



**"And when you have money...
What then?"**

Interview with Martijn Aslander

Martijn Aslander (male, 35 years old) is prominently an exponent of the *feminine* economy. In the way he works and lives, he shows a preview of the new economy to be. Aslander is ahead of his time, he defies all 20th century economy models. Avert from hierarchy, control, possession and job titles. The network is central. The importance of money as a dominant factor in economic trading is declining rapidly. The pleasure in the job is criterion Number One. Life hacking is his creed.

The one who hires Aslander as a consultant or speaker doesn't get any rates or quotes. The client decides the value of his work afterwards. Payment in kind? No problem. Incidentally, the tax office will be tried for a whole new area of problems. He does not write a consultants report. "Pure waste, nobody will read it and paper does not make anyone move". So says Aslander. Aslander faces up to all known customs, but he's not just doing something. All his actions and thoughts are founded with modern-day visions and theories of hundreds of scientists and experts. Aslander is really a pragmatic and no nonsense intellectual. A feminine entrepreneur and pathfinder combined.

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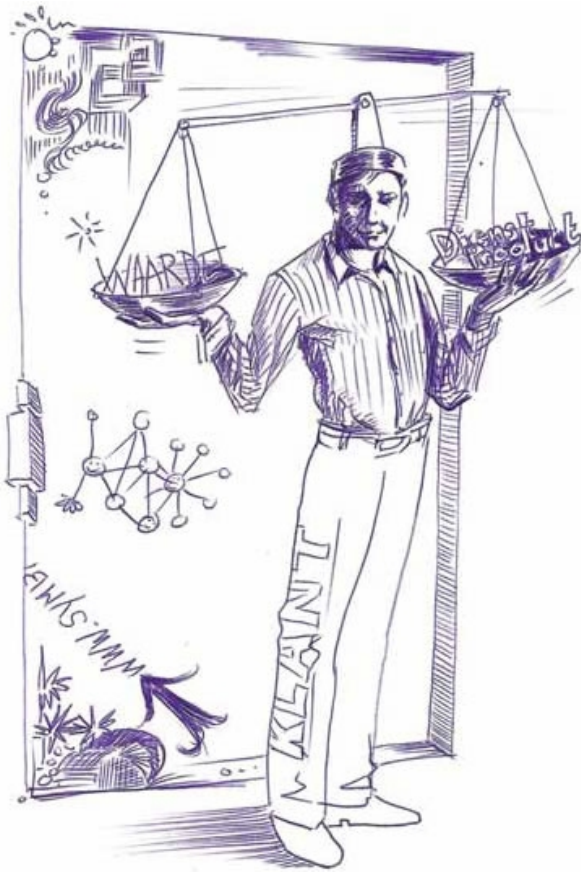
He has never had a job or a welfare check. He is elusive and hard to place. He certainly is no loafer, but seems to be very energetic and vibrant. What does Aslander actually do for a living? He agrees it can be very useful for projection and communication to summarize one's profession in one or a few words. On his website (www.martijnaslander.nl) he describes himself in three words: life hacker, connector, resourcerer.

"I want to move things. Develop myself and others. The largest sum of my time I spend thinking and learning. The rest of my time I spend with others. I connect people".

This is how Aslander clarifies his life-fulfillment. The resourcerer Aslander, reads, learns, and thinks. The connector Aslander has a network of 6000 interesting and highly qualified people. He connects the right people together by means of projects at adhoc basis. The life hacker Aslander proficiently combines simple technological tools and efficient modern procedures, to a way of working in which one can do more in less time. Subsequently creating time to resource and connect.

Nice profession! But what does that roll? And how about the employment terms?

"For over six years I have lived of donations – that is how I used to call it– then I discovered that this could be the path to more wealth as supposed to the path of the day to day hired consultant. Wealth in de sense of added value to both parties, in which value should been seen in a broader perspective than just money. We live in an era in which access is the keyword. Jeremy Rifkin wrote a book about it – The age of access. The possession of goods is no longer important, but more so the core use of it... It's not about possession, but about the access one can acquire to a certain lifestyle of like-minded people, Rifkin says. I think access is going to be more important than possession in the next decennia. The better your network is, the more access you will have."



"Paper does not move people"

"The network phenomenon is nothing new - it's always been there. But there is a huge difference between the old masculine network and the network Aslander and Rifkin aim for. The old network was about acquiring access to power and formal decision making. Hierarchy was the keyword. What is your current profession? This would be the most important question in the masculine network. And then second, what do you make? Renowned is the known "Old Boys Network". At the golf course, jobs are being divvied up and business passes on. The decisions are being made in the corridors. In the masculine network there is scraping, licking, scheming and elbowing. (Source, *how do I become a rat. Joop Schrijvers*). The Old Boys Network is about cronyism, jobs and assignments being passed on. In the feminine network it's about knowledge, talents and skills. And then secondly, "how nice are you?" Formal powers and material wealth are of secondary value in the feminine network."

The network of Martijn Aslander numbers some 6000 high potentials. Isn't that a goldmine for headhunters?

"Not really. Most of them aren't waiting for the kind of jobs headhunters usually have to offer. It only occasionally happens someone in my network is looking for a steady job. Mostly it would be something temporary, a steady income to finance another project they are working on."

Living off donations, the first word that comes to mind is poverty. Bums, homeless people and street buskers... they live off donations as well. Language influences our thinking as does the acceptance of new lines of thought.

"Yes I have discovered that too. I have become an artist with words over the years. I have learned to ask things in such a way so to actually get it. The word donation never really worked for me. Sanne Roemen gave me the idea to use the term, "*Validation Afterwards*". This sounds a lot better. This way of working has a broader acceptance and is more fitting in the traditional economy. Validation afterwards is now just an alternative remuneration for the traditional hourly bill."

But there are two parties involved, the supplier and the consumer. Can the consumer deal with this on a psychological level? I remember I once paid a waiter – when I was in a rowdy mood – with a 100 guilder bill, to pay a 60 guilder check and asked him to take the tip he deemed reasonable. This somehow only resulted in anger and aggression.

"Inside the head of the consumer will be a war with his inner sociologist and economist. The sociologist wants to pay a just and honest reward. But the economist almost automatically thinks – the less I pay the more I will keep for myself. It's my job to mediate in that argument by helping the client with the validation afterwards. That can be by asking questions, to benchmark the issue to the traditional model. What is it worth to you? What is your budget? What do you think you want to spend? But better yet – by opening up the reward altogether. What else do you have to offer me beside money? I once advised a chain of cinemas and they let me go to the movies for a full year. That to me is a more beautiful and more



practical reward. When I would have been given money, I would have spent it on movie tickets anyway. It is even more interesting for the ordering client, because it will save them money this way."

"By gaining experience I am getting better at helping clients with validation afterwards. When I am being asked to lecture I will ask how many people there will be present and for how much time I will need to speak. If for example, there

will be 200 people and I am asked to speak for two hours, I will say; "Okay, a movie in the cinema lasts two hours as well, how much would it cost to see a movie with 200 people? And if my lecture is much better than a great movie, how much would that be worth?"

"The masculine network asks – what are you, what do you have? The feminine network asks – what can you do, what do you know?"

What kind of fiscal consequences do "payments in kind" have?

"Fundamentally, that would just be income, but it would be an enormous future challenge for the tax-office. What would be my income if I get paid out in books, which I will pass on to others after I have read them? And what if my tax assessment comes out higher than my income in money, and I have no real assets either? The idea was to collect taxes but what if it eventually needs to be spent on my monthly bills? This is interesting stuff."

The big question is of course – How does this reward system work in reality? Can you make a living?

"The pleasure in what I do and my development are my priority. I only do things I like. Apart from that, I need to live, earn my daily bread. I really like giving lectures. I do this about eighty times a year. I talk about the new economy, creation of value, marketing 2.0, complementary economy structures, networking, life hacking and how to create a better world, due to new insides in social and information capital." When I do ten lectures, I will receive nothing four times, once I will receive €3000 and a few times €500. On average this is a nice amount of money."

All the times you worked really hard and earned nothing, aren't you feeling sore about that?

"No, think about the temple story of Jesus. A poor lady put a nickel in the jar and Jesus said, *"...this nickel is worth more than all those other pieces of gold, because it was her last nickel."*

"I'll give my knowledge away but afterwards I have the same amount of knowledge"

"What is work? I have worked hard but I have always done what I liked. Time is money people say, but that is not always true. It's an old economic law, in which people would sell their time to do what they didn't really like. I give my knowledge away without losing any. The zero-sum theory does not apply anymore. Sharing knowledge is an expansion of knowledge, you get feedback and people will contradict you. This food for thought will sharpen your knowledge. Sharing your network will make you gain something, sharing your knowledge will make you gain something too, sooner or later. When I speak to a room full of students, I will surely run into some of them later in life, consequently delivering me value or merits."

What is the advantage of the way you work?

"It forces me to think better about the added value that is being delivered, to the giver as well as the taker. This will lead to better choices, to more pleasure in your work, to more luck and higher earnings. The essence is to stay awake. You can always be afraid you don't deliver enough added values. But you can also see that as a signal for maybe not being in the right place, being better off doing a different line of work, or having the wrong customers."

All this considered, you use the kind of model pensioners and retired

entrepreneurs are using. They are economically active, earn some money left and right, but in an informal way. They have enough financial security to be able to allow themselves this. What they do at age fifty you are doing at age thirty. Isn't this the working model for the elite? People need security don't they? According to Maslow's Pyramid of Needs, people need food and water first and a roof over their heads before they start thinking about more illustrious things. Without a steady income they will run into trouble.

"That is all very relative. They are not getting themselves in real trouble, but their status will decline. In the Netherlands everyone has food and a roof, with the exception of alcohol and drug addicts. For the one who is afraid to give up his or her status, my advice is to try it for six months, one day a month. Say you earn 2000 euro a month, not even a hundred euro a working day. Do what you really like and are good at – one day a month, and discover what you are really worth. In most cases you will earn a lot more than that 100 euro a day."

You frequently write about paradigms. What roll do paradigms play in the economic organization of society, within business models in particular?

"They have played very big role... predominantly because of the internet. There has been a huge shift in society. Everyone can get to that knowledge straight away now. In the past, a manager would get his new insights from a management book. Then, he would have to wait for two years to get the Dutch translation of the American version. The knowledge would be old by definition. Now he can already read the new ideas on the author's weblog. You can read the book before it has even been published. That is a head start of about four years to gain that

knowledge. It's available to everyone and it's coupled with a paradigm shift. In the old economic model, you were successful when you kept your knowledge to yourself. In the new network model you can only be successful when you share your knowledge. You need to be able to offer the network something."

"We are already living in the network society, so there are new paradigm rules. When you are not conscious of this you will make the mistakes. Seth Godin strikingly describes as the *"Meatball Sundae"*. Many different toppings on a sundae will taste great, but don't try to put the same toppings on a meatball. Companies and organizations usually do just that. They will place new ideas on old models. But that does not work very well. *"It's not just the marketing and the technology that is changing, but the entire organization,"* says Godin. If you want to see new values, you have to look at it in a different way – not through the eyes of the old paradigms."

"Predominantly... because of the internet an enormous shift has taken place in society. Everybody can get to knowledge".

Accessibility to knowledge in the network economy – is that the only paradigm shift?

"No, the recent economy is still designed as if we were still working with our hands. This is how the paradigm – time for money – has come to exist. John takes a bolt and gives it to Pete... who in turn, will screw it in. This is a very handy method when everybody is available at the same time. We pay by the hour, and so we will check the hours delivered. But only a small part of the workforce actually works with their hands. So why pay by the hour or per piece? Why not give compensation towards an impact or contribution? And

why not let people work in their most productive hours? There are many people who perform better at night, but are forced to work in the office from 9 to 5. And why should they even be going to the office?"

Um... because there are still many manual workers who will need to be managed?

"Yes, supervision and control right? the practice of hierarchy. But is it really necessary? Give them some boundary conditions and watch them every now and then. Maybe that will be enough. In the fifties those manual workers did their work too, but without all those managers."

The modern manager should preferably manage his own time. Life hacking offers tools for that. You are one of the founders of lifehacking.nl and the life hacking academy. What the hack is life hacking?

"This is the smart cultivation of the possibilities of our times. Life Hacking is about working smarter. Do more in less time. Isn't that what Balkenende wants for us? Life Hacking gives you insight in how working with your head works best. You can learn this in just a few hours and save three to four working weeks a year... handy ways to track information filter it and organize it, to share your own expertise more effectively and to gain knowledge from other experts. There are so many technical tools for that. But there are also other methods, tricks and insights. RSS is a wonderful tool if you look into it. I'm following 700 relevant weblogs on a daily basis in only thirty minutes time. I manage 1000 micro tasks, when I have the time and energy. Hard work without the hurry. Life Hacking is the art of being effectively lazy, to postpone professionally. I don't have to read my cc'ed email because it's cc, so not really for me personally. I will stick it unopened in the corresponding project's file. I will only start reading it when I'm

working on the actual project. Most jobs have specific tasks and generic tasks. The art of it is to save a whole batch of those generic tasks and automate them. The author Timothy Ferris is taking it one step further, he likes to see all generic tasks farmed out and he promotes the four hour work week."

A life hacker who is living of donations... how does this come to exist? What were you like as a child? Have there been any turning points in your life that have stimulated you?

"I studied law for a few years, but had no time for it. I've been a little entrepreneur from grade one. I lived next to the "Hunebedden". A lot of tourists used to come and see them on Sundays. At one crossroad in the village 50 percent of the cars would slow down to check their whereabouts. I would stand there, six years of age, with my little kid's bike and so they would ask me where to go. I would say, "...that's hard to explain sir, but if you follow me, I'll take you there". I would come home with a big bag of Guilders and Rijksdaalders (FL 2,50). At the age of 15, things even turned for the better. As a scout I used to patrol the woods. You know... cross the river on a raft, that sort of thing. I thought – I can ask for a tenner a person as a survival instructor. And if I had a 100 people at the time, such as a company excursion, I would earn 1000 guilders on a Wednesday afternoon. In the vicinity of my secondary school there was merely an SRV wagon (supermarket bus) selling scooped ice cream... useless if 1200 pupils are having their break at the same time. I called the wholesaler and asked if he could sell me packaged ice cream."

"At the age of 30 I did an enormous project: The building of the biggest hunebed in the world."

"I rented freezers in the houses around the school and would sell 200 magnums in twenty minutes. Later I would organize school parties, because I had discovered that lots of parents would not allow their kids to go to the disco, but would allow them to go to a school party. So I would rent all discos in the vicinity and call it a school party. In no time I had eighty people working for me, and we would serve 16 schools. But it does go wrong too. By the age of 27, I lost a few hundred thousand. I had built up a company, but was then undressed professionally. You can choose to do one or the other, you can cry and distrust everyone, or you think – "Good, I've learned from that." At the age of 30, I did an enormous project – The building of the biggest Hunebed in the world. With a few hundred volunteers and 14,000 helping spectators. It lasted 16 days and had a million guilders in subsidies and sponsorships. It took two and a half years in preparation time. And when that project was completed successfully, I asked myself; "What do I still want to do on this planet?" And the answer was; "To develop myself as a person, as broad as possible." To share knowledge with nice people, do great projects with nice people and have the world to gain from that."

That sounds pretty soft. Or does that sound feminine? Are feminine people better equipped for the new economy?

"I see a lot more male females and also more feminine males. Androgyny types are to be seen as an evolutionary enhancement. The successful men in the new economy are almost all quite soft natured men. But truly – I am still a pathfinder... work together, don't be too selfish, be helpful and strive for a better world, with respect for other people and the environment.

And what about the money? Didn't entrepreneurs want to be rich in the old days?

"Well, you can strive for more and more money, profit and income, but when you have all that, then what? More and more, people don't see the importance of having all that money."

And what would that mean for the actual importance of money as a payment or medium of exchange?

"It's already declining. People have three kinds of expenses – basic needs, operational expenses and prestige goods. For the basic needs, money is a very handy payment. It's very efficient to pay bread with a euro. But for operational expenses, like wages, you don't necessarily need money. That can be done differently, more economic, exchange more in a network model. Prestige goods will slowly lose their attraction, so less money will be needed for that. So add that."