A definition and criticism of cybercommunism

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Abstract

When Žižek (2002b) defines his idea of cybercommunism using an adaptation of the Leninist formula 'Socialism = free access to internet + the power of the soviets', he omits the crucial part about electricity. The cybercommunist idea that the information society is more 'spectral' and 'malleable' than were the previous 'crudely' economical societies conceals the question of what types of communities it favours. The political economy of cybercommunism also demands an analysis of the material conditions of cyber-freedom that can be conceptualised, for instance, in terms of levels of decreasing alienation.

Cybercommunism and capitalism

If we accept the notion of *égaliberté* (the demand for equality–freedom that transcends any existing order) proposed by the French philosopher Étienne Balibar in the context of digital technology, it can be claimed that digital information has tremendous revolutionary potential. As noted by US president Ronald Reagan as long ago as 1989 (quoted in Kalathil & Boas, 2003), 'Technology will make it increasingly difficult for the state to control the information its people receive. … The Goliath of totalitarianism will be brought down by the David of the microchip'. Anything that can be presented as digital code can be copied with very little cost and no loss to the original. Once the necessary infrastructure is in place, digital information is not a scarce resource. Consequently, the cornucopian digital sphere supposedly transcends the physical limitations of traditional economies.

Correspondingly, on the social level the digital world has been seen as containing the first germs of new forms of organisation that will have radical political effects. Volunteer hacker communities and the various civil society activities organised with the help of the internet have been seen as completely new forms of self-management (for theories of hacker communities, see Levy, 1984; Castells, 1996; Himanen, 2000). For instance, while looking for examples of the new multitudes they advocate as the basic models of future politics, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004, 301ff) turn to free and open-source software (FOSS) communities. When the self-organisationed nature of hacker communities is combined with the abundance of digital code, some theorists detect a cybercommunist utopia in which volunteer communities of non-alienated labour manage themselves in a post-scarcity economy (see, e.g. Žižek, 2002b, 2006a; Merten, 2000). Slavoj Žižek delivers the idea with characteristic poignancy:

> However, does capitalism really provide the 'natural' frame of the relations of production for the digital universe? Is there not also an explosive potential for capitalism itself in the world wide web? Is not the lesson of the Microsoft monopoly precisely the Leninist one: instead of fighting its monopoly through the state apparatus (recall the court-ordered split of the Microsoft corporation), would it not be more 'logical' just to socialise it, rendering it freely accessible? Today one is thus tempted to paraphrase Lenin's well-known motto, 'Socialism = electrification + the power of the soviets': 'Socialism = free access to internet + the power of the soviets.' (Žižek 2002b)

More modestly, a whole school of writers (for an overview, see Lessig, 2004) has argued that in addition to the 'first' commercial economy, there exists another economy, variously called, for example, the amateur economy, sharing economy, social production economy, non-commercial economy, p2p economy, or gift economy. Even if a cybercommunist utopia is still far away – what will the hackers eat? Will everyone be a hacker? – inside the first economy, a change is already happening. By adopting aspects of the second economy, the first tries to present itself as having 'a human face'. The imitation can be observed on many fronts: schools and universities provide access to informal learning using social media tools and present themselves as hubs of social interaction rather than as formal institutions of power; nation states shift policy from traditional industry to favour competition in terms of design and high-quality experiences; and companies invite their

customers to co-create their future products in a process in which innovation itself is supposedly dispersed and equalised (for innovation, see Thrift, 2006).

Again, Žižek (2006b) has his finger on the pulse when he discusses a new form of business in which 'no one has to be vile'. One step removed from the utopia of cybercommunism, Žižek calls this new ideal 'liberal communism', and these are its rules:

1. You shall give everything away free (free access, no copyright); just charge for the additional services, which will make you rich.
2. You shall change the world, not just sell things.
3. You shall be sharing, aware of social responsibility.
4. You shall be creative: focus on design, new technologies and science.
5. You shall tell all: have no secrets, endorse and practise the cult of transparency and the free flow of information; all humanity should collaborate and interact.
6. You shall not work: have no fixed 9 to 5 job, but engage in smart, dynamic, flexible communication.
7. You shall return to school: engage in permanent education.
8. You shall act as an enzyme: work not only for the market, but trigger new forms of social collaboration.
9. You shall die poor: return your wealth to those who need it, since you have more than you can ever spend.
10. You shall be the state: companies should be in partnership with the state. (Žižek, 2006b, citing O. Malnuit in the French magazine *Technikart*)

This is all well and good as far as it goes. But like many other forms in which the first economy simulates or appropriates features of the second, liberal communism conveniently forgets the essential structural conditions of its own existence. For Bill Gates to give away huge sums of his fortune in charity, he had first to collect it by ruthless monopolistic practises. More generally,

> Developed countries are constantly 'helping' undeveloped ones (with aid, credits etc.), and so avoiding the key issue: their complicity in and responsibility for the miserable situation of the Third World. ... [O]utsourcing is the key notion. You export the (necessary) dark side of production — disciplined, hierarchical labour, ecological pollution — to 'non-smart' Third World locations (or invisible ones in the First World). (Žižek 2006b)

The qualification 'non-smart' reveals a crucial structure to which all cyber-utopias should pay attention: education as such, with no reference to the content and consequences, is not necessarily a good thing. Due to self-reinforcing processes of economic growth, population growth, technological expansion, arms races and growing income inequality, standardised and commodified education functions as a stop-gap. It is shocking to realise that people with higher degrees do the greatest harm when it comes to the above-mentioned problems: 'This realisation arises from the observation that the vast majority of people in crucial decision-making positions have tertiary qualifications' (Lautensach & Lautensach, 2008). And it is they who make the most ill-advised, short-sighted and self-serving decisions: 'An empirical correlation appears evident between higher education and inadequate decision-making' (ibid.).

The hunger for knowledge driven by the needs of a competitive global market is so great that it eclipses almost all other considerations. The developed world is using its information and education supremacy as a weapon in upholding and increasing economic inequality. In a recent article on the US Army's recruiting trends, Michael Massing notes how the education promised in the military service has been a great incentive for young people wanting to achieve middle-class standards of living. He offers these haunting words: 'In today's America, the hunger for a college degree is so great that many young men and women are willing to kill — and risk being killed — to get one' (2008: 36). There can hardly be a more poignant characterisation of both the local and global injustices built in to the western education system.

Information society 'for all' promises a lot: freedom and servitude at the same time. 'We' will be freed from fixed identities locked into the structures of the old bureaucracies of nation states; from the old models of one-way broadcasting; from the supremacy of the power centres. But simultaneously, freedom becomes a constraint: 'there is no alternative' to economic globalisation, perpetual networking or interactivity. This form of freedom has very little to do with actual freedom: often it is a mere façade for formal freedom; that is, the freedom to choose from ready-made alternatives. Participation in a never-ending chain of short-term projects is the name of the game.

The same holds true for information society theories and analysis: researchers need to move in a rapidly changing field almost without any firm conceptual positions, without a rigidness of authenticity and fundamental objectivity, always ready to change their viewpoints. The information society lets all the

flowers bloom, as long as they are information society flowers. Thus the dilemma of these theories is in their concurrent unity and diversity: the net of information theories as well as the information society itself allows plurality, but in reality it acts as a totality.

Is it, not possible, however, that this dilemma is badly defined? Globalised liberal capitalism needs both the pluralistic markets in which anything can be sold and a universal medium: it needs the apparently smooth market regime governed by state legislation and its structural power. Is it not precisely this dilemmatic dualism that catapults global capitalism to new heights and new victories — while destroying pluralism (cf. Klein, 2002), it displays itself as a catalyst and a protector of all cultural forms (cf. Žižek 2004a, Hardt & Negri 2000)?

As Žižek (2006b) points out, liberal communism can work only by masking the structural violence on which its outsourced practices are based. Against this, he insists on a true universalism that overcomes all local (ethnic, national, gendered, etc.) identities. The local identities are not, for Žižek, a force against global capitalism, as it is only too happy to manipulate, create and commodify such identities. However, we might ask whether the utopia of cybercommunism itself does not contain a quantity of structural violence — a violence that is familiar from earlier stages of cultural change.

Since the FOSS movement is often presented as the paradigm of the new forms of intellectual labour, let us consider for a moment the crown jewel of that movement, the GNU/Linux operating system. Linux is available free for anyone to use, modify and redistribute on the net. In 2002, it was estimated that Debian, a typical GNU/Linux distribution, contained more than 55 million lines of source code and that if it were to be created using traditional proprietary methods, the cost would be US$1.9 billion (Gonzáles-Barahona et al., 2002). That was in 2002; by now, the value has been multiplied. It is easy to see that this kind of use value created and distributed freely is indeed something not previously experienced. Nevertheless, the structures of inequality quickly kick in. Most Debian developers are male and relatively young. Moreover, most of them come from North America or Europe. They have typically received some academic education, and the proportion of Ph.D holders in the group is quite high — more than 10 percent (see Mikkonen & al., 2007). This geopolitical bias is not just a historical fact, a fossil created by the initiation of these projects in the North. During the fifteen years or so that the projects have been running, only minor changes have occurred, with individual programmers from Brazil, India and other southern

countries getting involved. If we consider the fact that during the year from summer 2005 to summer 2006, the Linux kernel took in more code from the .mil domain (US military) than it did from most third world countries (see Aaltonen & Jokinen, 2006), we instantly get a sense of the old colonialism continuing in new guises.

Or let us look at Wikipedia. Though the English Wikipedia with its roughly 2,275 million articles (11 March 2008) is a real boon of pluralistic knowledge construction, old structures and habits persist. Wikipedia's 'No original research' and 'Verifiability' rules (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/-Wikipedia:No_original_research) are particularly paradoxical: if Wikipedia is to contain only already published notable information, it collapses into a copy of the existing information order. Furthermore, for a wikipedia to work, it needs a certain critical mass (in order to resist vandalism, to promote increased content, the diversification of contributor roles, etc.). The smaller the (linguistic) community or the group with a common rationality, the slighter the chances of a vibrant wikipedia. Critical mass means normalisation, which in itself works against certain types of communal identities. From the user's point of view, the fact that the English Wikipedia is so much better than, say, the Finnish one provides an additional pull towards the hegemonic language and its values.

These two small examples should serve to indicate that the liberal communist utopia is by no means neutral with regard to local identities. Indeed, we might suspect that the power structures of the first economy are visible in the digital sphere. If this is the case, the drive towards culture as the playground of global commerce reveals a new side. The possibilities for small linguistic areas like Finland to make successful businesses out of the creative industries look bleak, notwithstanding the digital opportunities. What, after all, is the 'Finnish culture' in, say, Nokia mobile phones? Precious little. Even the design of the phones is a recycled global style with minor tweaks, and production is outsourced to the point that nobody wants to know about the toxic trail leading to illegal mines in Nigeria. Indeed, globalisation is reinforcing, for instance, both class distinctions — mobile phone assemblers in Finland and China face similar problems — and ethnic identities, as environmental crises threaten local nature.

As Žižek (2004a: 185) has put it: 'More than ever, capital is the "concrete universal" of our historical epoch. What this means is that, while it remains a particular formation, it overdetermines all alternative formations, as well as all noneconomic strata of social life'. Žižek is right: the rhizome described by Deleuze is the logic of digital capitalism: 'diversify, devolve power, try to mobilize local

creativity and self-organisation' (2004a: 185). But we need a sharper analysis: Žižek is right in criticising the naive belief in revolutionary diversity, but wrong in believing that any and all diversity can be digested by capitalism. Is not the plurality of the information society the familiar plurality of brands of cereal: there is a brand for all tastes and identities, but all boxes contain the same merchandise — and, post-genetic modification, quite literally the same. For instance, the network logic of information societies makes handicraft or subsistence-based local communities impossible, as Finnish independent researcher Olli Tammilehto (2003: 44–45) points out:

> Local communities and poor sub-communities are integrated into the national and global economy. The prices of the products of craftsmen and small farmers drop to the world market level, which is often low simply because of the subsidies in rich countries. At the same time, the prices of raw material and farm inputs may rise because in other countries there are richer and better paying customers. This makes it impossible for the small producers to continue.

Terrorism can be commodified as McTerrorism, but still the chances of non-western local communities are gone. The choice between a western technological lifestyle and a traditional local lifestyle is another formally free choice: you may choose freely, as long as you pick the western choice.

The cybercommunist idea that the information society is somehow more 'spectral', 'malleable' or 'virtual' than the previous 'crudely' economical societies conceals the question of what types of pluralities and local communities it favours. There is little or no evidence, for instance, that the information society would not speed up the death of languages or cultures. At the same time, the virtual-spectral level of the networks forgets the question of people: the wall separating those under the umbrella of human rights from those not so protected is at the same time the wall separating relative economic welfare from poverty. As Ted Honderich (2003: 6) points out, when we look at average life expectancy figures around the globe, 'the average lifetimes of seventy-eight and forty could suggest to someone overhearing this talk of life-times, but not knowing exactly our subject, that we are concerned with two different species'. The group of people whose human rights are 'virtual' can expect roughly a 'half-life' compared to rich western people. Conversely, the 'virtual' freedom that the rich western netocracy enjoys does not extend to the freedom to abandon cooperation with capitalism. This is why 'information

society' is simply not a concept in the same category as 'feudalism' or 'capitalism' (Žižek, 2004a: 193). As long as the cybercommunists and workers of immaterial production are not wholly spectral, they have to eat food and die a death.

Social, socialised, socialist media

'Social media' can be taken to mean the online platforms and software people use in order to collaborate, share experiences, views and so on, and to create their social identities. Correspondingly, 'socialised media' would refer to such tools when they are owned, maintained and managed by the community of users itself. Examples of this kind of self-management are many inside FOSS. There are even cases of the active socialisation of previously private tools. For instance, hackers have collected money to purchase the source code of computer programmes in order to develop them freely and to release them from the commodified world. Likewise, Wikipedia and other similar projects have collected the money they needed through donations from users.

But are these means enough to facilitate peoples' participation in the digitalised world, to foster dialogue? And more importantly, are these means themselves digital? It is not hard to believe Žižek's contention (2002a: 544) that dialogue both in its traditional forms and in the form of social media takes us only to the gates of authentic and substantial democracy. Is the sometimes violent process of socialisation the answer? Would it not be better if we could take another logical step forward from hacker ideology, and begin from the outset to talk about socialist media? What would the world be like if there were examples of socialist media? Can Wikipedia be considered an example of socialist media? Do we have other examples? In order to answer these questions, we need to confront the following one: what are the definitive presumptions and characteristics of socialist media?

Technical and political conditions

Besides the obvious technological infrastructure needed for using social media, basic energy — electricity, food — is fundamental. But the crucial question is, who owns and provides energy? The sad fact is that a majority of energy resources are owned by private corporations. Energy companies are in many ways key players in the arena of international politics, directing policies and making

decisions about war and peace. Unfortunately or not, energy is the definitive precondition for social media to become a truly revolutionary force. In this sense, the 'social' and the 'political' still rule the 'digital' for, to return to Žižek's 'Leninist' formula, free access to the internet requires an electrical supply.

This condition assumes quite straightforwardly that people should take back their common wealth from the global players. Without this logical step, efforts and activity towards open access and collaboration are freedom without freedom. For without this ultimate step — that of overcoming the private ownership of material resources — the ideology of FOSS remains another one-issue social movement. Lenin understood electricity and oil as being key aspects of global capitalism, and tried to make a case against the imperial powers of cartels and monopolies and their bourgeois defenders. In his *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), Lenin stated that certain reactionary writers

> have expressed the opinion that international cartels, being one of the most striking expressions of the internationalisation of capital, give the hope of peace among nations under capitalism. Theoretically, this opinion is absolutely absurd, while in practice it is sophistry and a dishonest defense of the worst opportunism. International cartels show to what point capitalist monopolies have developed, and the object of the struggle between the various capitalist associations. This last circumstance is the most important; it alone shows us the historico-economic meaning of what is taking place; for the forms of the struggle may and do constantly change in accordance with varying, relatively specific and temporary causes, but the substance of the struggle, its class content, positively cannot change while classes exist.

That said, we must emphasise the contradiction between a Leninist point of view — the role of a vanguard party leading the masses — and the obvious fact that in the networked social media, there is no centre controlling digital development. This contradiction includes another one: that of the ownership of natural resources by states or corporations. Quite contrary to the Leninist idea, the key to emancipation in the sphere of social media and its sociopolitical consequences could be 'oscillation … in the plurality and complexity of "voices": an emancipation consisting in disorientation which is, at the same time, a liberation of dialect, local differences, and rationalities, each with its own distinctive grammar and syntax' (Peters & Lankshear, 1996: 60).

The physical energy required for running social media sites is one condition. Another is the less tangible energy and free time needed in order for individuals to contribute. As noted above, GNU/Linux receives more contributions from the USA and Europe than it does from anywhere else. This bias in many major open collaboration projects, including Wikipedia, should direct our attention to the different possibilities that present themselves to individuals in different geopolitical and socioeconomic settings.

Linus Torvalds was, at the time he started the Linux kernel project, a student at the University of Helsinki, Finland, and consequently enjoyed the common benefits of the Finnish welfare state, including tuition-free access to the university and its resources. The Linux code was initially hosted by the Finnish University Network (FUNET). All of this points to the fact that non-alienated knowledge work in the internet does seem to need a certain basis of affluence and educational and social infrastructure before it can take off. Often, though, competences that have been built in the public educational system are primarily put to use by corporations. What is needed is a counter-move to free people's minds and intellectual resources from the wage slavery of the corporation, as well as from the slavery of the state and its marketised educational system.

In the Nordic countries, there already exist many cultural and social structures that allow counter-moves and actual freedoms. These include a progressive-taxation-supported schooling system ranging from kindergarten to higher education, libraries, cultural institutions such as museums and so forth. Indeed, the step from a media constrained by liberal communism to socialist media needs not only basic welfare but also actual control of life goals and non-physical needs. Paradoxically or not, the road to the latter runs through the collective or common control of the production of basic welfare (including things like electricity). Welfare strategies such as an unconditional basic income would pave the way. As Hardt and Negri put it in *Empire* (2000: 403):

> The demand for a social wage extends to the entire population the demand that all activity necessary for the production of capital be recognized with an equal compensation such that a social wage is really a guaranteed income. Once citizenship is extended to all, we could call this guaranteed income a citizenship income, due each as a member of society.

There are several expressions of different forms of socialism, as Peters reminds us. They 'revolve around the international labour movement and invoke new imperialism struggles based on the movements of indigenous and racialised peoples' (Peters, 2004). A starting point for the social condition of socialist media could be built around the concept of 'knowledge socialism'. This refers to the politics of knowledge: on one hand to the question of information domination and its means, and on the other, to issues pertaining to intellectual property rights and intellectual resources in general, including questions of expert knowledge versus amateur knowledge as explained by Peters (2004):

> In these discussions, issues of freedom and control reassert themselves at all levels: at those of content, code and information. This issue of freedom/control concerns the ideation and codification of knowledge and the new 'soft' technologies that take the notion of 'practice' as the new desideratum: practitioner knowledge, communities of practice, and different forms of organisational learning adopted and adapted as part of corporate practice. Indeed, now we face the politics of the learning economy and the economics of forgetting that insists new ideas have only a short shelf life. ... Informal knowledge and education based on free exchange is still a good model for civil society in the age of knowledge capitalism.

The presumption that the mode of production shapes the context in which psychological and social processes take place should be taken into account (Youngman, 1986: 101). In the first place, Wikipedia (like any other form of wiki) is not a technology but a praxis, a collective activity. It involves purpose and intention, and in this sense 'knowledge arises and deepens within a continuous process of activity, conceptualisation, and renewed activity' (ibid: 96). Since knowledge can be defined as a social product, it always involves hegemonic battles over power to rule and regulate.

The world of open and free collaboration on the net is not only a counter-hegemonic move but a serious, hard-to-stop mass activity. Wikis such as Wikipedia are lived, educationally-laden social situations, and if 'hegemony is the result of lived social relationships and not simply the dominance of ideas, then the experiences inherent in educational situations (i.e. the totality of knowledge, attitudes, values and relationships) is as significant as the purely intellectual content' (ibid: 105). In other words, the mere process of being in and part of the development of Wikipedia and the like is a critical learning experience towards the birth of

socialist media and the enfleshment of Marx's (1858) concept of general intellect:

> The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a direct force of production, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it. To what degree the powers of social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process.

Based on a close textual reading — a 'short-circuiting' — of Lenin, Žižek refers to the idea of general intellect as a huge 'accounting apparatus' without which, says Lenin, socialism is impossible. In the words of Lenin, to make socialism happen is to make this massive apparatus 'even bigger, even more democratic, even more comprehensive. ... This will be country-wide book-keeping, country-wide accounting of the production and distribution of goods, this will be, so to speak, something in the nature of the skeleton of socialist society' (Žižek, 2006a.) For Žižek, this marks 'the most radical expression of Marx's notion of the general intellect regulating all social life in a transparent way, of the post-political world in which "administration of people is supplanted by the administration of things"'. Žižek further notes that it is easy to criticise Lenin by referring to the horrors of the real socialist experiment in the Soviet Union, especially during Stalin's era, and the apparatus of social administrations which grows 'even bigger'. But as Žižek asks, 'Are, however, things really so unambiguous? What if one replaces the (obviously dated) example of the central bank with the World Wide Web, today's perfect candidate for the General Intellect?' (ibid.) What, indeed, if one replaces the example of World Wide Web with the world of open and free collaboration, including the servers and the power plants?

The usurpation of free collaboration is always already happening: in the world of FOSS, idealistic volunteer hackers are being replaced by salaried developers working for companies that see the software as a critical asset (see Fitzgerald, 2006; Mikkonen & al., 2007), and ministries of education around the world are launching programmes that integrate social media into formal curricula. Therefore, as Kellner and Kahn (2006) have stated in their critique of technoliteracy ruled from above, there must be another way:

> We cannot stress it enough: the project of reconstructing technoliteracy must take different forms in different contexts. In almost every cultural and social situation, however, a literacy of critique should be enhanced so that citizens can name the technological system, describe and grasp the technological changes occurring as defining features of the new global order, and learn to experimentally engage in critical and oppositional practices in the interests of democratization and progressive transformation. As part of a truly multicultural order, we need to encourage the growth and flourishing of numerous standpoints ... on technoliteracy, looking out for and legitimizing counter-hegemonic needs, values, and understandings. Such would be to propound multiple technoliteracies 'from below' as opposed to the largely functional, economistic, and technocratic technoliteracy 'from above' that is favored by many industries and states.

This emphasis on the 'from below' perspective reminds one of Marx's anecdote, at the end of Volume 1 of *Capital*, about a Mr. Peel who moved from England to Australia along with £50,000 in currency and 3,000 workers, but who didn't take into account the fact that what he could carry with him to the colonies was money, machines and other means of production but not, as their correlative, the wage worker who is ready to sell him- or herself of his or her own free will. In Marx's words, Mr. Peel didn't understand that 'capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons' (Marx, 1867). Thus, writes Marx, 'Unhappy Mr. Peel who provided for everything except the export of English modes of production to Swan River!' (ibid.). Just as the wage workers discovered in the seemingly boundless land of Western Australia the freedom to build their own lives and economies, we are now witnessing more and more people discovering their freedom in the borderlands of information technologies, providing they do not fall into a corporate trap; that is, that they not only acknowledge business interests and new modes in capitalist commodification around social media, but that they are also able to detach capitalist tendencies from voluntary work, work for fun or work just for the sake of it.

Let us summarise here the necessary principles for a socialist media, drawing on Project Oekonux's ideals (see <http://en.wiki.oekonux.org/Oekonux/Introduction>). These are the absence of alienation that results from the direct needs of those involved; self-organisation; and voluntary participation, including the voluntary taking on of responsibility or *Selbstentfaltung* (as responsibility and autonomy-in-interdependence). In addition, Oekonux maintains

that freedom has a triple meaning: freedom is both a result and a pre-condition of the process, and it enables the freedom of others.

Besides the growing use of FOSS-based information and communication technologies, there are at least two tendencies that give hope. One is the now evident fact of climate change, which forces us to re-evaluate consumption. The other is what Andre Gorz calls the lost magic of work- or wage-based society (Gorz, 1999). In modern times, Taylorian work never offered enough social coherence, but instead created abstract and weak social bonds. The basic idea behind the construction of socialist media is people's need for a personal and mutually shared narrative, for a mental and emotional anchor that helps them gain respect and a sense of solidarity in a situation in which working life deprives people of experiencing a narrative continuum and long-term planning. In short, what we need is a culture (Sennett, 2006: 183).

New conditions for the use of energy and habits of consumption along with the use of social media in its socialist form can at their best make a great change not only in people's minds and behaviour, but also in the very forms of production. So, in sum, we get the equation 'socialist media = basic welfare + common servers + the power of the soviets'. Of course, the order of the components in the formula can be different. In other words, there can be different orders of the free and open world without scarcity (i.e. basic welfare = electricity + the power of the soviets + socialist media).

Freedom, more freedom!

An alternative way of conceptualising the transition from social to socialist media is to think about the freedoms involved. The read-only culture proposed by ultra-commoditised and mechanised lifestyles can be seen from the perspectives of both media and education. In one extreme, a totalitarian state like Plato's utopia in *The Republic* will want to control education, reserving true knowledge for the philosopher kings and telling a 'royal lie' to the working classes in order to keep them at bay. Plato would have known exactly why the party and movement calling for the abolition of copyright is called the Pirate Party (for instance, in Sweden: <www.piratpartiet.se>). The Platonist closed-source approach is strictly correlative with media as a private profit-making business in which information first and foremost has an exchange value.

As we move toward more free modes of media and education, we first encounter social media and education as entrepreneurship, where the subjects are 'empowered' by active participation in

economically constrained activities. This is the first order of freedom, in which free speech exists inside the confines of formal freedom. Strangely enough, the road to more freedom comes through realising that the economic constraints of liberal, multicultural capitalism are not nearly strict enough. Only when the ghost of exchange value is stripped off is the persistent and non-symbolic use value revealed. In terms of media, this means GNU/Linux or Wikipedia, which do not have any exchange value but do have a tremendous utility. But even that is not enough in terms of taking economics seriously: the oikos humanity is facing is the planet and its resources. Native skills and indigenous information need sustainable material lifestyles, which is something the West has not been able to devise so far.

Thus the last two modes of freedom are linked to changes in the modes of production, governance and property. These changes will occur through the following three processes described by Michel Bauwens (2005): use value will be produced 'through the free cooperation of producers who have access to distributed capital' — this is called 'the P2P [peer-to-peer] production mode', which differs from a capitalist 'anything for-profit standard' and from public production by state-owned enterprises. The purpose of the P2P production mode is not to produce useless commodities or 'exchange value for a market, but use-value for a community of users' (ibid.). The changes will also be 'governed by the community of producers themselves, and not by market allocation or corporate hierarchy: this is the P2P governance mode' (ibid.). In addition, they 'make use-value freely accessible on a universal basis, through new common property regimes. This is its distribution or "peer property mode": a "third mode of ownership", different from private property or public (state) property' (ibid.).

A third mode of ownership demands that we who are working, generally speaking, in the fields of education and public pedagogy should, as Peter McLaren (2008: 477) points out, try to transform the social relations of everyday life to a new social logic 'in terms of criteria that are not already steeped in the logic of commodification. Students can — and should — become resolute and intransigent adversaries of the values that lie at the heart of commodity capitalism. This implies building a new social culture, control of work by the associated producers and also the very transformation of the nature of work itself'.

Table 1: Levels of freedom

	Characteristics	Media	Education
Closed	Exchange value	Media as corporate business	Education as an ideological state apparatus
	Vehicle and content controlled	Economic utility, control of content (business logic)	Economic utility, control of content (educational policy)
	Commoditisation 'Crowdsourcing'		Learning as having Prolonged exchange value of well-educated citizens
First stage of freedom	Economical utility, limited collaboration	Web 2.0	Educational content business
	Market sphere, entrepreneurship, multicultural capitalism, liberal communism Limited autonomy of content	YouTube, Google, CitizenTV, Adbusters, etc.	Teachers and students as commodified semi-objects (knowledge creators, consumers)
	'Sharing'	'Produsers'	
Double-Free	Use value/value in itself	Media as collaboration	Education as collaboration
	Full autonomy of content, limited autonomy of vehicle	Wikis, Linux, P2P	Freire, Selbstentfaltung
	'Commonist'	'Access to the Internet + power of the soviets'	Learning as being Reflective uncertainty
Triple-Free	Value inseparable from the world, Aristotelian finalities	Immediate media practices	'Deschooling Society' (Illich)
	Full autonomy of content and vehicle	Wikipedia + ecological autonomy + control of resources	Learning by doing, native skills
	Promoting other than materially-driven life forms		Students and teachers as human beings, 'lifelong learners' in an existential sense
	'Communist'	'Electricity + access to the internet + power of the soviets'	Education as commons

The economical shift is accompanied by an epistemological one. The ability to edit, discuss and follow the genealogy of knowledge in a project like Wikipedia leads to a world in which people begin to take for granted that many areas of human conduct and knowledge are based on processes of negotiations. And perhaps more than that, they will eventually decide to become ever more responsible for the world, as agents of history, by abolishing the division between those who know and do, and those who consume and obey. They will question the pedagogical myth that claims 'that there is an inferior intelligence and a superior one' (Ranciére, 1991: 7).

In this respect, a special characteristic of open and free collaboration on the net is its radical openness and anti-Cartesian uncertainty. Wikipedia's reliability is dependent on us; that is, it is not only dependent on you or me as individuals, but on us as the community comprising the various skills and literacies that we share as members of the community. Respectively, the idea of reflective uncertainty has a family resemblance with the 'learning as participation' metaphor that emphasises participation in various cultural practices and shared learning activities (in kindergarten, at school, in university and various informal learning sites, workplaces and organisational activities). In this metaphor, knowledge and learning are situated and created in people's everyday life as part of their socio-cultural context, which existentially includes the material means of subsistence or production.

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