemised costs one could pay on top of the daily price, and what those costs would buy customers (such as meeting rooms, printer credits or optional accommodation). The cofounders wanted the normal transaction process to be simple and explicit, ready to turn interested users into paying ones within the feel-good, pro-sharing, fantastical aesthetic they spent so much time perfecting.

In the field it was the norm to assume that each coworking space *owed* customers something for the price of admission. In its Copass description, Transforma BXL (a coworking space in Brussels)

claimed to provide customers with a workspace bathed in 'natural light surrounded by grass and trees;' it was a place 'where you work, meet interesting people and learn about new ideas' (Copass 2017a). Toolbox Coworking, in Turin, Italy, sold itself as 'a dynamic and sustainable environment in the true spirit of coworking' (Copass 2017a). L'Archipel Toulon, in Toulon, France, provided a 'perfect playing field to give ideas a chance… your ideas' (Copass 2017a, my translation). CoworkInn Dahab, in Dahab, Egypt, furnished 'a hippie community' where 'you can experience so many nice adventures,' that offered a way 'out of all the pressure and fear, and get back the power and enthusiasm for your project' (Copass 2017a). The relation Copass managed between customers and their temporary coworking spaces was not just one of guest and office. Buying a day in one of these coworking spaces was also buying into the idea that, upon arriving, they were owed not just a desk, but 'natural light surrounded by grass and trees;' 'the true spirit of coworking;' a 'perfect playing field' for ideas; a way 'out of all the pressure and fear' of life. Building from the society-products discussed in Chapter 2, Copass's coworking spaces acquired clientele from the same rhetoric of self-transformation through inclusion in upgraded, premium social structures.

But Copass was not just about individual workspaces. It was always, as Eric would put it, a 'global community of local communities' where each workspace had its small place in a bigger picture (in other words, a great enclosure within which each of them found shelter made possible through a great simplification, as seen in Chapter 4). This 'global community' was rendered most clearly in the Camps, and this is why they were the most fully-realised moments of the startup's enclosure. Each was a place designed to house the nurturing principles, values and serendipitous meetings of coworking spaces but *outside of any one particular coworking space*. And so, as paying customers in a place, the impression was carried over from individual coworking spaces that *that place* owed

them something for the price they paid to be there. The locations of each Camp were not just pleasant cities or towns, they were, as Stefano described it, 'great places all over the world to live, work, share and have a great time together.' In paying to attend a Camp, one was not paying just to go to a place: one was paying for a *'great place'* in the branding of Copass, a place that gave birth to all the values of the startup's wider universe. And a great place is one that, like the dreamy world of the startup presented in Chapter 1, 'must possess every virtue' of life, work, sharing and togetherness (Bachelard 1997: 65).

Just like customer testimonials from the previous chapter indicated that being stuck in a house with a group of people was an achievement, and being rained on was no longer an inconvenience but something one was happy to pay for, the act of purchasing access to a place meant that one was expected to receive something in return. In the case of the Copass Camp Lisbon I narrate below, the product was not just being stuck in a house or being rained on: it was a whole encapsulated world experience. *Being* in general, tempered by expectations of the previously discussed lifestyle arms race, by the expectations of being a hero and of discovering great things, was the product people were paying for. This effect was achieved ingeniously by the cofounders in how they arranged materials in each Camp. Materials included living accommodations (beachside villas, antique hostel apartments), travel means (vans, bicycles and sailboats), local trips (charming neighbourhoods, dormant volcanoes), food and drinks (local beers, local fish) and the immense amount of small objects in each of these contexts arranged to convey certain impressions. Visscher, paraphrasing Heidegger, explains the interrelationships of such objects and the implications for *being* that come with having them around:

> We do not first encounter individual objects in a room as naked physical things, to which we subsequently assign functions and then clothe with meaning. Nor do we encounter these objects as abstract locations on a mathematical grid bounded by four walls. Rather, we encounter these objects in the first place as things that form part of the daily life of the inhabitants. We first discover the domestic whole of which the individual household objects form a part and this whole forms the framework within which the individual items make their appearance. (Visscher 1998: 202).

Being in a place, one first gains the impression of it as a 'domestic whole' presented through a combination of many particular objects. Because objects, Heidegger suggests, do not exist independently (as 'naked physical things') but always in relation to other objects, pointing to them and gaining significance from their combination (1977: 100). In other words, 'The things we encounter in a house are characterized by their availability and their proximity, *they are there for us'* (Visscher 1998: 203). And this emphasis, *'they are there for us,'* was precisely what was emphasised in the Copass Camps: the world was there for paying customers. To understand what this meant in the context of Copass's constant urge for enclosure, I borrow the concept of 'a phenomenology of domesticity' to study one Camp as a home-making endeavour (Visscher 1998). The careful arrangement of materials presented to Copass customers enrolled them in a particular experience of the local world as an earth-wide *domestic space*. The startup was working to turn the earth into a user experience, capitalising on the fact that, as Jean Onimus described it, 'Our innermost being finds expression in the house to which we feel attached and as if we had made it entirely to order' (in Visscher 1998: 206; see Onimus 1991). Selling tickets to world destinations

was a success for the Camps because it was designed like selling tickets to the house that coworkers already felt attached to, their native coworking spaces.

George Perec's novel, *Les Choses,* tells the story of a young couple living in Paris in the 1960s (Perec 2005). The book focuses on the objects this couple owns and desires, and how their life is oriented towards them and takes place within their contours. Visscher analyses Perec's writing style to understand the relationship between consumers and their consumable interiors:

> The young couple can imagine an entirely harmonious life unfolding itself from across the things in their surroundings, a life between walls covered with books, surrounded by tools so perfectly domesticated they would end up believing they had always been destined for them alone, fitted precisely to their bodies and made to order for their life. Yet, the things of daily life —even things in a dwelling—retain some measure of stubborn resistance; […] Are these things truly made to fit the contours of their world? Don't they evince a certain hostility toward these poor individuals because they also represent a larger world which does not favor naiive and carefree dreamers? In effect, the things that go into making up a dwelling are not just private objects that refer exclusively to their users; they bring with them into the house the worlds of work, of fabrication of economic exchange, and of social difference. They tell us that life is never simple or easy or entirely harmonious. The abyss between dream and reality is evidence of the profound dissatisfaction which pervades daily life and never quite corresponds to our cultural, intellectual, or social aspirations. (Visscher 1998: 206)

The following sections explore 'the things that go into making up a dwelling,' how they were coordinated through impressions that the Copass cofounders wished to give to customers, and how

the team strategised to make a temporary life whose materials were ‘so perfectly domesticated’ that customers ‘would end up believing they had always been destined for them alone, fitted precisely to their bodies and made to order for their life.’ By analysing Camp Lisbon, which I attended in November 2014, I conclude that culture was reduced into a market-making tool to create a ‘pop-up society’ that was, in reality, a retail space. For in the ‘pop-up society’ that the cofounders were selling, what I found was not just a set of basic principles distilled from their personal experiences of coworking, but an emerging consumer-based model of interactivity that put people, places and things on a market of exchange disguised with brand rhetoric of a Vernian kind, outlined so far in this research. To begin, below is a description of the shared accommodations for Camp Lisbon, where myself and the cofounders stayed for one week with around twenty paying guests. The name of this chic holiday home was ‘Lost Lisbon.’

A HOLIDAY HOME

> Mocha calfskin leather strap sandals, alabaster canvas Converse lace-ups and daisy white rubber-toe sneakers interspersed with worn-in plastic flip-flops (some sea green, others sky blue) formed a snaking line of footwear inside the front door of the flat. Soft pitter-patters of bare feet pressed gently against the heavy wooden floors. Long hardwood slats stacked in straight lines, marked quaintly by dark knots and irregular strokes of darker grains, catching and caressing the creamy afternoon light in a delicate reflective gloss. The pungent perfume of pine washed into the air, as the door shut

behind us. The living room opened from the foyer, framed in finely varnished speckled planks. A tender light blue bathed the walls, showcasing a collection of irregular wooden frames: a small black and white sketch of Lisbon, in a delicate thin marigold frame; a building sketch framed by four pieces of hickory dotted with silver pins; a landscape drawing settled between a modest pearl coated frame, with a squiggly pink line playfully skimming the circumference.

A comfortably-worn antique wooden table was the room's centrepiece, sat on a red and orange striped Persian rug: its brown finish worn down to caramel colours around softening edges. It was squarely positioned, surrounded by a tan linen couch, two white-framed English garden chairs—one with maroon and white stripes, the other maroon with precise white polka dots—a black polyester couch adorned with two tiger-striped tartan pillows and two leather lounge chairs (both the same model, but worn differently, one a faded chocolate, the other hazelnut, but both supple and tender to the touch). A dark marmalade-tinged side-table sat at one end of the room, holding a modest brushed steel lamp next to a tall, thick glass vase, with a bright golden sunflower leaping out between faded green spice branches—anchored in the vase by a little multicoloured collection of perfectly round stones. In the middle, sat a cloud blue iron typewriter, featuring a faux-yellowed colour-printed sheet of paper with an Instagram logo and bold black text spelling out the holiday home's name: '#LOSTLISBON.'

The adjacent dining room featured a gently shining oak dining table, accompanied by darker minimalist mahogany chairs topped by blue leather cushions. A white architect's

light leaned over the table, illuminating a small marbled clay plate humbly placed as a table-top decoration. Stone walls reinforced with exposed wooden crossbeams gave a backdrop—accentuated with tiny white lights situated under the ceiling (that cast yellow lights to add dimension to the irregular rocky surface, further distinguishing it form the flat's otherwise smooth plaster walls). A low amber sideboard softly curved out from the wall, bordered in square motifs in brass plates on its cabinet doors. On top were unvarnished wooden sliding door bread baskets, a porcelain bowl piled with bananas, a breakfast tray holding a lime, a polished black Nespresso machine and a white plastic juicer. Finally, a stainless steel kettle sat next to an exquisite spherical cerulean tea pot, balancing the tabletop with two trap-lid mason jars of teas—airtight orange rubber cushioning sealing off circulation.

The kitchen was strictly utilitarian. Filled with industrial aluminium cabinets, the prep area featured a large two-basin sink with a meter-tall two-mouthed faucet: one draping out over one of the basins, the other coiling into a free-hand black shower head dotted by midnight blue high pressure spouts. An angular knife block, an array of multigrain wooden chopping boards, glass bottles of oils and vinegars, racks of cork-stopper spice jars, cotton dish towels in grey, yellow and white, and a few lilac-lemon striped aprons hung cosily by the oven were a few of the room's accoutrements. Against the back wall was a tall antique dish cabinet painted in teal, with age-worn faded brass and silver handles. Pulling open and closing the different drawers, the structure would creak and wane, the wooden backboard groaning under the weight of neat stacks of porcelain serving dishes, plates and bowls (for cereal and soup, both in sizes large and small). A

massive stone fireplace rounded off the back corner, smoke-grey granite slabs leading into the chimney, now furnished with a modern steel and black-glass gas oven, controlled through two sleek turning silver knobs and an easy-open door.

Bedrooms were mixed along the flat's long corridors, hidden behind a ragtag collection of old knotty wooden doors (refitted more recently with chic silver handles and locks, but accentuated by loopy, antiquated multi-pronged room keys). Each one was uniquely tailored with personalised design elements organised thematically by colour and texture. One was painted in a pastel snow white, underscoring its sober and stately wooden furnishings: a tall redwood work desk, draped in carved laurels and panelled by glass drawers (matched with a dark folding chair of Scandinavian austerity), and an impressive wooden bedstead, the brunette backboard carved meticulously into square and curved forms, showing off an Etruscan-style vase sprouting arabesque curvilinear flowers in a lighter shade of tawny hazel wood. Two bedside tables sprung out from the wall, each home to identical brass and porcelain reading lamps whose lights were dampened by a delicate thin fabric, draped with thin polyester filaments. A large treasure chest reinforced with thick metal bars and padlock, underneath a wall of rice-pastel plastic framed black-and-white sketches, sat next to a half-cut faux-crystal chandelier attached directly to the wall, whose glass ornaments would jingle tenderly when disturbed.

Here everything was certain, or at least everything between the carefully-selected salon furniture and the dimly-lit exposed stone walls. There was no room for doubt: it had been designed out by the

architect, who instead replaced it with plenty of comprehensive, discrete objects. How could one question, entering such an inspiring holiday home, this ‘entirely harmonious life unfolding itself from across the things in their surroundings?’ (Visscher 1998: 206). Paying to attend Camp Lisbon, reading the preparatory materials and examining travel photos on internet forums, Copass customers arriving at ‘Lost Lisbon’ found themselves in a holiday home so eclectic, so cosy, so luxurious and so inspiring that was, in almost every way, ‘fitted precisely to their bodies and made to order for their life’ (Visscher 1998: 206). It was chosen carefully by the cofounders because it had aesthetic similarities to the highest quality coworking spaces (indeed, Eric mentioned to me that it reminded him of parts of his coworking space, Mutinerie). Like walking into a coworking space, Lost Lisbon was full of objects setup by its owner for the pleasure of paying guests. Objects ‘characterized by their availability and their proximity,’ which might inspire a paying guest to silently remark in thought: *‘they are there for us’* (Visscher 1998: 203).

The experience of staying at this holiday home, much like the experience of visiting a Copass coworking space, never ended at the door. It continued out into the local environment, turning the city into a more expansive holiday home. The holiday home’s website matches this suspicion, suggesting it was a gateway to ‘exploring the city’s culture and lifestyle, while revealing the best kept secrets’ (Lost Lisbon 2017). To stay at Lost Lisbon was to have access to a key that, through purchasing one or more nights of accommodation, could unlock the ‘culture and lifestyle’ of the whole city. And here it becomes clear why the cofounders chose this holiday house in particular: because it operated along precisely the same lines of orchestrating discovery explored in Chapter 4, within forcefields that protected guests from boredom or discomfort as seen in Chapter 5, towards a goal of interior intimacy and external amazement as outlined in Chapter 6—all for the goal of

providing customers with not experiences, not memories, not moments, but, as argued in Chapter 7, a *lifestyle!* Lost Lisbon could be seen as a materialised analogue to Copass's model of lifestyle-aspirational enclosure fully materialised within the confines of four walls and a roof. As one of the holiday home's main slogans went, 'SHARE A HOME, SHARE A LIFESTYLE' (Lost Lisbon 2017). This mix of home and lifestyle made explicit the globe-spanning project of Copass, as Eric proclaimed in *The Copass Manifesto* from the previous chapter: 'calling every place our home and turning our life into an adventure' (Van den Broek 2015a).

A CITY (A MORE EXPANSIVE HOLIDAY HOME)

> The air was cool, with a light breeze blowing a fresh sea salt aroma. The water lapped back and forth against the piled rocky barrier at our feet, and an old, dilapidated wooden dock a few meters out. Eric, Sophie and I were at the edge of a large square on the mouth of the Tagus River, circled by a collection of renovated stone and steel buildings, with plate-glass windows and sliding doors. We slowly sipped our beers, taking a break from shopping before heading one block over to our Lost Lisbon flat. People were running or biking by, flickering and flashing under the streetlights in highly reflective polyester jogging apparel. Moving swiftly, their lime, orange, grapefruit and rose coloured sweat-proof jogging shirts and multicoloured Nikes carried on Lisbon's bright architectural motifs and clay shades from its buildings to its pavement. Occasionally businessmen passed donning a size-too-large suits and clunky black shoes, talking

intensely on the phone or strolling with a colleague. Much like Paris's Canal d'Ourcq, near Mutinerie, this seemed to be a bohemian highway, a key component of the bourgeois playground that Cais do Sodré had recently become. A quote that I read in preparation for the camp from *Lonely Planet* (a tour guide for the young hip masses) described the neighbourhood's status as such:

> For years, riverside Cais do Sodré was one of Lisbon's seediest neighbourhoods. Its backstreets were the haunt of whisky-slugging sailors craving a little after-dark sleaze; a lacklustre place where brothels sidled up to sweaty clubs. Then suddenly everything changed. In 2011, the district was given a makeover. Its main street, Rua Nova du Carvalho, was painted a welcoming bright pink and the call girls were sent packing, but the edginess and decadence on which Lisbon thrives remained. […] Similar to Bairro Alto [a neighbouring bar district], the vibe in Cais do Sodré is similarly bohemian. (Christiani 2012)

From 'whisky-slugging sailors' to beer-sipping bohemians, the very bedrock of Cais do Sodré had been torn out and replaced—its cobblestone street poured over with a soft, pink asphalt that sat agreeably under one's feet. Rua Nova du Carvalho—now affectionately known as 'Pink Street'—was just over our shoulders as we drank by the sea. We ate there the night before, at a sardine restaurant refitted into an old garage that was sunken into the ground. This small establishment could have been the apex of the street's renovation project: its chairs were made of flimsy plastic and two inches too low to be comfortable, accompanied by rickety tables (this discomfort emitting edgy vibes).

Menus were printed in seven languages and were covered in industrial laminate with several months of unwashed grease. Behind our table was a wall of colourful sardine cans: six glass cases stacked from bottom to top in curved-cornered tin and paper boxes, a rainbow of dijon yellows, sangria reds, peach pinks, plum purples, olive greens and balsamic browns. Hand-drawn sardines formed the artistic centrepiece of each box, some in black-and-white line drawings, others rendered with the minute detail of an 18th century encyclopedist, some with a monocle and chic black top-hat, some filleted and drawn out like a deck of cards to be drawn from, others packed tight and dense to simulate the can's interior conditions.

The restaurant had a striking density of objects: spiralling circular fishing nets hung from the ceiling next to a stuffed pufferfish. On the walls were bait, tackle, fishing buckets, fishing lines and fishing poles: orange, blue, yellow, black, striped and some patterned, with handles fabricated from cork, metal, wood, and plastic. They were stacked densely with lures and sinkers—complimented by a long line of red and white floaters of various shapes dangled on the wall. Shelves were stacked with books, post cards, t-shirts, posters and paintings of fish, fishermen, fishing boats in hundreds of varieties. The bar was decked out with dozens of tiny wooden boxes, each with lures jingling off the handle, made of large fish, small fish, and a dazzling array of buzzbait, bucktails and spinners in red, blue and yellow. A subterranean atmosphere was expertly achieved through the use of confused lighting. Several off-centre bright spots aimed at the ceiling (creating masses of moving shadows between the hanging fishnets), with each glass sardines case outfitted in yellow, blue and green alternating non-symmetric

lights. The space was all at once too dark and too bright in every corner—but just eccentric enough not to cause significant discomfort.

As we dined quietly on small plates of oiled sardines, the Pink Street outside bustled with groups of drinkers nursing their drinks and smoking cigarettes. It was cool, controlled and diverse all at once. By ripping out the sketchy streetlights, once affixed with seedy posters and dubious phone numbers, and replacing them with backlit rotating boards featuring decadent incandescent advertisements of Moët and Heineken, the City of Lisbon had installed a carefully configured array of objects, that (as confirmed by *Lonely Planet*) worked to oust the intimacies of certain whisky-slugging sailors—sleeping with prostitutes, drinking to oblivion, arguing into punch-ups, yelling slurs in the late hours—with reasonable beer-sipping youngsters: enjoying a few cigarettes, exchanging Facebook profiles, opening a bottle of Sauvignon, feasting on small plates of spiced sardines. Snapping back into the conversation between Eric and Sophie on the dock, I took a sip of beer and looked down at the pathway of runners. Their pink neon Reebok jogging shoes hit the ground in pace, seeming to pound their physical presence into the earth itself: turning the rough old cobble streets of yesterday into the smooth neon pink ones of tomorrow.

ONE GLOBAL DWELLING

At Copass, the team was always putting things in circulation. That included spreadsheets, calendars, emails, all containing ideas, improvements, finances, critiques and work objectives. My primary work as Chief of Communications was to put words and images in circulation for customers. Following on from Chapter 6, the infinity logo of Copass illustrated the startup's principle of movement as one of infinite circulation. Erasing ideas of speed and distance, the circularity of all things was animated in stickers, brand goodies, as well as in images and stories from our blog and social media. The brand triumphs of Copass, as seen in Chapters 2 (Community), 3 (Heroes), 4 (Discovery), 5 (Comfort), 6 (Enclosure) and 7 (Lifestyle) came from how we introduced people into new kinds of circulations that enabled possibilities (to achieve business goals, to have amazing discoveries or to network successfully). These were processes of putting people inside circulations of experiences, people and places reproduced and simulated through the introduction of images and text designed to convince customers and potential users of their potential reality. By putting ideas of exotic or beautiful locations in our newsletters, for example, we aimed to penetrate the daily lives of users with amazing destinations otherwise inaccessible-made-accessible, through reading the newsletter and eventually purchasing a subscription.

But the Copass Camps, beginning in Lisbon, signalled a shift: the success of these in-real-life events wouldn't come from convincing circulations of digital images. We had to achieve a fun

experience of enclosure over a short duration of time in real life, and in order to make that experience convincing for paid guests, we had to put an extensive amount of work into practically preparing the terrain for their arrival. The feel-good vibe of connecting entrepreneurs having fun together and exploring a city did not come from nowhere. This *culture* was the result of our material intervention in environments we strategically cut off, isolating guests from certain local surroundings that might be unpleasant. Working with holiday homes, home furnishings, restaurants, dishes, body soaps and alcoholic beverages, we were *collaborating with materials* to make real the culture we were obliged to sell to paying customers. For Lost Lisbon, the Camp culture was rooted in 'the domestic whole' of the apartment, made possible by gaining ticketed access to a well-furnished, chic designer interior that mimicked Copass's curated coworking spaces (Visscher 1998: 202). For Lisbon, the city, Camp culture was made possible through materials organising experience, such as beer bottles, a Pink Street, Moët advertisements and decorative fishing rods. The team's media circulations of adventure and fun did their job: they sold out all of the Camp's available tickets. But the experience of customers had to live up to those circulations. To do that we created *a pop-up society* using material partnerships.

Pop-up retail is a recent trend in consumer marketing that consists in the temporary opening of short-duration sales spaces where customers can not only be encouraged to buy products, but can *experience* them. The first pop-up retail example was put in place by The Ritual Expo in 1997 in Los Angeles, described as a one-day 'ultimate hipster mall' (Courrielche in Swystun 2015, Moore 1999). The practice has since been adopted by thousands of startups, as well as by globe-spanning corporations who identify themselves as practitioners of lifestyle marketing. Without any exaggeration, I would suggest that the Copass Camps were planned 'pop-up societies' in the same

manner: *space machinations that transformed local environments into tiny brand universes.* Because, as is made evident in the vignettes above, the collective experience we prepared for customers was highly designed and meant to please. After all, this was the goal for them having purchased their ticket. Snarkitecture, a New York architectural firm, conducted a collaboration with COS clothing to create a 'temporary retail installation' in Los Angeles. Their project description reads as follows:

> Upon entry, visitors are immersed in an all-white environment filled with an offset grid of displays made from bent steel and concrete. Silhouettes of the pieces are cut out of each sheet of metal, highlighting the strong forms of COS's current collection. A single rack in the centre of the space showcases a selection of monochromatic white and grey pieces from the collection. […] The second room, while identical in form to the first, is tinted entirely pale pink, referencing and showcasing the warm copper and pink tones of the collection. The uncanny effect of finding oneself in two monochromatic, reflected spaces—identical yet different—creates an unexpected and altered world for visitors to experience and share. (Snarkitecture 2016)

The aesthetics of this space were carefully designed to imbue the principles of the clothing brand, with ghostly 'silhouettes' of its clothing items carved into the negative space of steel sheets. Here, COS was no longer localisable in its high street shops or its clothing items, but an actual inhabited space that, thanks to a team of well-trained architects, created 'an unexpected and altered world for visitors to experience and share.' The emphasis on experiencing and sharing and the desire to create a world that was *alternative* and unexpected both came across in the Camps setup by Copass. Each

space in this first Camp adventure (the Lost Lisbon accommodations, the Pink Street) was carefully conditioned for customers to experience not as individuals on a joyride, but as consumers looking through the branded orange-and-blue tinted glasses of a Copass habitus. Just as COS customers might walk around the gallery, examining its products and colours through the gaping silhouettes of the brand's clothing forms, Copass customers were walking around the city of Lisbon, gazing outwards through the silhouettes of the brand's *social shapes*—'highlighting the strong forms of [Copass's] current collection.' Far from being a liberating moment, the Camps were engendered from the first marketing materials to the last moments of departure with a 'curated selection' of moments reflecting lifestyle values. The 'offset grid of displays' might be considered as the diverse collection of experiences lived by customers: the quirky design of Lost Lisbon, the pink pavements of its neighbourhood, the diversity of its dinner and the oddness of its decorations.

Far from being disingenuous, I suggest that the Copass cofounders were true social innovators: taking the sales principles of retail products and applying them to the realm of *society-products* outlined in Chapter 2. Rather than being the antithesis of World 2.0—that is, as the real-life manifestations of a false, impossible world—I suggest that the Copass Camps were the most concrete forms of the World 2.0 made possible. They were the performative prospects of World 2.0, enabling the platonic forms of a better world to infiltrate the profane streets and workspaces of our own. As the vision of the cofounders was so strong in their prescriptive desires for all specificities of their world to be brought accurately to life, being able to design, structure and arrange these moments for small, manageable groups of people provided the perfect testing-grounds of a pop-up society. A pop-up society that rendered visible new possibilities in the form of the newest product lines adaptable to any environment. Just as COS has had a series of pop-up retail installations for

their newer collections, so too did Copass present a series of pop-up societies with variously updated collections of societal principles, to fit the ongoing style-trends of co-existence as fashion statement.

The concept of the pop-up, like lifestyle from the previous chapter, also falls under Goodman's category of 'deletion and supplementation' (1978: 14). He explains,

> Our capacity for overlooking is virtually unlimited, and what we do take in usually consists of significant fragments and clues that need massive supplementation. Artists often make skilful use of this: a lithograph by Giacometti fully presents a walking man by sketches of nothing but the head, hands, and feet in just the right postures and positions against an expanse of blank paper; and a drawing by Katharine Sturgis conveys a hockey player in action by a single charged line. (1978: 14)

Interestingly, it could seem as if contemporary architects borrowed worldmaking strategies directly from Goodman—the careful clothing silhouettes and blank spaces of Snarkitecture craft 'an unexpected and altered world for visitors' by forcing them to fill in the blanks and connect the dots of COS's minimalist pop-up space (Snarkitecture 2016). Copass used a similar trick in their camps: focusing Campers' attention on key props and prepared scenery (like the Lost Lisbon home, the Pink Street) was an effort to delete incompatible scenes (of homelessness or poverty) taking place elsewhere in Lisbon. By deleting and supplementing local environments, the atmosphere of a pop-up could be installed in a convincing way. This process began in email marketing newsletters, but was completed by the array of materials the team used to build impressions of the city of Lisbon.

Companies presenting pop-up product spaces did not end merely in brand galaxies illuminated in the form of shopping environments; some were retail experiments in providing purchasable visions of future, better societies in more obvious forms. One such space, The Period Shop (designed by the Organic advertising agency), was radical in its calls for social change in comparison to COS. This was a pop-up retail space for Kotex, a brand of feminine toiletries, temporarily opened in Manhattan. As an attempt to make items like tampons into products that could be seen as cool and interesting, Kotex worked to create a trendy shop aimed towards women going through their periods. With comedic undertones—the idea was inspired by a Tumblr post—this 5th Avenue installation was run by its internet originator, Sarah M. The shop's website explains her reasoning for the creation of the concept:

> Sarah was frustrated with how many stores exist for things like sunglasses, hot sauce and shaving gear for men, but none for periods, something that all women experience. So she took to Tumblr and wrote about a period shop—a space where women can feel comfortable, safe, respected and revered while shopping for their period. (U by Kotex 2017)

Sarah makes clear that this form of techno-physiological innovation was not just an excuse to sell tampons, (although, in a reality driven by corporate sales under the auspices of helping women, that's all it was). For Sarah, it was an exercise in manipulating feminine sentiments: making women '*feel* comfortable, safe, respected and revered while shopping' (U by Kotex 2017, my emphasis). 'Taking to Tumblr' is what many might claim to be the political intervention of an affluent 21st

century West, where blogging on the idea of a shop-turned-corporate sponsorship is considered a form of social activism. And what she wants us to take away from her activist project is that this was an act of affective charity, not financial scheming. That it was about reorganising the relationships of women around the universal phenomenon of monthly bleeding, uniting them under the brand umbrella of Kotex products (much like, she seems to suggest, how 'sunglasses, hot sauce and shaving gear' unite men, in a profit-driven gender-stabilising exercise). The conclusion to The Period Shop's opening description affirms her position: 'The Period Shop is proof that, together, we can change how women think and talk about their periods' (U by Kotex 2017). If anything, Kotex (and apparently Sarah) would not like customers to think that it was proof that, together, the brand could exceed its quarterly earnings—further shielded by the fact that all proceeds were donated to a New York-based charity organisation for homeless women.

There are similarities here to Copass's events. The Camps were claims to change the affective capacities of independent workers, creating inspirational places in the real world where, as Copassers, they could 'feel comfortable, safe, respected and revered.' Like pop-up shops, the pop-up societies of Copass Camps were commercial projects disguised in a will to bring about social change, primarily by pampering their money-carrying potential customers into phenomenological comfort zones where feel-good vibes could perform the world they wanted to live in. Looking at the Camps in this light—as alternative versions of retail installations—it becomes clear why the cofounders never accepted investor money throughout their history. Because with investment, these real-life versions of the fantasy world they wanted to install would've been revealed explicitly for what they really were: *retail spaces to sell a society*. Not taking money from venture capital firms was a very real way to help them keep these pop-up shops as extensions of their strong vision of a

World 2.0, instead of expanding into the shopping malls of global consumption. Rather than giving into the allure of money and the potential for the growth of their business idea, the cofounders always prioritised their aesthetic, their style, their independence and quirkiness. In other words, they prioritised their *vision of a world just around the corner;* their dream house of tomorrow that 'must possess every virtue;' one startup's dream that was more valuable as *a dream for what could be* than a startup that might gain investment (Bachelard 1997: 65).

And this is why the Camps were the epitome of Copass's aspirations for enclosure. They offered the nurturing potential of the values of coworking *beyond the walls of coworking spaces*. Keeping them as retail installations marketed as pop-up *societies* enabled the startup to earn revenue through making sales without compromising the aspirational values encapsulated in its vision for a better world. For these dreamers of dwellings, each Camp was an opportunity to create one global dwelling: a general way of living with other people according to certain values and standards espoused in coworking spaces, taken to the whole world. Although accepting funds from venture capital firms would have given them more reach to take their vision to a wider audience (and the means to get it noticed), it would have not only taken the aesthetic they were creating out of their hands, as I suggested in the introduction, but more importantly the *values* they wanted to present to everyone they came across. It is important to recall that Copass was created as an an accident: Stefano and Eric originally envisioned it as a collaborative effort between key players, not as a dedicated, revenue-generating startup. In this context, it is clear that their concern from the beginning was not to capitalise on a movement of global coworking, but instead to *provide a platform of shared values so that the movement could take form and build momentum.*

Although I was perplexed about why the cofounders didn't accept funding early in their career, Lisbon was the moment where I realised the benefits of their guarded approach. Because, keeping the Camp under their proprietary control—in Stefano's branded phrase of 'a gathering of amazing people in an amazing place to live, work, share and have a great time for ten days'—they could keep hope that other people might believe in their vision. That people might take part in their vision. That people might adopt their vision and each in their own way, make it something personal. The widely-held founder of coworking, Brad Neuberg, gave a keynote presentation at a coworking conference during Copass's later Camp in San Francisco. In his speech, he argued a central tenet that he held and repeated at many other similar events. He insisted that other attendees and coworkers try not to idolise him, to put him on a pedestal as the iconic founder of the coworking movement and everything it stood for. He urged people to instead 'take this idea, steal it, and make it your own' (Neuberg 2017). 'Basically,' he describes on his blog, 'I was giving people permission to take coworking and remix it, just like the open-source roots I came from' (Neuberg 2017).

In Chapter 1, I suggested that the startup could be understood as a dream house. Now, after having stepped into one of its holiday homes and having examined its furnishings, this material infrastructure could act as support for the preceding chapters presenting cases of aesthetic and ideological integration into an enclosing world drawn into itself through the imaginative productivity of the startup. Because 'Life begins well,' Bachelard writes, 'it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house' (1997: 7). Copass's aim was to create a globe-spanning house (a dream house, which at the time of my departure had not yet been realised) that would be capable of hosting, as Eric put it, 'a new breed of people' all sharing values that the coworking movement emphasised: sharing, opportunity, spontaneity, freedom and movement.

Establishing the possibility of one global dwelling, the Copass Camps were real-life attempts to give a new, better, more enlightened, more hopeful world the potential to succeed—by way of selling tickets to its temporary pop-up predecessors.

By keeping total control over these events, the cofounders could shepherd the movement as they saw fit, under the guise of social change and ideology—rather than the thin veneer of profit and desire for ownership. They could keep hoping that these events might just succeed in bringing to life the vision of an actual better world that, in their eyes, *almost was*.

Conclusion

A MODERN SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Copass was different from other startups I knew in the field, because unlike them, its primary goal was not to turn a profit. Its cofounders were not interested in getting rich quick or in selling out to investors who showed up at their doorstep; after all, they had turned down over a million euros of investment funds offered to them before I began my fieldwork. Their mission was too ambitious, their vision was too big, their fantastical world too all-encompassing. This startup's dream was 'to create a universe:' and to do this, shortcuts were not an option. Nor was there space for others—investors, board members or business coaches—in crafting this universe. From the moment of the startup's foundation, its vision was already sketched out. It was to herald a new age of prosperity for

digital workers, where work could be fun, where the mundane could become the adventurous and where all the bad things in the current world could be designed out and erased by a new one. The point of this startup was not to make money, it was to create a new world. And they tried to bring this new, ideal world to fruition *by realising a fantasy of what its ideal lifestyle would be*. To make real ways of life previously thought impossible by resolving complex economic issues, by empowering an increasingly alienated workforce and by turning what the cofounders saw as a harsh and unforgiving world into a fully-equipped, comfortable dwelling space (by turning the whole world into a coworking space!)—and to do all of this through rebranding the status quo.

To realise a fantasy of what an ideal lifestyle could be was a difficult project for four people to undertake. How might realising such a fantasy even be possible? On the one hand, making an ideal lifestyle into something concrete could be achieved through politics. Starting a movement, creating a political party, defining key platform stances, organising meetings, holding protests, finding suitable candidates, managing campaigns and, above all, defeating incumbents that represented the status quo is a tremendous amount of work that four people could certainly not accomplish alone. This would be a route to realise an ideal lifestyle marred by compromise, by bureaucracy, by recurrently having to 'face the facts,' by being weighed down with 'common sense' and constantly facing defeat against the normal state of affairs that such a fantasy would never want to be mixed with from the outset. Considering that, in the democratic societies of the modern West, such a project would inevitably become a mix of intentions and visions that cloud young idealism, this approach would never have worked for the happy-go-lucky lifestyle Copass wanted to realise. On the other hand, avoiding the inconvenient administrations of democratic governments, the cofounders could have followed the ideal lifestyle realisation strategy of previous generations by

escaping to the countryside to found autonomous communes like the American hippies, or certain religious collectives.

The problem with this approach is that contemporary workers, including office employees, independent workers and digital nomads, necessarily require the infrastructures and markets of modern urban society to live. While technological or electrical isolation worked for communalists of previous epochs, the techno-workers and internet-saturated peoples of Western cities and suburbs that Copass was speaking to could not leave behind these entrapments without also leaving behind their core identity as workers, consumers and productive human beings. Demanding such a dramatic departure from all that is familiar would simply have been too much, and would have in the end achieved too little. So, without political integration or isolation, what other routes to realising an ideal lifestyle were left for the Copass cofounders? Working within their means, the obvious answer was to bring this lifestyle to life *by creating a business that could sell it.* Between the four cofounders, two of them were educated at one of Paris's premier business schools, the ESCP (École Supérieure de Commerce de Paris), one attended ParisTech, and all four of them had either already started their own business, joined a startup or worked independently before Copass. Eric had a Masters in Marketing and International Management Strategy, and Sophie had a Masters in Management, Strategy and International Business.

With these backgrounds, it seems obvious looking back on the cofounders' project that the easiest way for them to realise their fantasy lifestyle was through the medium of a startup. Startups were small, agile and independent economic units that, above all else, had an ability to scale quickly, and the potential to change the world overnight. Making money from their startup was, if anything, a

side effect of the medium they were using to realise a fantasy lifestyle, rather than an end they were working towards. The goal, as Stefano put it, ‘to create a universe’ was familiar to them in the form of a startup, as well as immediately accessible, routinely testable, easily scalable and perfectly suitable for the people they wanted to give their envisioned fantasy lifestyle to: white collar digital workers. So, from this perspective, it should come as no surprise why Copass was created as a means to achieve their end goal of a fantastical way of life in a new and improved world. Startups and technology were part of who the cofounders were, what they knew, and what they knew *could work*. Furthermore, considering that, as mentioned in the Introduction Part I, Eric and Stefano were not able to find collaborators to launch an open-source coworking federation, a startup was the ideal model to choose in order to fulfil the same capabilities as their initial vision while making it proprietary.

What I suggest was ingenious about their attempt to realise a fantasy lifestyle through a startup, was that they tried to do it using *branding* techniques. By encapsulating their ideal lifestyle in a brand, which could be fine tuned and instantly distributed around the world via a website, blog and social media pages, they could quickly realise their vision of a fantasy lifestyle and encapsulate everything that it contained inside a perfectly coherent and directly manageable brand universe. This universe includes everything from the preceding chapters. Throughout this thesis I have attempted to capture the world I worked with them to make through our digital accounts and real-life events, emphasising the minute aesthetic details they spent so much time working out, the intricacies of dressing-up in costumes, the behind-the-scenes work of creating experiences of discovery, the deliberate generation of protective forcefields, the enrolling of space through stickers, the maintenance of impressions through lifestyle pornography and the use of events to make people

experience a brand as a new way of life. And every aspect of this universe I have described went to concretise the ideal lifestyle that the cofounders wanted to share with customers who, immersing themselves in the brand experience, would live and in a very concrete way, *make real*.

But, for the cofounders, the valuable result of marketing an ideal lifestyle as a brand was that it could be bought and sold, and success of realising a fantasy could be determined by sales volume. Turning an ideal lifestyle into a product meant that it could be measured, it could be quantified, and in the form of a subscription model, the fantasy of this life itself could be made into something actual even if nobody purchased it—because the possibility of purchase was always available on Copass's checkout page. And that leads me to a question that many people asked me after the end of my fieldwork: did Copass succeed? Did they put in place their 'universe,' and realise their fantasy of an amazing lifestyle? At first glance, it doesn't seem so. The startup never scaled as they once imagined, the cofounders have since found new projects to pursue (both economic and familial) and their marketing came to a near-stop, as each team member had less time to devote to the project in the year that followed. Copass quietly slowed down and the excitement for the potential world it promised did too. But what's interesting is that the website stayed up, and their service technically continues to this day. There are several hundred Copassers who routinely use the network, as well as more who visit their website and test out their product. While the excitement and momentum behind their product has certainly faded since I worked with the team, the potential for the ideal lifestyle they wanted to introduce, and the ideal world that would come with it, still lives on through their website today.

Focusing their attempts not on political messaging (to debate about a better world), economic policies (to reshape wealth distribution) or social change (to improve the quality of life of certain people), it may seem at first that envisioning such a lifestyle through brand-building startup was a superficial exercise. But it *was* superficial, and that I suggest is the social innovation these four cofounders achieved in their startup. There was strength in the superficiality of their project: because their world-building was done in brand materials like their website, logo design, sticker design, costume design, thin blog-worthy narratives and slickly edited photo albums, it was easily translatable to different people with different understandings of their project, it was easily transposable to all environments and contexts and it was instantly relatable because, unlike a political treatise, a first-time viewer could gain *an instant aesthetic appreciation* of the project and its goals. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then Copass's photo of a beach with a laptop on it was designed to communicate a complex message that was at once social (what's preventing you from working on a beach?), economic (shouldn't you have the means to work on a beach?) and political (why should you be prevented from achieving your dream of working on a beach?) In short, you could easily participate in the fantasy lifestyle the cofounders tried to make real by reacting to this imagery, signing up and eventually making a purchase.

In the company's penultimate blog post, Eric presents an exciting announcement: 'Copass PLANS Are Out!' (Van den Broek 2015b). The cofounders changed their pricing from what was initially a subscription model when I joined in 2014, with different levels offering varying benefits (the levels were titled exciting names like 'Explorer,' 'Adventurer,' etc) to a pay-as-you-go model that allowed users to use the startup's coworking spaces à la carte with no upfront commitment. After I left, they changed back to a subscription model again after deliberating for months about how to improve

customer acquisition. By leaving the subscription model for one year, they wanted to lower the cost-of-entry in the Copass lifestyle for people who might only test out their service for one or two coworking days. But the advantage of a subscription model was that it offered *concrete proof of a lifestyle becoming reality*, because in counting the subscribers, one could look at the number and say: 'today, x number of people have decided to accept and live the life we wanted to share with them, which is more than yesterday's number. So we are achieving our vision in absolute terms.' The implications of this equation between subscription and realising a fantasy of an ideal lifestyle are outlined by Eric in this blog post:

> By subscribing to a Copass plan, you instantly become a member of all the best spaces and communities in your city, in your country and on the planet. That's it. (2015b)

Just like subscriber numbers could instantly prove that a vision was becoming a reality, new customers were instantly becoming members of spaces and communities 'in your county and on the planet.' Eric here envisions new customers as people who were becoming members of a new movement of people living in a new way across planet earth, and by subscribing they were committing themselves to this mandate (even if customers might have a different interpretation of what it meant to sign up, but for the team that was not important). 'Copass memberships activate upon purchase,' Eric continues, 'They are recurring monthly memberships and will renew each month on the same day of the month that you signed up' (2015b). Once you pay to join, your existence in the Copass movement is 'activated,' and Eric is kind to remind users: 'Thanks a million times to be part of the movement' (2015b). So, for the cofounders, has Copass's fantasy vision been

achieved? Eric notes that, as of the date of publishing the post, ‘We’re more than 10,000 Copassers around the world and more than 500 spaces in 300+ cities and 75+ countries, reinventing work day after day’ (2015b). 10,000 subscribers with 500 spaces is the extent of, as he puts it, ‘the movement.’

But because the nature of their messaging was, as suggested above, superficial, to what extent was this ‘movement’ only surface-deep? What was the distinction, in Copass, between the store that they created (to sell subscriptions) and the story they sold (to enrol people in a new world) that built this movement? Above all, *what exactly was the ‘movement’ that Eric refers to as the result of Copass’s efforts?* For the cofounders, I suggest that what is interesting is how store and story were connected in the making of it. Achieving sales was a means to tell a story, and purchasing products was a way for customers to listen to what the seller had to say. Throughout the previous chapters, however, I have discussed Goodman’s worldmaking in the context of the startup’s marketing strategies. Although I have demonstrated their efforts and initiatives to use marketing to bring about their new world, at this point one can pose the question: at what point did their worldmaking bring something into existence? Or was it all an exercise in futility? If the ‘world’ they brought about was only as superficial as number of total subscribers (and not at least, for example, active users), what does this mean in the context of Goodman? He poses the question, ‘What are the criteria for success in making a world?’ (1978: 17)

> […] a version [of a world] is taken to be true when it offends no unyielding beliefs and none of its own precepts. Among beliefs unyielding at a given time may be long-lived reflections of

> laws of logic, short-lived reflections of recent observations, and other convictions and prejudices ingrained with varying degrees of firmness. (Goodman 1978: 17)

Indeed, it seems that according to observations made in this research, resulting from long-lived reflections on the startup experience, their world did not come to fruition, and although it was tested on many occasions, it did not pass Goodman's simple criteria for success. The reason for this is straightforward: the world did not end up existing outside the close circle of the cofounders and a very small number of Copassers beyond the Copass Camps, each of which had a limited duration. While some might consider this a failure, what I suggest is more important to look at is that Copass did not create their *world*, but instead they created a *movement*. Below, I will investigate what exactly this movement consisted of, but before turning to that I would like to emphasise that the startup's inability to create a true world they strove so hard to realise is not to say it was a waste of time. '"The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" would thus be a perverse and paralysing policy for any world-maker. The whole truth would be too much; it is too vast, variable, and clogged with trivia' (Goodman 1978: 19). Instead what the cofounders achieved was a movement that affected the lives of many people, that rewrote what could be possible in the world of coworking (even if only for a brief moment) and that was audacious enough to envision a better future and to act based on that hope, even if was only a better future for some.

With this idea in mind, we can further examine what their movement turned out to be by discussing three questions, each echoing themes from the literature subsections in the Introduction. First, did Copass successfully design out precarity for its customers? Second, did Copass succeed in turning its brand into a complete habitable world? And third, did Copass finally create a global movement

that lived its lifestyle? To conclude, I will analyse the movement, and the power that it had to imagine and herald the arrival of a fun new world.

DID COPASS DESIGN OUT PRECARITY FOR ITS CUSTOMERS?

Copass presented a world of abundance, and its lifestyle was driven by its infinite promise. Joining the network, you could work anywhere. Anything could happen to you. You could get rich quick with cash or experiences and discover how your pre-subscription existence was less exciting, less full and less fulfilling since you started Copassing. The blog was an ongoing testament to this prosperity, as each post promised something new to actual or potential customers. Whereas in the field most startups used blogs to share news about their product, Copass used their blog to share views on their lifestyle. A quick glance at the startup's blog titles (as well as selections cited previously in this thesis) indicates that the cofounders cared to communicate, above all else, their amazing world and its endless delights. Including new travel destinations, inspirational workspaces, handpicked Copasser stories and interviews with the team's glorified heroes of independent working, the blog was a continual reminder to independent workers that life didn't have to be difficult, making ends meet could be easy and dreams of the ideal life could be achieved. All you had to do to escape the precarity of your everyday life was to signup to Copass, whose world didn't seem to leave room for low incomes, stressful part-time work or clients who refused to pay. Instead, the startup offered constant delights foreshadowed in blog post titles such as,

-Designing Lifestyles: Toward a new way to live and work

-“This is not about work anymore”

-Let’s go around the world in 80 spaces!

-A software engineer sailing the high seas

-The easter break Copass Camp: the Canary Islands

-Somehow, we’re all going to be digital nomads tomorrow

-Cowork on a catamaran sailing the world with Coboat

-Cowork in a bright yellow van in France

-Coworking in the French countryside: Mutinerie Village

-Coworking in Santa Cruz

-The first big code & surf retreat (Copass 2017e)

These titles remind readers that in this new world, life is not about work anymore: life is travel, and travel is made easy by joining the Copass network and working anywhere. In this Copass universe, because work was mixed with life, and life was all about travelling and having a great time, precarity was impossible because it was represented nowhere. Where are the blog posts about struggling to apply for visas, about self-managing healthcare, about how to fill out paperwork to create your startup, or about which government offices need to approve your tax status as an independent worker? Here readers wouldn’t find anything about the struggles of succeeding as an independent worker—instead they could read about a successful software engineer who lives his dream of sailing around the world, or a team of entrepreneurs who do the same thing on a catamaran, or coworkers in a yellow van next to the beach, or in a converted farmhouse deep in the French countryside or in sunny California. But we are reassured by the startup’s promise, that

‘*Somehow*, we’re all going to be digital nomads tomorrow’ (my emphasis, Van den Broek 2015a). Somehow: this is the hard part. But by signing up for Copass, it is implied that customers don’t have to worry about it because that’s the startup’s problem. Just purchase now, start living your dream, and everything will be alright—*somehow*. The problem of precarity in Copass’s world was never made much clearer than that.

One December day in 2014, Eric approached me in Mutinerie’s cafe and told me about an idea he wanted to put on the blog. He wanted to create a hashtag that might have the potential to go viral and increase our reach on Facebook and Twitter. His idea was to use the hashtag #SlippersFriday. I found it funny and quirky in Copass’s tone of voice, and suggested that he go ahead and write up a post that I would later edit. The title he gave it was in the form of a question: ‘What about slippers Friday in coworking spaces?’ (Van den Broek 2014c). He writes, ‘We recently came back to Paris after some amazing time in Lisbon during the Copass Camp […] this Friday we entered winter mode and brought our slippers to cowork. We have to share this excitement :D’ (Van den Broek 2014c). As a means to share the startup’s lifestyle, this blog post presented several narrative points: the author was recently in Lisbon having an ‘amazing time;’ the author recently came back to his normal city indicating that he is a world traveller (emphasised in the post’s photo of Eric’s slippers on a desk next to a computer showcasing the Copass world map); the author has an office environment that allows him to wear pyjamas; and the author earns a high enough income to afford not only a global lifestyle, but the privilege and luxury to wear slippers in his workplace.

‘Working in a cowo with your slippers on is SO good,’ Eric continues, ‘You almost hear the fire cracking while you work’ (Van den Broek 2014c). Of course Eric meant this as a lighthearted and

superficial blog post, but the impressions it gave of Copass's lifestyle continued a narrative (of social peace, economic stability and relaxed work free of problems) that began elsewhere, on other blog posts, on the startup's website, in its events or other brand materials. This post presented experientially the 'vision behind Copass' from 'the very beginning,' as Eric writes in another blog post: designing lifestyles, this time with slippers (Van den Broek 2013). But designing lifestyles was not all about having fun, it was also about removing problems from the everyday lives of independent workers and startups to help them achieve their goals. In a different blog post, Eric explains how Copass was meant to facilitate an ideal entrepreneurial lifestyle with certain key ingredients: 'The convenience of a managed space, the freedom to be anywhere AND the power of a global community of local communities. A global network of coworking spaces' (Van den Broek 2014a). Put differently, this was a project conceived to remove an element of precarity from the lives of independent workers, or employees and managers of small companies, because it removed the problems of managing real estate or renting an office, it removed the complications of working in multiple cities or countries and it removed the need to seek out new networks in new places. In Eric's vision, these problems of precarity were driving forces behind why Copass was needed at all.

But these solutions did not reduce precarity for workers. They simply made living a precarious life more streamlined. Finding an office space was a challenge for my informants, just like travelling for work or finding new connections and networking in new places, but these were not the main 'precarious issues.' It's hard to equate them to the problems of being a young entrepreneur making ends meet month-to-month from an unreliable income, or of starting and bankrupting two businesses, or of repaying enormous sums of student debt, or of struggling for years to achieve the promised image of a successful visionary only to meet failure in business ventures with disastrous

financial returns. These are not exceptional cases, they were examples of normal people who frequented the spaces I worked in. At the time of my fieldwork, nearly 60% of middle and lower-income coworking entrepreneurs were over $60,000 in debt, with salaries fluctuating wildly based on market changes, averaging $1,000 per month (Altringer 2015). Being sufficiently affluent, or at least capable enough to outsource the work of office management or world travel planning to someone else, made nomadism look easy and fun to outsiders. Copass's endless promises of amazing adventures and a globe-spanning fun park sound paradisiacal, when questions of financial means were not considered. By representing a new world *without talking about precarity*, their hope was to design out the pesky financial, social and psychological difficulties that plagued 21st century digital work.

But, simply put, Copass was not solving precarity because the issues it tried fixing weren't precarious. Wanting a nice office environment, wanting to work from anywhere and wanting to make work fun were problems of people who weren't already financially compromised, driven to social isolation or psychological distress. Copass did not design out precarity for its customers, it just reinforced an illusion of greatness in a fantasy lifestyle that would actually, most likely, make customers' lives *more precarious*. In Altringer's study of digital nomads, the author interviews a number of people disillusioned by this fantasy lifestyle and their reflections on what it was like to be a location-free, world-travelling entrepreneur. One interviewer points out how the branding and rhetoric that he encountered in self-help books or blog articles presented little more than an 'illusion of location independence' (in Altringer 2015). The author suggests that this illusion comes from a variety of sources responsible for the increasing numbers of digital nomads in Europe and America, that all recount a dream of more pleasant work in a better world. A dream of being able to become a

pro kite surfer while managing one's company and raising a child; a dream of moving to a small Asian beach town and writing a novel, launching a software product, designing a better future, all from a contained space of affluent comfort. She writes,

> Despite the inevitable realization that it is hard to stay productive as a digital nomad, the numbers continue to grow. Perhaps this is because nomadism almost always starts with a fantasy that untethered work may lessen the stress of mounting adult responsibilities and usher in an easier, more connected, joyful life. It's a compelling dream, and there is a lively cottage industry of nomads—coaches, bloggers, event organizers—who fund their lifestyle by teaching others how to be nomads. (Altringer 2015: 5)

This places Copass's world—its own 'compelling dream'—in a context of other actors profiting (or at least trying to) from efforts to capitalise on a fantasy lifestyle. Although it comes in many names and nomenclatures, in many brands and variations, one could trace this fantasy back to a best-selling book from 2009 by Tim Ferriss, *The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere and Join the New Rich*. In a familiar phrase, Ferriss introduces his vision of a world where work becomes fun, and life becomes easy with his novel idea of 'lifestyle design.' Now, Eric's first-ever blog post of Copass—'Designing Lifestyles: Toward a New Way to Live and Work'—gains its context, and we see the inspiration that drove the founding of this startup. In his revised preface, Ferriss writes, 'From the *Economist* to the cover of the *New York Times Style* section, from the streets of Dubai to the cafes of Berlin, lifestyle design has cut across cultures to become a worldwide movement' (2009: xii). In much more explicit terms than Copass ever put it, the author explains how to make a new world free of precarity possible through the faith and power of the

enterprising individual, which he calls the 'dealmaker.' He writes, 'The manifesto of the dealmaker is simple: Reality is negotiable. Outside of science and law, all rules can be bent or broken, and it doesn't require being unethical. The DEAL of deal making is also an acronym for the process of becoming a member of the New Rich' (2009: 10).

The New Rich could be seen as an equivalent of what I termed the Lifestyle Class, and much of the strategies Ferriss employs throughout his book are recapitulated in Copass's world (see my observations from Chapter 8). Regardless of the implications of his wider project, we find the philosophical roots of the Copass dream in his phrase: *'Reality is negotiable.'* Just as Ferriss implores readers to introduce the rules and goals of the new game, Copass introduced the contours and contents of its new game in its own take on the ideal lifestyle fantasy, in an attempt to negotiate their reality. Just as Ferriss offers a step-by-step process for personal reinvention, Copass offered a step-by-step process for becoming a Copasser, one of a new 'breed of people' to inhabit a new world to come that—beyond the fixed domains of 'science and law'—could be modified, patched, and redeveloped (see Ferriss 2009: 10-11). Ferris and Copass each offer an *upgrade* to one's life like one might purchase a new mobile phone or computer, or in a software update. What makes this notion of an upgrade seductive is what makes it believable from the experience of consumer technology: in a quick click and a purchase, your can change your life. Your life can be better, you just have to do this one thing first (subscribe to a service, buy a book). By upgrading your life, you no longer have to train for years to improve your skills, you can 'turn 12-hour days into two-hour days… in 48 hours' (Ferriss 2009: 10).

But the problem with this perspective that both the founding father of 'lifestyle design' and one of its experimental offshoots, Copass, suffer from, is that this instant self-improvement is a myth used to excite people to purchase goods and offers little in return. Both offer an empty promise of a better tomorrow, seducing people into an illusory vision where current problems cannot not exist because life will be too great, too fun, too plentiful. Both build new worlds for willing customers that offer 'the rules and objectives of the new game,' forgetting that even if people accept to join they are all equally bound by the rules and objectives of a current one. One plagued by financial debts, political borders, social injustices, ethnic segregation and other lived conditions of precarity in a world rocked by dramatically fluctuating markets, increasingly encroaching blue-chip monopolies and worsening conditions for independent workers. The old 'rules and objectives' do not disappear overnight with the introduction of a new world, and old precarity does not disappear in new promises. Buying a subscription to Copass did not design out precarity for customers, it helped people forget about their current problems by promising that, *somehow*, things were going to be better soon. It offered an aesthetic playground where customer's imaginations could temporarily reside, but instead of helping it encouraged people to live more precarious lifestyles that were always pictured as a manifest destiny, as an unstoppable trend or as an eventual inevitability.

Instead of trying to offer a viable solution to the precarity of independent workers who sought something better, Copass was instead moulding customers to be ideal figures the startup needed them to be for their world to, somehow, succeed. The startup was participating in the 'lively cottage industry' of coaches and event organisers 'who fund their lifestyle by teaching others how to be nomads' (Altringer 2015: 5). Stefano explained to me that Copass was not responding to the needs of modern workers, but was instead trying to start a 'social movement.' Eric wrote that Copass was

the incubator for a great 'new breed of people' who would be more connected, more worldly and more close with each other than ever before. These two visions, I realised, were two sides of the same coin: they demonstrated how Copass was a project to finance a fantasy lifestyle—which was in fact *the ideal lifestyle of the cofounders*—by teaching others how live it. It was a vicious (or virtuous) circle: the cofounders' affluent lives were distributed in representations that were used to acquire customers, who would pay to finance the cofounders affluent lives, which were continually used as marketing materials to attract more customers.

The compelling dream of Copass was, therefore, never about designing out precarity. It was about making precarity more bearable by placing the problems of work life continually at the dawn of 'an easier, more connected, joyful life' right around the corner (Altringer 2015: 5). By educating customers to be Copassers (like Ferriss might educate readers to be dealmakers), customers were given hope that things could indeed be better than they were presently, and the cofounders were also given hope that, like their subscribers, the better world they were living for might somehow finally arrive.

DID COPASS SUCCEED IN TURNING ITS BRAND INTO A HABITABLE WORLD?

While Copass did not succeed in designing out precarity for its customers, their ultimate achievement was to build a world where—if it *were* possible to simply escape the difficult problems

and responsibilities of the current one overnight—customers could feel at home, everywhere. The startup, using tactics from Ferriss's lifestyle design, was able to sell its fantasy of a lifestyle that was based on the idealisation that 'untethered work may lessen the stress of mounting adult responsibilities and usher in an easier, more connected, joyful life' (Altringer 2015: 5). It cannot be overstated that this thesis documents the attempts of young people to resist the boring, administrative and highly regimented expectations of self-development and career progression (one might call these rites of passage into adulthood) in modern French society. While, from one angle, Copass could be seen as a naïve attempt to continue living childishly in a world insisting that kids grow up, I suggest the cofounders purposefully wanted to rejuvenate French society with a childlike mischief and adolescent indulgence that came from insisting the question: 'why not?' Why not try to invent a work world that, instead of being dull and full of water cooler chats, could be colourful and full of beach bonfires? Here I sympathise with the cofounders in their attempt 'to create a universe,' insofar as they committed to their vision by trying to make it include the whole world.

As discussed in the Introduction Part II, Graeber explains that, 'One must be able to imagine oneself and others as integrated subjects in order to be able to produce beings that are in fact endlessly multiple; *imagine some sort of coherent, bounded "society"* in order to produce that chaotic, open-ended network of social relations that actually exists' (2009: 526, my emphasis). And this is precisely what Eric and Stefano did: they imagined themselves as the ringleaders of a new group of people for a new kind of world, bound together by the Copass brand, that with enough luck might in turn create a new and improved 'chaotic, open-ended network of social relations.' By exploring the visions of space and of office space that the cofounders experienced in Chapter 1, I cited passages from Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1997). Beginning with the open-

ended image of the world-as-house, I wanted to capture the space-making ambitions of Copass as they domesticated the earth and tried to transform something otherwise scary, uncertain and dangerous into the known comfort of a calm and well-designed coworking space. Pulling the threads of Vernian adventurism, I hinted at how the team took narrative inspiration from this author in particular for how people should be configured to travel around a vast world—always somehow to return comfortably to the affluent domestic space where they began. This led to the observations of Chapter 6 that, indeed, what Copass was doing as a space-building project was satisfying an infantile passion of enclosure.

Barthes and Bachelard go hand in hand from this perspective on Copass to show that with a background in Verne's fully furnished and explorable worlds, the startup was able to achieve imaginative scale with its endless creative ambition. Much like Verne's extraordinary voyages, Copass never attempted to mystify the world or to extend it towards an infinite horizon. Instead the cofounders tried 'to retract it, to fill it with people, to reduce it to a known and enclosed space, where man could then inhabit it comfortably' (Barthes 2014: 87, my translation). But if Copass succeeded in making its brand into a habitable world, fully replete and ready for habitation by customers representing what Eric termed a 'new breed of people,' what was the new *feature* that this world had to offer its young inhabitants? Yes, it structurally might share resemblance with Verne's worlds, and the anecdotes provided by Barthes and Bachelard, but what about this world was refreshing and desirable for people who wanted to go there in the context of modern work and office life? Each chapter could be considered its own justification. In Chapter 1, this appeal could be the pleasure of a 'daydream of elsewhere' in Copass's vision, that posited a better world as a permanent possibility (Bachelard 1997: 62). In Chapter 2, it could be the excitement of self-

actualising as a coworking entrepreneur. In Chapter 3, it may be the pleasure of putting on a costume and becoming a hero—even if only on the surface.

In Chapter 4, the appeal of Copass's world could be found in the ease with which one could move gracefully around the world, discovering people and places like explorers of ages past. In Chapter 5, it could be found in the protective forcefields that kept good and comfortable moments far away from sad and uncomfortable truths. In Chapter 6, perhaps it might be found in the comfort of finding intimacy and shelter in Copass Camps, nests for the warmth of human closeness in a digital world. In Chapter 7, it may be the imaginative pleasure of picturing oneself living a life that, as Eric put it, 'tickles, scares and excites' (Van den Broek 2015a). In Chapter 8, this appeal might be found in the perfectly furnished holiday home of a Camp, from which the entire world could be seen as a holiday home, welcoming customers in the same spirit. In short, there are many reasons documented above for why Copass's world was appealing for customers. But to make a more general observation from these chapters, I suggest that the general feature, or upgrade, which Copass's habitable world offered customers was how it *pampered* them. From an analytical perspective, this world was a pampering space for independent workers and startuppers phenomenologically, socially and psychologically. But this idea differs from what is discussed in the Introduction, Part II, using Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1958). The kind of experience that takes us beyond this concept is explained by Peter Sloterdijk in his use of the term, 'integral pampering.' He writes that we can now,

> […] go beyond the negative definition of the "affluent society." What was previously imagined merely as an escape from the mental and material conditions of the deficient world can now be

> expressed positively in the statement that this society of abundance forms a *Gesamtkunstwerk* [comprehensive artwork] of progressive collective self-pampering—a work that shows a tendency to include increasing numbers of participants at the same time as heightening the disparity between inside and outside. Integral pampering can be defined as the amalgam of freedom without struggle, security without stress and an income not dependent on performance […] (2016: 751)

The central feature of Copass's new habitable world was its pampering effect. Not the resistance of certain material conditions (mass poverty, mass sickness), but the ability to live freely at no cost, having security with no stress and wealth with no labour. Put differently, it was to have the best experiences in the world at one's fingertips, that could be chosen effortlessly on a whim. Copass was the vehicle of this new way of life, offering a 'perfect infrastructure for a new way to live and work' as a free radical, able to move anywhere at any moment (Van den Broek 2014a). The basic elements of its product were about pampering individuals by removing the most basic troubles from their hands. As Eric put it, on Copass, 'Moving into a space takes minutes and no longer are we responsible for keeping the toilet paper stocked, or paying bills, or fixing internet downtime' (Van den Broek 2014a). This is integral pampering made explicit: where the basic conditions of existence are *no longer your concern*. Buying toilet paper or paying bills, or just fixing problems are now someone else's misfortune. Now you are left to your own devices, to self-actualise as a coworker in a community, to become a hero, to discover, or to take whatever other pleasures in which you would enjoy. This is positively-defined abundance, in a 'progressive collective self-pampering' of a 'new breed of people' who can connect and experience the world with each other, without all the difficult parts.

Sloterdijk's use of the German term *Gesamtkunstwerk* to qualify self-pampering is especially relevant in the case of Copass because a direct translation of the word would be 'total work of art,' or 'comprehensive artwork.' Speaking at length about their world in this thesis, it might not be an overstatement to consider what they were trying to complete was indeed an all-encompassing work of art. It was an intricate tableau of aesthetic elements that comprised, in brief, the form of a new ideal subject (a new breed of people), the contours of new ways of co-habitation (society-products) and a background in bright colours offering the promise of constant discovery of delight (the navigable earth). Within these aesthetic elements that the cofounders produced in their website design, in photoshop editing, in handpicked photography, handmade costumes and dozens of other trinkets like coins, bag tags and flags, a promised world of 'freedom without struggle' and 'security without stress' could be found (Sloterdijk 2016: 751). Their artistic achievement of life in a new world was underlined by a reminder that income was 'not dependent on performance,' and as long as the nominal fee was paid, all experiences would be given to the customer. As Eric described it, 'We want to be able to work from *anywhere* on the planet […] to connect with the *right communities* and ecosystems wherever we go' (Van den Broek 2014a, my emphasis). In the pampered world of Copass, no longer would it take hard work to achieve that. All it took was a subscription.

And that dream was made possible as collective self-pampering, offering a bright vision of inclusion to all for this new world, but in fact 'heightening the disparity between inside and outside' (Sloterdijk 2016: 751). Georg Simmel, in *The Sociology of Space* writes how this framing effect is the case for both a work of art as well as a society:

> The frame of a structure, its self-contained boundary, has a very similar significance for the social group as for a work of art. […] closing the work of art off against the surrounding world and holding it together. The frame proclaims that a world is located inside of it which is subject only to its own laws […] (in Sloterdijk 2016: 289)

As explored in Chapter 5, Copass used forcefields to create and maintain the boundary between the ideal world it was constructing and the unfortunate realities of the one it tried leaving behind. Using aesthetic strategies, its envisioned world was 'subject only to its own laws' because of this separation. Cutting off the destitute, the hopeless, the ruined and out-of-luck was crucial if Copass's bright world was to ever succeed, because these elements soured the optimism and ease of life it wanted to promote. If Copass inherited much from Verne's conceptions of worldmaking, it also inherited the author's colonialist outlook on the peoples of the world not fortunate enough to be on the road to progress. Heightening the disparity between the inside of the Copass world (explorers, visionaries, pathbreakers) and its outside (servants, assistants, supervisors) occurred at each stage of the cofounders aesthetic realisation of it. Its customers were heroes who were *going somewhere*. People of self-importance doing important things, which included taking time for vacation and achieving pleasure through beach getaways or city breaks. In this ethnography, we have heard almost exclusively of these kind of people, as well as the cofounders who, depending on the moment, were either managers of that experience by running Copass from behind the scenes, or exemplars of the heroic figures they encouraged others to become.

But, why is it that only now we consider all the *other* people that must have played a part in the story of the Copass heroes? Why is it that, we never tracked the activities of people in coworking spaces who, as Eric put it, kept the toilet paper stocked? Or those who paid the bills of Copass's coworking spaces? Or those who fixed the wifi while coworkers were frustrated at the temporary breakdown? The reason is because those people—the labourers who, like Verne's concierges, bell boys, indigenous guides and train conductors are rarely mentioned—did not have a place in the framed world of Copass. This world, 'subject only to its own laws,' was not the world of busybodies, administrators or manual labourers. It was beyond the frame of what the cofounders cared about portraying as a future of human society, and these people were written out of the story as incidental side characters whose purpose was little more than to facilitate the heroes in their grand adventures. An illuminating section of Tim Ferriss's *The Four Hour Workweek* speaks to how this pampering world was possible for entrepreneur-heroes. The concept he introduces is that of 'Outsourcing Life: Off-Loading the Rest and a Taste of Geoarbitrage' (2009: 113). Fascinated with the concept of 'remote executive assistants,' Ferriss emails a Bangalore-based company to ask if they would supply him with a personal assistant. He writes,

> I explain that I'd like to hire someone to help with Esquire-related tasks—doing research, formatting memos, like that. The company's CEO, Vivek Kulkarni, responds, "It would be a great pleasure to be talking to a person of your stature." Already I'm liking this. I've never had a stature before. In America, I barely command respect from a Bennigans maitre d', so it's nice to know that in India I have stature. (2009: 114)

One might hesitate in thinking this text describes a Vernian adventurer, who marvels in discovering more than anywhere else the height of his stature amongst some rural locals in a far-flung region of India. A colonial undercurrent undeniably perpetuates itself in the exciting promise of being an entrepreneur-hero, who delegates the management of life's boring essential tasks to others less worthy of his stature. The author continues, 'I can have a nice, clean division of labor: Honey will take care of my business affairs, and YMII can attend to my personal life—pay my bills, make vacation reservations, buy stuff online' (2009: 114-115). And with this delegation of tasks to other people, a disparity is entrenched between those who ride life in the driver's seat, and those who facilitate the driver's ability to self-direct on a whim. This echoes observations made about the Lifestyle Class of the Introduction Part II, as well as the New Aristocracy of Chapter 7. Thus, the reason we haven't heard of such figures in Copass's story was because they were quietly silenced when the heroic character was on scene, much like side characters in peplum cinema discussed in Chapter 2. This action of removing responsibility and management from the hero's control was what enabled the frame that closed Copass's world as a place where exciting, delightful experiences were made possible.

On the inside of this frame, in its sequence of aesthetic devices and narrative tools, the startup was able to represent 'freedom without struggle' because its heroic customers were not responsible for freedom, they had already purchased it (in comparison to those who couldn't afford it and were forgotten, as in Chapter 5). It was able to represent 'security without stress' because global travel was put on rails by behind-the-scenes managers (the Copass team, as seen in Chapter 4). Finally, it was able to represent 'an income not dependent on performance' because Copass customers were already affluent enough to participate in the joy of Copass's globetrotting slogan, 'I AM

FREE' (Sloterdijk 2016: 751). In this case, income had nothing to do with performance or productivity, because customers—the 'new breed of people' Eric promised—were conveniently all just wealthy enough to be included. So yes, Copass did succeed in turning its brand into a habitable world. But, that answer must be specified by noting that this world was only habitable for the heroes: those with money and the willpower to seize the day, those who didn't meddle in stocking toilet paper, but who whitewater rafted in California foothills. Their world was complete up to the Vernian standard: fully furnished, adeptly thought out, well organised and perfectly comfortable for voyagers who were stocked for the journey.

But being this way, it performed a great simplification that relegated other humans to a sub-class of user support agents, waiting in the wings either to help the main cast or waiting—in the best case scenario—to pick themselves up by their bootstraps, buy a subscription and join in. While the startup's world represented something new to a group of people who were desperately seeking out better futures, it brought with it something much older: a colonial attitude of subjugation of peoples by well-intentioned authority figures who would lead the way down the path of progress. If, as John and Jean Comaroff write in the Introduction Part II, the 'one possible future—perhaps *the* future—of ethnicity lies, metaphorically and materially alike, in ethno-futures,' in culture-turned-capital, worlds like what Copass represents might cause some to pause (2009: 8). Buying into a branded world like this was also buying into a view of how the world worked in terms of ethnicity: with certain key players who called the shots, and the supporting many that made their exciting lives possible. If largely white, educated, affluent coworkers were the heroic centrepiece of this world, it leaves some hesitation on imagining what the rest of that world—that in this thesis, like in the field,

goes unspoken, unseen—might look like. At this point, still standing at the dawn of the world that Copass promised since the beginning of my fieldwork, we have yet to see.

DID COPASS CREATE A GLOBAL MOVEMENT THAT LIVED ITS LIFESTYLE?

Copass was always envisioned by the cofounders as a 'movement' more than a traditional business, and onlookers also shared this impression, who often mistook customers in brand costumes for employees. This is where the concept of the Copass 'movement' was unusual. Because what I discovered was that for a startup concerned with horizontal governance, with authentic community, with collaboration and cross-pollination through the empowerment of workers—customer conceptions of the wider Copass experience were surprisingly opaque. On a dozen occasions in my fieldwork, I noted conversations that I shared with customers in Paris, Lisbon, the Canary Islands and San Francisco where people were shocked to learn that Copass was actually *not* a big company, with dozens or even hundreds of employees. People were under the impression that the startup was a large multinational machine that, meeting expectations from blog posts describing how Copass was operating in over 300 cities, had momentum, organisation, administration and infrastructure. Each occasion when this happened, people were amazed to learn that, in fact, the startup included just the four original cofounders and myself, as an intern. Interestingly, this revelation was met not by disappointment but instead with fascination. My interlocutors were startled that five staff could

achieve such a worldwide reach, affecting so many people in so many places—even if the effects were purely superficial, they were still impressive.

I reflected at length on these reactions, and although I was disappointed to learn we communicated such a distorted image of our global presence, I began to understand how the team profited from this *illusion of a 'movement'* to empower independent workers and startups. Because, joining Copass, many workers were trying to escape feelings of abandonment by institutions that no longer supported them in a society and economy they felt increasingly estranged from. As discussed in the Introduction Part II, this abandonment came from the breakdown of the 'triple institutions of home/work/school' promised in European post-war regimes that promised an '"enterprise society" of Fordist capitalism' (Allison 2012: 350). A society that gave people stable orientations towards themselves, towards work colleagues, towards fellow citizens and the wider world found in 'the material conditions of life-making, including work, and the social and existential conditions of living, including the ties we have with others and the ways we define (and find) meaning, energy and worth' (Allison 2012: 349). But following the financial crisis of 2008, and increasing precarity in digital work including the outsourcing of jobs to part-time, highly competitive, short-term, low-paid freelance contracts, Copass was promising something better. It promised a movement of people who, through their solidarity as independent workers could find independence together (in the new infrastructure of a brand), and who could begin to not only envision but to *live* in a better world.

For all the discussion and analysis above of Copass's dream for a better world—a designed world that was primarily aesthetic and powered by manufactured representations—at the end of the day, Eric and Stefano put effort to make this world real because they believed it might provide a new

infrastructure for people to live better lives as more comfortable and confident workers. Using their brand as infrastructure, the point was to never reflect an actual reality, but to present a highly strategised and specifically optimistic one. A branded reality that would serve not as a truthful representation, but as a launching pad for better future truths—an origin point from which new truths could be nourished. This reality could be understood in the specific word, 'movement,' that Eric used to describe what Copass was trying to achieve throughout my fieldwork. His use of this particular word was articulated within the representations that the startup was always producing, and the fact that it might true or false—just like this one startup's dream generally speaking—was never the concern. The concern, like Stefano admitted to me long after my fieldwork, was with how Copass was trying to *engineer* its own 'social movement.' Being opaque with customers about what was actually going on (communicating only, for example, that there were 10,000 customers, instead of the several hundred active users; focusing on the hundreds of Copass spaces, instead of the several dozen active ones) was not an attempt to swindle people, but instead to empower them and give them courage to adopt a new way to work and live.

Borrowing from analysis of Alberto Melucci, I suggest that Eric and Stefano built Copass as a modern 'social movement' whose main purpose was to 'announce to society that a fundamental problem exists in a given area' (1988: 248). That area was the well-being of affluent digital workers who were estranged from the institutions that were designed to support them with a sense of inclusion, a sense of meaning and a sense of existential orientation, summarised in the notion of 'soul precarity' discussed in the Introduction Part II (Allison 2012). Melucci argues that the importance of social movements has neither to do with the feasible future worlds they present, nor with the actual means of making those future worlds possible. What is important about movements,

he writes, is how they 'have a growing symbolic function; one can probably speak of a *prophetic function*' (1988: 248). He continues, suggesting that any one social movement,

> assumes the form of networks submerged in everyday life. Within these networks there is an experimentation with and direct practice of alternative frameworks of meaning, in consequence of a personal commitment which is submerged and almost invisible […] The 'movements' emerge only in limited areas, for limited phases, and by means of moments of mobilization which are the other, complementary phase of the submerged networks […] What nourishes [a movement] is the daily production of alternative frameworks of meaning, on which the networks themselves are founded and live from day to day […] This is because conflict takes place principally on symbolic grounds, by challenging and upsetting the dominant codes upon which social relationships are founded in high density informational systems. The mere existence of a symbolic challenge is in itself a method of unmasking the dominant codes, a different way of perceiving and naming the world. (1988: 248)

Thus, the aesthetic dream world of Copass and its ideal lifestyle *were* superficial, aesthetic, surface-level representations, but this was precisely the startup's innovative approach in an attempt to build a movement with the possibility to change the world. Eric and Stefano presented their vision through edited photos, curated events, selective points of view on social and ethnic diversity and specified perspectives on what the future of work would be so that they could build a movement defined 'principally on symbolic grounds,' that, as a 'different way of perceiving and naming the world' could open the door to a better kind of human coexistence that they wanted to install. Their work was *prophetic:* it was meant to herald a better tomorrow that would arrive—as pointed out earlier in this chapter and discussed throughout previous chapters—not as the result of a specific

plan, but as the fulfilment of a prophecy to be attained in leaving behind a current world and adhering to representational principles and the way of life they pointed towards. Framing their creation of a social movement as something prophetic, from an analytical point of view we could compare this startup with other 20th century millenarian movements which functioned along similar lines of prophetic fascination as a means to bring about a new, better world tomorrow. In both cases, 'we are dealing with *a basic human hope*, expressed in particular movements,' and for both 'no matter how bizarre some of these expressions are, the hope itself is neither eccentric nor a pathological aberration' (Turner 1990: xi, my emphasis).

The Copass movement, captured in representations that the cofounders spend years building, demonstrates a kind of 'basic human hope' studied previously by anthropologists in more exotic contexts, made most famous in analyses of cargo cults and religious groups. This literature examines 'Millenarian, nativist and revivalist movements' during 'the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s,' noting the importance of 'cultural and symbolic aspects of resistance' that they presented (Escobar 1992: 399-400). Millenarian movements can be understood as a 'collective espousal of belief in some dramatic, unsurpassable Set of Events in the world's future,' with a 'specific application to groups of people very much "on the tips of their toes" in expectation of such an occurrence' (Trompf 1990: 1). Looking back at what we have seen, Copass was rife with millenarian anticipation for the dawn of a new epoch. This can be seen in the notion Eric cultivated that, 'Somehow, We're All Going to Be Digital Nomads Tomorrow,' that by joining the startup one could finally live its slogan, 'I AM FREE' and that doing so would give one a head-start on 'the ride' of a world about to arrive—'because, after all,' he writes, 'you'll be on it sooner or later' (Van den Broek 2015a). Eric's TEDx talk from Chapter 1 epitomises this millenarian mentality with his

dramatic opening statement: ‘The office—as we know it today—is the legacy of an old world’ (Van den Broek 2012).

In this speech, he proposes that ‘all of these new initiatives’ of coworking, freelancers, digital nomadism, increased collaboration and ease of travel ‘are in the midst of creating a new world *that is beginning to become conscious of itself’* (Van den Broek 2012, my emphasis). This new world is made evident for him in ‘a whole group of signals which show that there is a global realisation [*prise de conscience*] of the existence of this class [of workers], and of this world’ (Van den Broek 2012). And it is this phrasing, *prise de conscience*, that positions the world and ideal lifestyle of Copass as a specifically millenarian movement. It was an awakening, an arrival, a collective happening that had the power to one day ‘revolutionize the way we work in a similar way cloud computing did’ (Van den Broek 2014a). The millenarian dimensions of Copass may be less obvious beyond the salvation-based theology of Christianity or material rites of Melanesian cargo cults. But I suggest that this is because Copass was drawing inspiration from a new mythology unique to a modern, affluent West: that of *cloud computing*. In the startup’s second blog post, he explains that, ‘When we first started building things for the web, there was a huge amount of work required. Launching a web service meant establishing, managing and maintaining our own server farm and hiring a bunch of engineers to prevent service outages’ (Van den Broek 2014a).

‘Then came shared-hosting,’ he writes, from which ‘we could effectively outsource server maintenance and responsibility for downtime’ (2014a). But even then, with sudden spikes in web traffic websites would crash so that the system was unsustainable, deeming shared servers as ‘too inflexible to cope with increased demand’ (2014a). Finally, advances in technology and new

companies and private sector initiatives changed everything. ‘Developments in server infrastructure for web applications have introduced cloud services, such as Heroku, AWS [Amazon Web Services] or Google App Engine, and made the idea of releasing a web app accessible to anyone’ (2014a). Now, startups and companies ‘have the flexibility to seamlessly expand or reduce server capacity […] with the click of a button’ (2014a). This story does not end here, as many might envision this transformation as a purely technical one having to do with the intricacies of web hosting. Eric takes this change to a wider social and economic context by pointing out that, ‘Interestingly, we see a similar pattern developing in workspaces’ (2014a). He saw the same restrictions and discomforts of server use in office workspaces, that like servers, one would rent at inflexible rates and durations that might not fit the growth of a company, or that if one wanted to own it, would demand an exceedingly high cost of maintenance, management and expertise beyond the scope of a small company.

‘Then coworking spaces offered the flexibility and ecosystems long needed,’ and from them Eric’s startup could become the ‘perfect infrastructure for a new way to live and work’—he specifies, ‘That’s why we’re building Copass’ (2014a). The rapid transformation that Eric and the other cofounders experienced with the arrival of cloud computing was a pattern that offered a solution to the problem of the office as ‘legacy of an old world’ (Van den Broek 2012). It offered a way out of precarity experienced in part-time no-contract work arrangements. It promised freedom beyond the institutional constraints that made life as an entrepreneur isolating and inconvenient. Suddenly, with cloud computing technologies, entrepreneurs could take an idea and turn it into a reality overnight, as Eric put it: ‘in one click,’ ‘with the click of a button’ (Van den Broek 2014a, 2014b). A quick subscription to a cloud-based service could give an entrepreneur the ability to realise a dream, to put

their business idea into practice immediately, with no structural restrictions that previously hindered the realisation of an idea. Eric took technological advances in cloud computing, and built a mythology that would fuel the transformation of a new world, the world of Copass. One that, for an entrepreneur—like for a business owner signing up to Heroku—promised change 'in one click' via a subscription service. One that, by signing up, could give instant access to freedom, comfort and the promise of a better world with 'the perfect infrastructure for a new way to live and work.'

The familiarity between the transformational capacity of cloud computing and the transformation that Copass promised is not coincidental. Copass's attempt to liberate the world from restrictions of ageing technologies of an old world precisely matches Eric's view of cloud computing's liberating power for a new workforce. For the cofounders, both of these moments were millenniums, each one 'as a mythic or macro-historical displosion' that was based in what Yonina Talmo has termed '*this-worldly* salvation' (in Trompf 1990: 9). 'The more material the content of the Millennium, in fact, the greater the likelihood of a quest for some technology or ritual to bring about its actuality' (Trompf 1990: 9). Indeed, what I have described in this thesis is precisely the quest of four people for both the technology (the Copass network) *and* ritual (its construction, its communication and its deployment) to bring about collective salvation in a better future. Their focus on aesthetic devices, marketing rhetoric and event planning was to 'engender greater cohesive activity' for the creation of a new, self-identified group of people—Copassers—in the dreamy vision of a world that was always exaggerated: 'enhanced, by more definite, if simplistic picturing of what is to be soon forthcoming, whether verbally or iconically' (Trompf 1990: 9). Finally, then, with this in mind, did Copass create a global movement who lived its lifestyle?

It is safe to say that by the time of writing this (late 2017), their global movement—Eric's 'new breed of people,' or equally what Stefano termed their 'social movement'—has not been formed. While the cofounders spent years trying to build a movement with the arrival of a new world, for these 'fervent believers' their dreams have not yet come true and their long-awaited future has not arrived. But as for whether that new breed of people willing to live differently, along the lines of the startup's dream, will happen one day, or whether Copassers will always be customers seeking convenience, the answer is not clear. What I find important in this study of this one startup's dream is not the world that they succeeded or not in bringing about, but instead the radical millennial position of imagining a new world differently using the materials of modern life as a basis to create a mythology for something better. In the West today, 'there is the mounting sense of economic, social and ecological crises that are beyond human management,' and decades after Turner noted this, the situation has not become any easier and solutions to how to improve it have not become any more evident. He asks, 'Can we say that these attitudes are unrealistic or that to turn to some millenarian solution is merely escapist?' (1990: xi). I suggest not. The power to position oneself, and subsequently a group of people then the world, around a series of radical propositions and simple optimism is a powerful human potential that, contrary to being childish, naïve or escapist, has the potential to present a brighter world that can be achieved through gradual work made possible in continual yearning.

What is significant in this ethnography of a small startup's dream, is how the 'intensity of effervescence of those moments' at the birth of a social movement can create 'the turning point of a new and preferable direction, and the making possible a new *communitas'* (Trompf 1990: 10). Like cloud computing, Copass's promised world was the beginning of a wealth of material that could be

continuously reworked by subsequent entrepreneurs and startups inspired by the vision they proposed. The power of a startup like Copass in acting according to millennial dimensions, is that like the dream house of Bachelard, ‘A daydream of elsewhere should be left open, therefore, at all times’ (1997: 62). Offering a seductive and simplified vision of an imagined tomorrow, made liveable in an ideal lifestyle, was a way to build optimism and hope into the lives of people who, in the face of economic, social and political crises, sought a way to be happier, to be better, to improve their lives today and to seek out a better world tomorrow. Visions like the one proposed by Copass, therefore, are wellsprings of hope that can serve as launchpads for ambition and encouragements for new projects and novel experiments. What is so valuable about their vision was that, in its simplicity of a better world, ‘members may then still look to the Millennium, but avoid the mistake of proposing a time-table’ (Trompf 1990: 10). This may be the greatest potential and consummate value of living towards a fun new world.

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