A series of insights for the creation of a collective manifesto for the Mutable Net

Working Manifesto for

The Mutable Net

Writing a Manifesto for



Introduction

This small guide is divided into tasks that accompany the participant in the creation of a collective document for defining a shared political direction, social trajectories, and the roles of their own networking system.

Drawing inspiration from already existing documents and agreements, this guide aims at the creation of a new one, in order to extend the possibilities of governance that a networking environment can have, starting from a techno-communitarian basis.

This guide is designed to be used collectively: read it together, discuss it together, write it together and compile the document it came with.

The idea is, through the proposed readings, to connect to the possibilities that a free networked system can offer, and how these possibilities can open new ways of imagining and defining the principles through which the infrastructure emerging from this lab series exists.

On the Mutable Net

The Mutable Net is a collectively coded, built, and shaped network developed during the experiences proposed by the “Building a Mutable Net” research lab series.

The resulting network is made of nodes — the routers and antennas it is composed of — that communicate with each other non-hierarchically through the distribution of data. They connect with each other through electromagnetic communication, using the ISM Band: a free band through which telecommunication can be reclaimed.

The Mutable Net is made of counter-devices that were collectively hacked with free and open-source software (OpenWrt and LibreMesh), and whose physical shape was collectively developed through the various adaptations that such a networked system can offer.



Task/
01

Task/01: Identity

Access the Repository for the Mutable Net at mutablenet.xyz and navigate to the "Building the Commons" section through the index. Once there, enter the section related to your group.

Under Task 01 you will find a set of readings that will form the basis of your entry. Divide the readings among the participants and begin a first round of discussion. After this initial exchange, start defining the objectives of your collective entry to the communal manifesto: what urgency it is responding to, what it stands against, and what it stands for. From there, decide on a title for your group's entry, and finally a logo that encapsulates the direction your group is taking.

The idea is, through the proposed readings, to connect to the possibilities that a free networked system can offer, and how these possibilities can open new ways of imagining and defining the principles through which the infrastructure emerging from this workshop series exists.

Insights for writing

Use this manifesto proposal as a space in which you can project what you would imagine from an infrastructure that puts collectivity at the base of its development and how this translates into your group's network layer.

A manifesto should start from one point and somehow oppose an existing one, advocating for the creation of a new one. Based on the readings, think about what it is that your group is opposing and what are the objectives that would stand against this.

Think of how a free network developed by communities opposes private forms of infrastructure such as the internet, and what, in your group's layer terms, differs — or should differ — or should make sure it is as far as possible from those models.

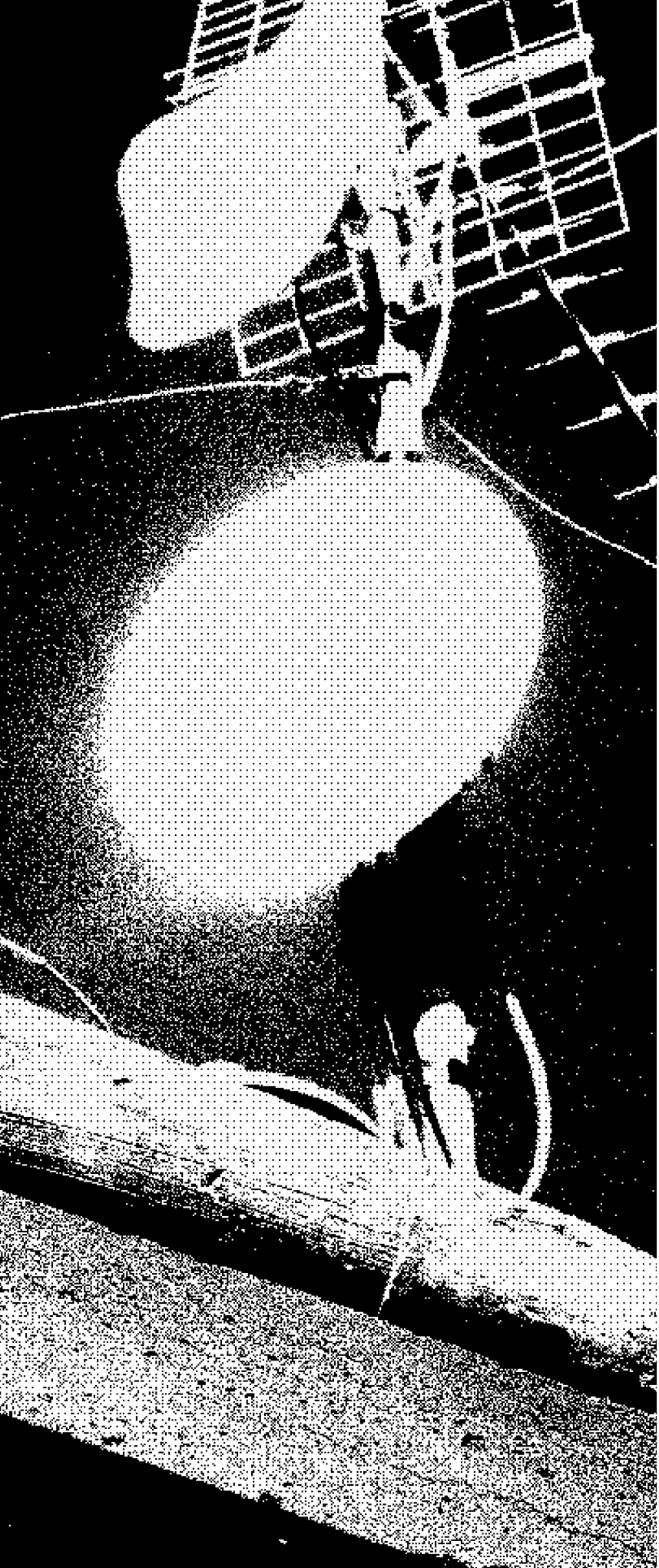
From your own experiences, try to locate as a group what exactly would drive you to create an alternative technological system, how you wish you could use it, and how mesh network systems could offer solutions or the steps required to do so.

This section should function as a first brainstorm, so it is fine to still have confused ideas, as it is the first step to get to work through a group discussion that will translate into a piece of writing.

As your group name is just a first way to identify an area of interest, propose a new one that actually works for you and for the theory that your group is referring to. Then translate this into a logo that visually resembles what you are advocating for — it should be simple, direct, and function as a recognitive element for your group.

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Task/
02

Task/02: Principles

Under Task 02 you will find a second set of readings. Divide them among the participants as you did before and begin a new round of discussion, this time focusing on the specific elements, roles, and areas of interest that define your group's layer of the Mutable Net.

Based on the readings and on the discussion developed in Task 01, start identifying the figures that populate your layer (who acts, who maintains, who decides, who uses) and the areas, tangible or not, that your entry covers. These elements will form the backbone of your principles.

From there, begin writing the principles of your manifesto entry. A principle should be a short, direct statement that activates people and defines a political direction. It should make clear what your layer stands for, what it refuses, and what it makes possible.

Insights for writing

This is the main part of the writing process. Start by discussing and explaining to each other the readings you have chosen: define the points of intersection, where they differ, and where their focus is similar to yours.

Based on the readings and on the discussion developed in Task 01, start identifying the figures that populate your layer (who acts, who maintains, who decides, who uses) and the areas, tangible or not, that your entry covers. These elements will form the backbone of your principles.

From there, begin writing the principles of your manifesto entry. When writing your principles, you can refer to a specific public subject, for instance "the user", or write as "we", or refer to a specific element, for instance "the Mutable Net". Every time a new subject enters a principle, make sure to give an idea of what that subject or element is and what it is doing.

Try to think about how principles and ideas from other theories could enter the manifesto you are proposing. For instance: what would it look like if feminist theory entered a mesh network manifesto? What are the points of intersection?

Discuss each principle carefully and pay attention to the way you write it, are you all on the same page? If not, how would you change it?

What you write should activate people to change their behaviour, motivate them, and open their eyes to alternatives. Discuss how you can make this happen and what is the best approach to writing for this purpose.

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Task/03: Exchanging

In this phase you will pass your written texts to the other groups. As participants in the creation of a collective document for a collective infrastructure, the idea is for each group to discuss the outcomes of the other groups' writing, and to note possible clarifications, errors, or elements that are not coherent — either within their writing or in relation to your own.

Annotate directly on the sheets you receive, using a different colour from the one used by the original group. Mark what is clear and working, what is unclear or missing, and what contradicts something in your own entry.

Once all groups have finished reading and annotating, the sheets are passed back to their original group. Take some time to read the feedback together and discuss what you want to keep, change, or clarify before submitting as part of the collective document.

Insights for writing

Now go through the suggestions and comments from your peers and try to define what is not working, fixing it in the creation of the definitive version of your entry.

If something is not clear, talk with the group that annotated your text, or if you think something should not change, understand how to make it more comprehensible without losing its meaning.

Eventually, question what you wanted to write and where its actual meaning lies, and fix it accordingly.

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Writing a Manifesto for The Mutable Net
© Luca Marini 2025/2026
Text and Design:
Luca Marini
lucamarini.void@proton.me

Typefaces:
Lunchtype22
Lunchtype 23
Lunchtype25
Designed by
Steppot

CMU concrete
Designed by
Donald E. Knuth,
Various authors

Printed in May 2026