Technology can be a territory. If we take territory to be an abstract political projection of boundaries and laws over a hardened and implacable geography then, in a sense, anything could be a territory. But if we take geography, not as continents and landmasses but as the network - the jealously embedded system of cabling and legal frameworks often carelessly brushed off as ‘The Internet’ or more recently ‘the cloud’ - then we arrive at a point where the territories constructed on the network possess a cruel politics that is crushing the imaginable alternatives the technology promised.

In early October 2013 the FBI arrested Dread Pirate Roberts, the alleged founder of TOR’s online narcotics marketplace Silk Road. TOR and much of the rest of the deep web, function as distributed networks piggy-backing the physical and software infrastructure of the network. They provide anonymity by bouncing the user’s IP address around thousands of global nodes to disguise identity. Dread Pirate Roberts, lesser-known as Ross William Ulbricht, was arrested in a public library in San Francisco while using the free wi-fi to manage his online drugs empire. It’s alleged that the Silk Road’s dealings in narcotics and illicit substances made around $1.2 billion for Ulbricht in bitcoin.

As if Breaking Bad were remade in Silicon Valley, Dread Pirate Roberts was the allegedly ruthless leader and founder of a post-modern drug empire while Ross William Ulbricht was a generally kind but lonely boy renting a room in San Francisco and spending his day in the public library. That’s not to say that there’s a dualism here. This is one man behaving in the great tradition \*\*\*\*

On 19th October, on the other side of the San Francisco bay from where Dread Pirate Roberts was giving his first interview in Alameda County Jail, Balaji Srinivasan, founder of genetics company Counsyl was giving a talk to Y Combinator’s Startup School titled Silicon Valley’s Ultimate Exit. Srinivasan seduced the largely teenage crowd with stories of renegade technologists as state-builders, ending his talk by cementing the ever more vocal demands coming out of Silicon Valley for a Randian homeland of their own. Silicon Valley secessionism is nothing new; Eric Schmidt, executive chairman at Google, has previously called for legal and physical territory for Google to experiment with new ideas and Peter Thiel, the most recognisable face of the Paypal Mafia old boys network, is an ardent advocate of Seasteading and space colonisation; anything to escape the bounds of state governance.

Mass surveillance, technocracy, securitisation, privatisation, nationalism and deregulation often feel like states floundering to stay in command of a world they are increasingly out of touch with or too slow to react to. Quinn Norton and Eleanor Satta in a recent presentation at Chaos Communication Congress titled No Neutral Ground In A Burning World**\*\*\*** made the compelling point that these policy decisions are the ways in which states express natural concern for their citizens, misguided as it may be. When the historical motherships of civilisation find themselves unable to handle the world, it's no wonder that interested parties go looking for new territories in the network as in the Silk Road or implicitly hold the network hostage for political leverage as in Silicon Valley secessionists.

Historically, if you found that your beliefs conflicted with those of the state or hierarchy in which you found yourself, you fled. Albert O. Hirschman**\*\*\*** outlines this in his theory of Exit, Voice or Loyalty. Faced with unhappiness with the current system the preferable option is to leave it, secondly to voice one’s upset and thirdly to remain loyal and concede. Before we had truly conquered the globe by the end of the colonial period it was easy to Exit. But as the reach of the state grew throughout the colonial and industrial eras, physical territory was securitised and quite simply, we ran out of places to Exit to.

More recently, following the mass protest movements of the sixties and seventies, Voice was institutionalised and securitised, penned-in by legal frameworks and technocracy until the right to protest becomes less of a right and more of a favour; brought under the auspices of state control, demanding permissions and permits of dissenters in return for expression.

So we're left with loyalty as our sole response to unhappiness with the state and now even that is brought into question when, for example, newspaper editors and journalists are widely branded traitors by the state for publishing stories of mass surveillance. The loss of a means of change or expression of will has culminated in what David Graeber calls 'the imposition of an apparatus of hopelessness.**\*\*\***'

Neither the Silk Road nor Silicon Valley secessionism are good responses to the failings of the state, the war on drugs and poor technology policy. The SIlk Road will at a distance end up fuelling cartel warfare, death and terror while Siiicon Valley politics seems tasked with securing the power of an elite - a Bullingdon club for kids who grew up on HTML instead of the ancient classics. But they are *reasonable* responses. They are responses of our time, using the network as a geography to be colonised and bartered with, a fertile land, sliced up by new colonial powers and pirates.

But colonialism is more complex than hero stories of colossal East India companies and renegade buccaneers. The convicts looking for a fresh start, the Quakers an Puritans and the earnest settlers of Jamestown play a vital role in this history.**\*\*\*** These early state-builders were evicted, escaped or compelled to Exit and start again, learning from the mistakes of their homelands, manoeuvring around the profit hunger of the companies and avoiding the threat of pirates.

The Athens Wireless Metropolitan Network is another example of technology as a territory. It is a good response to a weak network infrastructure in the city, government censorship after the protesting and riots of 2010-12 and more recently, mass surveillance. The AWMN is a mesh network, similar in peer-to-peer structure as TOR, it has no centralised control and relies on trust to function. It is also entirely separate from the Internet, a slice of territory outside the purview of Google or state control.

The AWMN is more than just a lifehack, it is a political projection over the hardened infrastructure of Athens and its fibre optic networks, telegegoraphy, data centres, its nodes and routers. The activists who constructed it seized the landscape in a decision to re-map that heavy geography in the image of a new territory. And the AWMN is not alone, mesh networks themselves are becoming more and more common, and ever-more ingenious ways of using the geography of the network to offer exit or voice are appearing daily even as we witness the implementation of filters and the corporate rollback of net neutrality**\*\*\***.

The global response to the mounting and damning revelations of mass surveillance was one of outrage quickly followed by numbness. A feeling of hopelessness descended on the world as if it was too late to change this homogeny - a shocked acquiescence to the proof of the loss of new and fertile lands.

Technology can be a territory, and territories themselves are neutral ground to be filled with a politics that reflects the will of those that demarcated that territory from the geography. Territory is important not just in empire building but in providing a space to start again or to express discontent. The network is a new type of geography, one that is increasingly under threat of colonisation, securitisation and violence and we are beginning to feel that living inside the stacks**\*\*\*** of the new colonial powers, we are losing our territory. But while states flounder to understand the world being built around them by pirates and new colonial powers, we're presented with an unprecedented opportunity for Exits and Voice. The Athens Wireless Metropolitan Network is an early settler in this new geography, experimenting in the forms that territory might take and how it can be presented as a feasible imaginable alternative, something that can give us an option other than shocked acquiescence and numbness in the face of overwhelming power. Though, much like Google or the Silk Road, it won't survive forever in its current form, the AWMN provides a portent for how we might populate the geography of the network using technology to craft new territories.