

PART II

## Cultural Democratizations



## CHAPTER 4

# Internet Cultures as Collaborative Creation of Value

‘un mundo solo se para  
con otro mundo’

### 4.1. Genealogies and Contradictions of Digital Cultures

#### 4.1.1. How is the authority of a manifesto in defense of the Internet constructed?

Questions such as the following have often been posed, completely reasonably, it seems to me: Who excavates the minerals necessary to build the machines that make the ‘New Technologies of Information and Communication’ (NTIC) possible? Who gives up their health and dreams to work impossible hours for ridiculous pay to assemble the pieces of those computers and cellphones? And who spends their life cleaning rooms, washing clothes, feeding, and caring for the ‘creative workers’ (and their children) who use the NTICs?

With all due respect for the differences, which are many, these questions resonate with others that perhaps allude to similar situations, in a sense that must be determined: who finds the time to write and correct the thousands of entries in Wikipedia? Who spends their nights subtitling the films and series that circulate in P2P networks? Who spends their free time responding to strangers’ questions in Internet forums? And who takes on—without being asked—the mission of producing, labeling, ordering, distributing, and making attractive all the uncountable, anonymous, accessible content on the Internet so others can use it?

Let’s take, for example, a 9.5-byte file, a pdf document called ‘Manifiesto en defensa de los derechos fundamentales en Internet.’ No matter how almost irrelevantly small it might be, just like any other fragment of digital information, it wouldn’t exist without a series of material processes dedicated to it through the limited abilities and finite energy of a few human beings. Many people today have easy access to writing or reading a text

file like this one. But the apparent immediacy and ease with which they do it tends to obscure some of its conditions of production—in particular, everything related to building the hardware and the minimum quality of life requirements that will enable us to read it and write about it. But it's also true that another type of condition, which in some sense can also be considered one of production (particularly related to the file's circulation and reception), far from being concealed, becomes especially necessary and obvious, especially in cases of information that generates a lot of interest, like this file.

So, it would in fact be unfair to think of the 'Manifiesto en defensa de los derechos fundamentales en Internet' simply as a specific digital file that is already published as soon as it's written. That would mean artificially separating it from the enormous collective effort that went into it. Hundreds of thousands of operations of revision, commentary, and diffusion accompanied it, and these really must be considered an essential part of its production as a fragment of information whose existence developed like a living process in what Franco Berardi calls 'the infosphere.'<sup>1</sup>

It was published for the first time on December 2, 2009. Three days later, the Manifiesto had a million Google hits, more than 100,000 people had joined the Facebook group that supported it, and it had become the number one trending Twitter hashtag in Spain (#manifiesto). In addition, it was translated into English, Catalan, Galician, Aragonese, and Asturian, and was the object of 210 articles in print media, 500 in digital media, 174 television spots, and 207 radio spots in its first week of existence alone. In that same week, a wiki version of the manifesto was published online, with its own domain name and a forum dedicated to debating future actions ("Manifiesto 'En defensa de los derechos fundamentales en internet'" 2014).

But why did this Manifiesto spark so much interest? Why did so many people participate in its production? Why did so many people devote themselves to do something that could be called 'work' on it, knowing that most of them would never see any money for it? Did they perhaps expect recognition as its authors? Or did they simply want to support what some 'public intellectuals' had declared in that manifesto?

1 'The infosphere is the interface between the media system and the mind that receives these signals—the mental ecosphere, that immaterial region where semiotic fluxes interact with the reception antennae of the minds scattered across the planet. The Mind is the universe of receivers. These receivers are, of course, not limited to receiving signals; they also process and create them, thereby setting in motion new processes of transmission and provoking the continuous evolution of the mediascape' (Berardi, 2007, 81).

Of course, it must be remembered in the first place that the Manifiesto was published the day after the introduction of the bill that would become the Law on Sustainable Economy. This included a clause about regulating the Internet and protecting intellectual property, and would become known as the 'Ley Sinde' (the Sinde Law, from the second last name of the Minister of Culture who promoted it, Ángeles González Sinde).<sup>2</sup> The Sinde Law proposed, among other things, creating a commission of experts unconnected to the judicial branch, to which power would be granted to shut down websites that did not respect intellectual property rights. This provision was widely interpreted as an attack on the Internet and gave rise to an unprecedented mobilization in its defense. The Manifiesto constituted a significant chapter in this effort. And, as was only to be expected, it also expressed a range of diverse and contradictory traditions and cosmovisions that coexist in the vast world of digital culture.

So, on one hand, the Manifiesto effectively reproduced, up to a point, the traditional move of 'public intellectuals,' that of denouncing a political situation from the position of legitimacy gained from having distinguished themselves in cultural spheres supposedly unrelated to the political arena. It did this in particular by using the form of a 'manifiesto' and by using the language of the liberal political tradition, from which the very figure of the public intellectual historically emanates. Even the title itself appealed to those 'fundamental rights' pulled straight from constitutional language. Then the document as a whole operated through the legal discourse of the state to which it was addressed, holding up classic values of the liberal political tradition, such as, notably, the separation of judicial and executive power, freedom of expression, and the presumption of innocence.

But this was not the only cultural or political tradition that fed the rhetoric, and above all the pragmatics, of the Manifiesto. Its authorship, for example, was ambiguous, contrary to that of a typical manifiesto produced by public intellectuals, which requires lots of names, and the more famous, the better. Instead of signatures, the 'author' appeared in the text as a diffuse 'we': 'the journalists, bloggers, users, professionals, and creative people on the Internet.' Later, the newspaper *20 Minutos.es* (the only newspaper that endorsed the manifiesto) explained that the text was developed collaboratively by 'some 40 journalists, bloggers, and Internet

2 It was also later called the Sinde-Wert Law, because the Minister of Education, Culture, and Sports of the Partido Popular government (José Ignacio Wert), who joined the government in 2011, continued to promote it, and was, in fact, the one who finally implemented it. In reference to the pressures the North American government exerted on its Spanish counterpart to pass this law, its critics have also sometimes called this law the 'Biden-Sinde Law' for Joe Biden, the US vice president.

professionals' (20minutos.es, 2009) using Google Wave, a digital tool still in beta, which allowed collective writing in real time on a single platform (a tool that, incidentally, disappeared shortly afterwards).

The next day, Minister González Sinde tried to respond to the uproar online by organizing a conversation with some of the voices that opposed the new law. In the process, the names of the 14 'professionals' who attended the meeting became known, and it turned out that they were among those who had participated in writing the manifesto. They appeared in media like *20 Minutos.es* (whose own director was one of the 14) classified respectively as 'journalists' or 'businessmen'—plus a single blogger or 'internaut'—and so each one was identified by his or her allegiance to certain journalistic media or business projects.

Thus, those who introduced the 'authors' of the manifesto contributed, to a certain extent, to locating them in a space of legitimacy associated with that concept of 'professionalism' which, in all its ambiguity, comes from the same modern genealogy I mapped out in Part 1: a genealogy that starts with an ambition to monopolize cultural value through a specifically 'modern' type of power/knowledge, founded on the pillars of Western technoscience. The cultural authority that invokes this concept of 'professionalism'—associated here with the figure of both 'journalist' and 'businessman'—simultaneously resonates with the competitive, *business* interpretation of that modern power/knowledge which neoliberalism creates. Only that one lone blogger (or 'internaut') among the 14 names of what was, with typical 'web humor,' soon called 'Sinde's List,' would open the door to more amateur and 'countercultural' traditions that would operate through other, less competitive ways of producing value and cultural authority. In light of this fact, it is significant that, unlike the others, this 'internaut' appeared on the list without a last name, and gave every impression of being a pseudonym: 'Alvy.'

But there were still more latent tensions regarding authorship. At the end of the text it was asserted that 'This manifesto, developed collaboratively by several authors, is by everyone and by no one. If you want to join, spread it online.' In contrast to attempts by journalistic media to attribute authors and perhaps even 'authorities' ('outstanding professionals,' 'Internet personalities,' etc.), those 14 guests invited by the minister to engage in a dialogue constantly rejected the idea that they were 'representatives.' 'We don't represent the Internet,' they asserted repeatedly. 'All we did was write a manifesto that a lot of people are joining.'

As Margarita Padilla noted in her book, *El kit de la lucha en Internet* (2012), during that meeting with the minister some of the 14 invitees were tweeting to the multitudes of uninvited internauts affected by the law. This effectively

established a practice that, says Padilla in her astute analysis of the situation, ‘diminishes opacity and secrecy, relaxes the weight of representation on the group sitting at the negotiation table, and extends the situation throughout a public-private space that exceeds the virtual-real duality’ (114). For Padilla, this type of practice, which alters representation, doesn’t come out of thin air; rather, it has to do with what she calls the ‘political architecture’ of the Internet:

The Internet is ungovernable and is made up of intelligent and autonomous nodes. From the interconnection of these nodes a new public-private sphere arises in which, simply by existing—publishing a post, commenting on it, connecting to it, resending it, tweeting and retweeting it, tagging it, sharing it ...—politics is already being practiced. (123)

Putting special emphasis on the importance of technological infrastructures in potentially ‘democratizing’ situations—as in this case, on the existence of the social network Twitter used as a tool of instantaneous communication between those who were at the meeting with Minister Sinde, and those who were not—can cause (over)simplifications. We live in an era given to ‘cyberfetishism,’ as Cesar Rendueles (2013) explains, and idealized, quasi-determinist versions of technological changes abound. Those versions are also pushing us always to forget or ignore the concrete historical processes that link the Internet with the expansion of neoliberal globalization and its financiarization of the economy.

Silvia Federici (2011), among many others, has called attention to the simple fact that ‘online communication/production depends on economic activities—mining, microchip, and rare earth production—that, as presently organized, are extremely destructive, socially and ecologically.’ To this it should be added that, as Stefano Harney (2013) has explained, the whole new ‘deregulated’ economy that emerges around 1998, with the ascent of financial products such as ‘derivatives’ and ‘hedge funds,’ could not exist without the infrastructures provided by the new digital technologies, which allowed real-time global trading. Internet and digital cultures have obviously been instrumental for the shift towards what is sometimes called the ‘immaterial,’ ‘creative,’ or ‘cognitive’ economy, but the problem is that it is impossible to separate this economy from the destructive dynamics of neoliberal financiarization.<sup>3</sup> Harney (2010b) explains that the ‘cultural

3 Copyright is often a key tool for the financiarization of ‘immaterial wealth,’ which in turns allows for speculation and anti-social accumulation by the biggest corporate monopolies of neoliberalism. César Rendueles (2013, 60) has explained

commodity' has actually been the model for neoliberal capitalism, because of its 'unfinished quality,' which allows constant renovations of its value. Capitalism has understood that society is always producing this 'unfinished cultural value,' and has developed the means to expropriate it. This is, as Margarita Padilla (2010) herself has pointed out, exactly what often happens in the so-called *web 2.0*, a concept for 'entrepreneurs of themselves'—says Padilla, echoing Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism, a market milieu in which collective creativity becomes the motor of capitalism—although this, she adds, doesn't prevent the appearance of multiple tactics that 'use the market against the market.'

In a world with a high risk of 'cyberfetishism,' fortunately, and as Padilla's own example shows, complex explanations focused on material historical processes related to digital cultures also abound. It may be useful to bring together several more of these explanations to effectively situate this question of the relationship between technology, capitalism, and democratization. This will avoid tedious debates about supposedly 'essential' properties—whether negative or positive—of the new technologies.

#### 4.1.2. 'Shared agency' with technologies and a genealogy of its democratizing uses

In this regard, it seems to me that the sociologist Amparo Lasén (2009) offers a very acceptable starting point when she proposes that human beings have something we could call a 'shared agency' with technology: 'Shared agency means that technologies are not passive instruments, they make us do certain things, and we make them do others.' There would thus be, in Padilla's terms, a technological 'architecture' that in no way predetermines human behavior, but which is in constant interaction with the uses socially assigned to it. Accordingly, it is always a 'political architecture.' Lasén confirms: 'In our daily activity with technologies there are power conflicts (contrasting interests:

this situation clearly: 'Since the 1970s, the rich countries have simultaneously tried to accumulate the production processes with higher added value and increase their speculative gains. The protection of intellectual property legally connects both dynamics. Industries that generate higher profits depend on some sort of protection of intellectual property and governments are very predisposed to provide this legal coverage. At the same time, these companies routinely use that position of technological predominance for speculative purposes. Monsanto has the technology and resources to conduct biological research and, therefore, it uses the protection of this investigation as an umbrella for biopiracy. Hollywood has the ability to flood the world with its products and, therefore, tries to prevent the passage of its movies to the public domain. Microsoft and Apple (or on a smaller scale, Oracle or Adobe) have acquired a monopoly position that allows them to charge usurious prices for their products.'

intellectual property, control, commercial uses).’ Rubén Martínez (2014a) has written in similar terms about ‘Internet y política’:

A static, predefined set of political practices does not arise spontaneously from the web. Rather, as with all cultural production, the web can be used, sampled, or assembled with practices, processes, and uses that understand it (by theorizing it and using it) in very different ways. In turn, the web contains ways of doing things that influence the collective ways of communicating and producing, creating feedback cycles between users and technology.

Having established these general parameters to help us move away from all essentialization or idealization of technologies (digital or any other kind), what I want to do is contribute to the specific historical analysis of what happened that December morning when 14 people met with Minister Sinde, ‘armed’ with their Twitter accounts. In doing this, I hope to contribute more broadly to the specific historical analysis of the types of cultures and policies that have sprung up in digital environments—always in continuity with those that move beyond the digital—in the context of the struggles against the Sinde Law in Spain. This context seems to me to have been decisive for fulfilling those ‘ungovernable’ potentialities that, as Padilla says, are offshoots of the ‘autonomy’ and ‘intelligence’ of each of those online nodes. Thus the genealogy of *that* specific version of the Internet, of *that* digital culture which values autonomy and distributed intelligence, is important for the material and historical analysis to which I want to contribute.

I will not be able to develop that genealogy in depth here, but I do want to briefly mention a couple of scenes that function, up to a point, as ‘origin myths’ for those collaborative, decentralized digital cultures. These examples can shed light on the digital cultures’ reappearance in relation to the struggles against the Sinde Law. One is the well-known story of the origin of the Internet itself. As Padilla explains, the fact that it is a decentralized network is no mere chance. Rather, it is the result of the persistence of many people who have fought for many years to maintain this democratic architecture. At first, it was a military strategy, a response to the desire to create a communications system that could survive a possible nuclear attack: ‘in a situation of “every man for himself,” it is necessary to respond fast and well, so intelligence must be distributed throughout the whole network, and not just at one or some centers’ (41). Later, it was the university community, and later still, the hacker culture that sprang from it, that completed the project:

[I]t was in the universities that this strange network without a central

authority and with intelligence and autonomy distributed throughout all its points began to be developed. It was there that these developments connected with the hacker counterculture, a techno-elite that departed from the script and not only created the Web, but also recorded in its DNA the characteristics with which we have inherited it today: openness, flexibility, and distribution. (41)

What interests me about the culture of the first Internet is precisely that hybrid nature between different traditions and ways of creating value that, I think, survive in the contradictions I have been indicating, as a result of the ‘Manifiesto en defensa de los derechos fundamentales en Internet.’ So, as Txarlie (2012), a member of the group Hacktivistas, indicated in a talk on social movements and the hacker tradition, in the university context that created ARPAnet—the academic ancestor of the Internet—software was shared, ‘and nobody suggested putting restrictions on that “knowledge,” just as they wouldn’t put restrictions on a chemical element or a theorem.’ In other words, as has been repeated often, we must consider the importance of the enlightened spirit and its affirmation of the universality of knowledge in configuring the ‘political architecture’ of the Internet.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the Web was born in an environment that was not, in other respects, at all unfamiliar with what would become the other, less amiable side of that enlightened spirit: the type of technoscientific cultural authority that tends to monopolize the production of meaning.

But the Internet also incorporated important democratizing elements from the North American countercultural tradition that would serve as a counterbalance to those tendencies to monopolize meaning. Emmanuel Rodríguez explains it very well in his book *Hipótesis democracia* (2013):

4 Robert Darnton’s well-known arguments are not so much about the historical enlightened origin of the Internet and digital culture, as they are about the need to use technological means to recuperate the enlightened project of the ‘Republic of Letters’ in an even more democratic version. In an article titled ‘Google & the Future of Books,’ he said, ‘The eighteenth century imagined the Republic of Letters as a realm with no police, no boundaries, and no inequalities other than those determined by talent. Anyone could join it by exercising the two main attributes of citizenship, writing and reading. Writers formulated ideas, and readers judged them. Thanks to the power of the printed word, the judgments spread in widening circles, and the strongest arguments won.’ And from the appreciation of that model in the past, he concluded with a program for the present: ‘Yes, we must digitize. But more important, we must democratize. We must open access to our cultural heritage. How? By rewriting the rules of the game, by subordinating private interests to the public good, and by taking inspiration from the early republic in order to create a Digital Republic of Learning’ (2009).

Its genesis [that of the Internet and 'cyberspace'] is in those libertarian, countercultural media whose main current showed a preference for a kind of ingenuous naturalism, scattering later into all kinds of Orientalisms and 'new waves,' but it also had a side current that leaned towards playing with electronic gadgets.

The luck of this 'other counterculture' was forged in the crossover between the intense existential revolution of the moment and the passion for knowledge and technological experimentation that had been preserved in academic and scientific cultures. An alloy that acquired a special hardness in the field of new kinds of engineering that were just taking their first steps (cybernetics, computer science).

There were two great landmarks of this movement. The first was the creation of the first prototype of the web of networks. The second was the miniaturization of some technological devices that, in line with the current catchphrase among yuppies, 'just do it,' would very quickly put into the hands of a lot of people the technological and productive powers that until then were only within the reach of states, large universities, and multinational companies. The resonance of this movement with what in older terms we might have called 'socialization—from below—of modes of production' is evident. (190)

Perhaps another of the great scenes that mark these 'origin myths' is that famous fight in 1980 between Richard Stallman, then a programmer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and a printer that constantly broke down on him, causing him no end of annoyance. His annoyance was not so much due to its constant malfunctioning, but because those who programmed its software didn't allow users access to it, so Stallman couldn't solve the problem using his own abilities as a programmer.

This was in the early eighties, and some companies had decided to begin to restrict access to the programs they produced. Stallman and many others 'geeks' and 'hackers'—located at the crossroads between academic cultures with enlightenment roots and the anti-authoritarian countercultures of the sixties—wanted to change this. They wanted the code for all computer programs to be accessible to everyone; they were used to it being this way and they couldn't accept having to consider private something that was produced and maintained collectively.

They began to take steps to achieve this. They created legal tools, first the successive versions of the General Public License (GPL), then the Creative Commons licenses. These were two milestones around which were woven the rich, diverse threads of the world of free software, and later also that of the so-called 'free culture.' It's a complex history, with many curves, which

David Bollier calls ‘Viral Spiral,’ because he understands it as a propagation and acceleration of shared creative processes to which each generation adds improvements, thanks in large part to the connective capacity of the Internet.<sup>5</sup>

## 4.2. Unpaid Work and Creation of Value on the Internet

### 4.2.1. Job precarization and increase in Internet use

But to understand at what point on that ‘viral spiral,’ and at what point on other spirals (commercialization, privatization, or even criminalization) that turn in opposite directions, digital cultures had become heir to these complex processes by the time of the struggles against Spain’s *Sinde* Law, I now want to raise a fairly pedestrian question relative to the interonauts’ meeting with Minister *Sinde* which was tweeted live: Who had time at that hour on a Thursday morning—a normal, ordinary workday—to be following Twitter, and even, as Padilla notes, ‘to provide arguments, data, documents, or consensus’ to those who were meeting with the minister?

Apparently, quite a few people, judging by the number of messages on the subject that day, and which can still be found today thanks to the free search tool Topsy. It is that availability, that capacity to do something that could well be considered ‘work’ on the Web, even if it’s unpaid work, that interests me now. Because, once again, it seems that these processes cannot really be understood without taking note of their conditions of possibility; that is, without attending to the question of sustainability. This is not necessarily

5 In the definition of ‘free culture’ offered by the jurist and activist Lawrence Lessig, in his first book on the subject, an understanding of culture is proposed as something that is done collectively, and thus benefits from the greatest possible access, without implying an erasure of ownership or property: ‘A free culture supports and protects creators and innovators. It does this directly by granting intellectual property rights. But it does so indirectly by limiting the reach of those rights, to guarantee that follow-on creators and innovators remain *as free as possible* from the control of the past. A free culture is not a culture without property, just as a free market is not a market in which everything is free. The opposite of a free culture is a “permission culture”—a culture in which creators get to create only with the permission of the powerful, or of creators from the past’ (2004). Within this tradition, however, there are multiple interpretations, the confrontation between Stallman’s and Lessig’s positions being particularly notable, along with their respective models of ‘copyleft’ licenses, the General Public License (GPL), and Creative Commons licenses. The essential difference lies in Stallman’s—and others who think like him—opinion that the author doesn’t have the right to decide how her work will be shared, or to impose certain restrictions (in contrast to the Creative Commons licenses, which do allow this). Rather, he believes that the author should be obliged to respect free access given to the culture in general. For more details on this, see chapter 9 of Bollier’s ‘The Many Faces of the Common.’

always a question of money, nor of salary, nor even of employment, but in societies that have essentially entrusted most of the population's sustenance to those mechanisms, it does tend to come down to that, at least in part.

And that is why perhaps an enlightening way of approaching the problem can be to contrast—with no intention of giving the last word to statistics, or of trying to establish simple causal relationships—employment and job insecurity data with Internet usage data in Spain. We know that precarization of work has been a continuing and rapid process in the Spanish state since the Moncloa Accords of 1977—which prepared the great neoliberal transformation—opened the door to temporary contracts, as the sociologist Angel Luis Lara (2003) tells us. The following decades witnessed the birth of a whole raft of measures that have basically facilitated job terminations, made wages 'flexible,' and broadened the repertoire of unstable, unguaranteed contracts that generally offer insecure conditions for workers.<sup>6</sup>

For the rest, as Lara and other activists and researchers (like those of the collectives 'Precarias a la deriva' (2004) and 'Espai en blanc' (2006), and those participating in a monograph issue of the journal *Sociedad y Utopía* about precarity (Gálvez Biesca 2007)) have shown very well, it makes no sense to limit oneself to viewing the insecurity created by neoliberal capitalism solely in relation to the state's labor policies. Precarization is inseparable from the uncertainty created by many other factors related to habitability, like transportation, urbanism and housing, childcare, health, education, etc. In light of this, 'Precarias a la deriva' preferred to talk about precariousness as the 'set of material and symbolic conditions that determine an uncertainty about sustained access to essential resources for the full development of one's life' (28).<sup>7</sup>

6 Angel Luis Lara details these measures, recalling, for example, the National Employment Agreement (1982) in which, he says, 'The upper echelons of the majority unions accepted the development of precarious employment modalities as a supposed means to halt unemployment.' He also mentions the following decisive moments in the growth of job precarization at the legislative level:

—Year 1992: Royal Decree-Law of April 5 decreasing unemployment benefits ...

—Year 1993: Royal Decree-Law of December 3 introducing the apprentice contract as a means of reducing salaries for a period of three years for people up to 25 years of age; it includes a new regimen of part-time hires and causes greater flexibility in the regulatory framework, legalizing private employment agencies and the so-called Temporary Employment Agencies (ETT).

—Year 1997: Interconfederate Accord for employment stability, which seeks to guarantee greater stability by increasing the flexibility of the hiring system. Terminations are reduced and the Workers Statute is modified by broadening the nature of terminations with cause to help businesses adjust to the movements of the market' (2013, 220).

7 Judith Butler has clearly distinguished three dimensions to this problem, which

In any case, if there were any doubts about precarization as a generalized problem among Spain's population during the years of the so-called 'economic bubble,' these have been more than cleared up since the beginning of the 2008 crisis. The unemployment figures are perhaps the most spectacular, holding at around 25% from 2008 to 2015 and a scandalous 50% among the young during the same period. But these data constitute only the beginning of what is needed to get a good idea of the degree of pessimism and lack of expectations that have spread during these crisis years, especially among young people. Other indicators should be mentioned along with unemployment: the 700,000 Spaniards who emigrated between 2008 and 2014; the exorbitant cost of living along with frozen wages; the consequent delay in young people moving out of their parents' homes (the average age is around 29); as well as the proliferation of all types of low-wage jobs and the dismantling of social services and basic public aids, including education, which has produced an increase of up to 50% in the cost of university tuition.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, it is precisely this young sector of the population so pummeled by unemployment and instability that has been responsible for the exponential increase in the use of the Internet. Sixty-nine percent of Spanish homes had gained access to it by 2013, the year when 53.8% of

she identifies as 'precarization,' 'precarity,' and 'precariousness': 'In some economic and political theory, we hear about populations that are increasingly subject to what is called 'precarization.' This process—usually induced and reproduced by governmental and economic institutions that acclimatize populations over time to insecurity and hopelessness (see Isabell Lorey)—is built into the institutions of temporary labor, of decimated social services, and of the general attrition of social democracy in favor of entrepreneurial modalities supported by fierce ideologies of individual responsibility and the obligation to maximize one's own market value as the ultimate aim in life. In my view, this important process of precarization has to be supplemented by an understanding of precarity as a structure of affect, as Lauren Berlant has suggested, and as a heightened sense of expendability or disposability that is differentially distributed throughout society. In addition, I use a third term, precariousness, which characterizes every embodied and finite human being, and non-human beings as well. This is not simply an existential truth—each of us could be subject to deprivation, injury, debilitation or death by virtue of events or processes outside our control. It is also, importantly, a feature of what we might call the social bond, the various relations that establish our interdependency. In other words, no one person suffers a lack of shelter without a social failure to organize shelter in such a way that it is accessible to each and every person' (2011).

<sup>8</sup> Regarding the increase in the average age at which Spanish youth leave their parents' homes, see Valera (2012). Regarding the increase in the cost of college tuition, see *Publico.es* (2012).

Spaniards between the ages of 16 and 74 used the Internet daily (according to data from the INE). Among that general population, young people shine as the most dedicated users: 81% log on every day, and 96% search the Web in general. Numerous studies show that the famous ‘divide’ between young ‘digital natives’ and adults continues to grow. One such study indicated that 53% of young people prefer to use the Internet for entertainment, as opposed to 16% of adults; 70% of young people prefer to study online, as opposed to 35% of adults; and finally, 41% of young people choose the Internet to stay informed, as opposed to 16% of older generations. Another recent study found that:

5.5% of young people, who, according to the INE’s most recent survey in 2013, do not use the Internet or social networks on a regular basis, could run the risk of being ‘left behind’ in an environment in which so many aspects of life for people between 16 and 24 years old are developed partially or totally through the web.

More specifically, it refers to aspects such as ‘the broadening of their sphere of relationships in their free time, their training, their sources of information, and their work.’

At the risk of coming across as trying establish rigid or unambiguous causal relations between these data, it would nonetheless be misleading not to look at the job insecurity and uncertain living conditions experienced by a large part of Spain’s youth when trying to understand their Internet use.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4.2.2. ‘Copyleft’ activism and new sharing practices in mass culture

At the same time, however, this Internet use cannot be understood without also being aware of the influence of what Martínez calls the online ‘culture of freedom,’ which comes from the ‘enlightened’ and countercultural origins described earlier. Because, in fact, no Internet use can be understood without being aware of defense mechanisms against the privatization and regulation efforts that have marked its history, as Martinez indicates:

In the face of attempts at regulation, control, stratification, privatization of the web by state organisms or market agents, different social and collective organizations defend its original principles and liberties so it can continue to offer its full potentiality as an open system. To a great extent, other forms of policy on the web are unthinkable if we don’t take into account the culture of freedom—which, we must remember,

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the use of the Internet by young people, see Europa Press (2014).

is not synonymous with cost-free—that arises from the defense of its interrelated protocols and technical diagrams.

In Spain's case, the influence of this online 'culture of freedom' could be included in two spheres, one more militant and politicized, and another that grows in the massive spaces of the mediatized consumer culture. In the first case, we are speaking of what Guillermo Zapata (in Martínez 2012) has called a 'copyleft movement' that clashes head-on with the 'monopolistic copyright culture of the CT.' Zapata asserts that 'Spain is one of the countries in which copyright has been most effectively delegitimized. Since the end of the nineties, the copyleft movement has been growing spectacularly.' According to Zapata, the causes of this could be

The interaction between the Internet and the street, the so-called *hacklabs* (laboratories experimenting with new technologies to serve political ends), the existence of a critical mass of publishing and cultural projects, along with a critical mass of lawmakers producing legislation, as well as a population willing to break the monopoly of that content production (mainly for television) by constantly sharing in a never-ending cycle. (146)

Padilla concurs by noting the importance, since the end of the nineties, of the Social Centers of the autonomous squatter tradition (like the mythic Lavapiés 'Laboratory' where the digital platform *Sindominio* was created) on the 'militant' side, and of the hacklabs and hackmeetings where those cultures of independent activism converge with the technophile cultures of the geeks. But in addition, Padilla indicates the importance of the proliferation of what she calls other 'politicizations in cyberspace,' which account for the vast preponderance of such activities, like the dynamism of swarming, which spring up in environments like 'fan' cultures or among videogame and film download 'addicts,' when they see their practices being threatened. The anons are a famous case in point. They came from the world of 'fan' cultures and reinvented themselves as Anonymous to fight (in swarms), first against somewhat secondary 'supervillains,' like the Church of Scientology, but later also against the most powerful neoliberal elites.

It is especially interesting to observe how it is the mass, consumerist culture itself that has developed these collaboration logics which, up to a point, undermine their individualistic, instrumentalizing foundations. Henry Jenkins (2006) calls attention to the unexpected effects of the proliferation of interaction among NTICs, which one would expect to lead to more personalized consumption. In other words, each individual could choose from among a much greater supply and thus come up

with a completely unique path through the world of mass entertainment, information, and communication available through the multiple screens and formats at his or her disposal. However, what has happened instead is that the individual facing this intermedia culture has mostly met up with other individuals who also inhabit that universe of screens, and begun to interact with them.

Michel de Certeau (2010) had already warned against prejudices occasionally based on readings of the great critics of mass culture like Adorno and Horkheimer, which tend to view the consumer as an isolated, passive individual. For de Certeau (who wrote at the start of the explosion of the 'digital age'), consumption is a secondary form of production that doesn't actually produce products of its own; rather, it is manifested through the *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic system. In those ways of using, thousands of tactics are condensed to form an entire informal substrate of collective meaning production, which he called 'practices of daily life.' With the appearance of the intermedia world, all that richness of life finds new channels and, in fact, increases its ability to appropriate the products launched by consumer society.

Jenkins gives a few examples from the entertainment culture, such as the 'spoiler' communities online. One of most notable examples is that of trying to discover what really happened during the taping of the North American television reality show/contest *Survivor*, before it was aired. This effort mobilized all kinds of investigative resources, from satellite cameras to workers and local inhabitants actually trying to infiltrate the filming zones, and included analysis of images aired during previous editions to try to guess routes, and so on. The interesting thing is that this type of collective effort, says Jenkins, is not always dedicated to such banal causes. The same logics of collective investigation were activated, for example, when a series of American bloggers joined forces to send impartial reporters to Iraq, with the aim of getting to the bottom of the scandal over the tortures in Abu Ghraib prison.

Consumption in the intermedia era is no longer conceived as an individual activity, but a group one. This gives rise to enormous communities, with much broader and more complex spheres of human relations than ever before. Although they develop around commercialized consumption and entertainment culture, these communities are often able to come up with their own objectives that can clash head-on with those that states and media conglomerates try to set. Pierre Lévy (1999) viewed these communities in terms of 'collective intelligence,' and described them as groups in which everybody knows something they are willing to share, but nobody knows everything the community (as a whole) knows. Lara (2013), in another

revealing article about these matters, uses the concept of 'prosumers' to synthesize the most important characteristics of this type of 'active public':

In Fordism, the consumer delegated to production the definition of his or her necessities in exchange for the possibility of accessing standardized products at a limited cost. But the dissemination of new technologies of formal production (flexible automation) and of communication (telematic networks) has prefigured new organizational forms for the relationship between producer and consumer based on the principle of interaction. However, the transformation has included a still more pronounced change, which has been defined by a transition *from the interaction to the integration* of both spheres, production and consumption, even generating a form of hybridization that has given rise to the phenomenon of the *prosumer*. (16)

Mapping the increasingly varied practices of prosumers and online collaborative cultural practices in general that have prospered in recent decades is an extremely complex task. Regarding the question of their sustainability, it seems to me that it is useful to maintain a certain separation between those that emerge in the culture of mass consumption and those that are more consciously inscribed in the tradition of the fight against privatizations and restrictions which the hacker cultures articulate with free software and free culture. Regarding the first type of practice, Lara proposes this useful classification:

Some of the practices which lead many young people join the participative cultural universe are: *affiliations* (membership, formal and informal, in online communities around various forms of media, like Friendster, Facebook, Myspace, meta-gaming, chat rooms, etc.); *expressions* (producing new creative forms, like digital sampling, writing, audiovisual creation, mash-ups, etc.); *collaborative problem solving* (working together in teams, formal and informal, to solve tasks and develop new knowledge, as in Wikipedia, alternate reality games, 'spoiling,' etc.); and *circulations* (giving form to the media flow through podcasting or blogging, for example). (13)

In the same article, Lara emphasizes the special vulnerability of these practices to exploitation by companies of the so-called Web 2.0. These are companies that have adapted the competitive, privatizing spirit of neoliberalism to the prosumer ecology, creating business models based on exchange and access to information stored 'in the cloud' (data system clouds). This system became hegemonic around 2006, with the explosion of

some very familiar businesses that adopted this model: Google, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, etc. I will return to this danger of commercial, privatizing exploitation of the value collaboratively produced online. For now, I merely want to repeat that in very close proximity to this ‘participative cultural universe’ of which Lara speaks—sometimes to the point of being indistinguishable from it—could be located an equally participative but more ‘militant’ one, which is more directly related to the ‘culture of online freedom’ that tries to defend itself from those forms of privatization of value in Web 2.0.

The paradigm *par excellence* of that free digital culture continues to be free software, and in particular the operating system Linux, closely followed in its capacity for massive social impact by Wikipedia. Both cases have in common the focus on communities of ‘producers,’ which Mayo Fuster Morell calls Creative Communities Online (CCOs) (2011). These communities take on the production and self-management of their platforms’ cultural content with the expressed desire of defending them from privatizing appropriations. In the wake of these hugely successful collaborative models, a whole constellation of practices can be found related to what has been called the ‘Free Culture Movement.’ Fuster and Subirats (2012) propose the following categories to catalogue the agents, projects, and processes that comprise it: lawyers specializing in intellectual property, hackers, free software programmers, journalism that uses ‘creative commons’ licenses, free publishers, pedagogical projects, online creation communities (OCCs), cyberactivism campaigns, ‘file sharing’ (platforms to share archives), institutional policies, startups, promotion of the ‘commons’ paradigm, and associations to work with people who don’t have access to TICs (15–16).

#### 4.2.3. ‘Fansubs,’ altruism, and developing unrecognized abilities

I would now like to cite a Spanish example of a type of activity that occurs in the culture of mass consumption, and which doesn’t have the ‘militant’ profile of the free culture. My point is to call attention to forms of online collaborative production of cultural value that can illustrate some of the complex relations between precarization and young people’s online collaborative creation of cultural value.

More than a decade ago now, when the phenomenon of new fiction television series was bursting onto the Spanish scene, accompanied by the no less important phenomenon of downloading files through P2P (peer-to-peer) networks (something to which Zapata alludes), a remarkable event took place. One of the reasons why so many people downloaded series episodes was that either the series weren’t aired on Spanish television networks or they were aired much later than in America. That was why, when it came to

very popular series like *Lost* or *House*, one could typically find an episode already available for download on Spain's most popular P2P networks the day after it aired in the US. But in addition, and this is what's odd, those files were even already subtitled in Spanish, thanks to the generous work of series fans who collectively created the so-called 'fansubs,' in the slang of the Internet.

In 2008, the author of the blog Yonomeaburro ('I don't get bored') interviewed several people who offered this work anonymously. 'We got up at 3 or 4 in the morning,' said somebody known online as Smalleye, 'the time when the episode was usually already online. We downloaded it, and everyone did a part that we had decided on earlier. Then we helped each other figure out problems, and when we had them straightened out, one person joined all the pieces and uploaded them to the web.' This has been going on since 2004, when Smalleye collaborated on subtitling *Lost* for *Lostzilla*, the most important Spanish fan page for the series. Later, Smalleye decided to create a tool that would facilitate this job, and launched the site *Wikisubtitles*. 'If I hadn't invented it, somebody else would have, since it was necessary to improve the workflow of online subtitling,' said the 26-year-old computer scientist. He also said that not only did he not earn any money, he lost it on this website, but he's motivated because 'the spirit of Wikisubtitles is like the spirit of Wikipedia, we all help for nothing, and as long as it's like this, you feel like keeping going. The site exists because of people's goodwill, something that's not very common nowadays.'

Both he and the two other people that were interviewed for Yonomeaburro have college degrees and jobs—although not necessarily ones they want; in other words, they have other things to do besides subtitling, and they say that to be able to do all that 'they lose hours of sleep.' In a more recent article that appeared in *El País*, 'Subtítulos por amor al arte' (Marcos 2012), the same subject was presented, giving testimonies of people with very similar profiles, who also referenced altruistic feelings to explain their motivation.

But along with these feelings, it's important to emphasize that often in these cases references are made to the satisfaction of a job well done. Marga of the Asia-Team website (Yonomeaburro 2008a) reported that what kept her going was 'seeing that a good subtitle, or a not too bad subtitle, is well received,' and that she started because she thought 'that people had a right to see the series downloaded from P2P systems with good subtitles. I don't think that because something's free it has to be low quality.' It would seem, then, that there's a fuzzy line between the narrative of altruism ('I do it without expecting anything in return') and the narrative of a job well done ('I do it because I like to do things well'). 'Some of the subtitles I downloaded weren't very good, and I thought I could help make them better

and “give back” for everything I’d received,’ says another computer scientist who collaborates with Subtítulos.es.

Replacing bad subtitles with well-done ones, but also practicing languages, solving programming problems, meeting people from around the world, and even acquiring a knowledge of history or a better understanding of the characters of the series are some of the activities these people see as related to their work as subtitlers, and in which various fundamental abilities are undoubtedly put into play (linguistic, social, epistemic, aesthetic, etc.). The importance of cultivating these abilities as an element (sometimes unconscious) of their motivation complicates the reading of this type of online phenomenon in purely ‘altruistic’ terms. It is not only the individual desire to do something unusual for others that’s in play here, but also a series of technological mechanisms and informally instituted practices that favor the cultivation of individual abilities in service to the creation of collective value.

This is a key question that concerns not only the fansub phenomenon, but the entire Internet. It is the same decentralized political architecture Padilla spoke of that favors the possibility of collectively producing value by exercising abilities that, in the realm of a job market destabilized by neoliberalism, often are not considered pay-worthy skills.

Bollier (2008) has called this ‘the great value shift.’ According to him, around 2003, when fast connections became widespread and the Internet reached 600 million users, the beginning of a radical change took place in how value was produced and distributed online. A type of wealth appeared that is no longer necessarily private, nor does it translate into money: ‘On the Internet, wealth is not just financial wealth, nor is it necessarily privately held. Wealth generated through open platforms is often socially created value that is shared, evolving, and nonmonetized. It hovers in the air, so to speak, accessible to everyone’ (126).

There are problems with this idea that the wealth produced online remains ‘in the air,’ which I will return to later. However, I will say now that the danger here is twofold. On one hand, it’s easy to forget that the collective wealth of the Internet is only possible thanks to all those other people who make possible the existence of the hardware and the conditions of life necessary for some people to be able to spend time online. On the other hand, there’s the danger of underestimating the enormous capacity of the monetary, capitalist economy to reappropriate that public wealth ‘accessible to anyone’ online, and make it private. But even with all these problems, it seems to me that there is something fundamentally important in what Bollier proposes. Most certainly, to an extent that should not be too easily dismissed, the Internet has facilitated the creation of the type of wealth

that, to say the least, exceeds the (individual, privatizing, competitive) logic of what David Harvey calls ‘the community of money,’ because it has made accessible mechanisms of value creation that are alternative to the system of valorizing social wealth constituted by money in the capitalist system.

Truly, it seems that cases like those of the people who get up at four in the morning to translate subtitles without getting paid for it are good examples of that capacity to create value. The hypothesis I propose, no matter how impossible it may be to verify completely, is that the lack of recognition of many people’s basic human capacities, especially young people’s, during the precarization of the job market associated with neoliberalism, has been a fundamental incentive for that collective creation of nonmonetarized value. In the face of the ever-greater difficulty of translating their abilities into money, these people throw themselves into the search for other ways to produce, use, and recognize value that do not necessarily go through the market economy, and they find the Internet to be the most appropriate space for it.

Perhaps, after all this, we are in a better position to understand why so many people found time to be following Twitter on that workaday Thursday morning when Minister Sinde met with 14 ‘notable internauts.’ Perhaps now we are also in a better position to understand why many perceived the minister’s actions as a frontal attack on a space where, no matter how precariously, amateurishly, and sometimes unsustainably, their abilities had finally managed to contribute to something valuable.

By following the thread of the defense of that space of shared value creation, perhaps it will be possible to explore a little further what that creation of shared value consisted of, and how it kept getting stronger in keeping with the necessity to defend it, besides sometimes allowing the wise advice of John Locke to be read in Spanish. I am not referring to the philosopher—whose work will also be relevant here—but to the character from *Lost*.

### 4.3. The Pleasure of Doing, and Telling What One Does: Self-Representation of Internet Cultures

#### 4.3.1. Choosing a culture of collaborative practices

In a survey comprising part of an excellent study carried out by Martínez, Fuster, and others (2013) about collaborative audiovisual projects developed online—called ‘audiovisual commons’—many of the participants declared that they didn’t expect any economic repayment for their participation in these projects, and that their main motivation was ‘the pleasure of doing it’ (86%). The second most frequently mentioned motivation was ‘recognition’

(76%), and the third, the ‘experience’ (72%), perhaps ambiguous elements as far as their possible ‘utilitarian’ underpinnings. This utilitarian aspect can be plainly seen in the minority who declared that ‘entry into the job market’ (29%) was the goal they pursued with their unpaid online activity. The most typical response to such results would probably be to class the first type of motivation as ‘altruism’ and the rest as ‘utilitarianism.’ It seems to me, however, that doing so runs the risk of making invisible the other type of value creation that Bollier speaks of: a collective value, not necessarily privatizable, not necessarily monetarizable.

The philosopher George Caffentzis (2013) explains that, given the growing pressure on the economics field to stop ignoring activities that generate wealth not translatable into money, one of the great answers offered has been the ‘rational choice theory.’ This theory compares all human conduct to a monetary commercial transaction, in which the protagonist is an individual—a ‘rational agent’—who calculates the costs of his actions to obtain as much satisfaction as he can:

A ‘rational agent’ would treat all the alternatives ‘as if’ they were commodities with a price attached, calculated by how much time and money it would take (for instance) to bring up a child, or spend an evening with one’s lover, where the value of one’s time is measured by the amount of money one could earn in the formal labor market in same time period. (261)

Contrary to what one might tend to think—and as César Rendueles explained very well in *Sociofobia*—belief in altruism does not deny this theory, at least not completely. The theory continues to operate from one of its fundamental assumptions: that human existence can be explained based on the instrumental actions of isolated individuals. If we start from the consideration of human existence as something that basically consists of the decisions of individuals who choose between maximizing their actions or being generous and doing something for others, we are trapped in an individualistic worldview that neglects two facts that seem quite evident. First, human life is always interdependent (being an individual is only a ‘moment’ in being human); and second, above all else we need to look to our own survival, implementing mechanisms of reproduction for the social conditions necessary for this survival.<sup>10</sup>

10 This is how Judith Butler explains it in *Frames of War*: ‘There is no life without the conditions of life that variably sustain life, and those conditions are pervasively social, establishing not the discrete ontology of the person, but rather the interdependency of persons, involving reproducible and sustaining social

The feminist tradition has been one of the richest spaces in recent decades for the recuperation of these two basic facts displacing the individualist perspective and, consequently, the theory of rational choice. As noted in the first chapter, researchers of feminist economics like Antonella Picchio (2009) have analyzed the blindness of the economics field, which is heir to ‘neoclassicism’ with respect to these issues—and these issues escape its narrow concept of humanity. Caffentzis indicates that it was the Marxist feminist tradition in the seventies that was truly able to theorize in all its complexity the problem of the existence of forms of social wealth, value creation, and nonwage-earning work outside the circles of the formal capitalist economy—the problem the rational choice theory tried to solve by turning all of human existence into a kind of capitalist market. And the Marxist feminist tradition could carry this off because it recuperated the question of classical economics, especially Marx’s but also Adam Smith’s and others, about ‘social reproduction.’ That is, it looked at how society not only creates new wealth, but also maintains itself, subsists, ‘re-produces’ itself (in Marxist terms, the specific question was how to reproduce a labor force capable of producing value).

More recently, thinkers like Judith Butler (2010; 2011) or, in Spain, Marina Garcés (2013), Amaia Pérez Orozco (2014), and Silvia L. Gil (2011), have offered a worldview that would reread the question of classical economics in these terms: if society needs above all to be reproduced, it’s because human life is interdependent and needs constant care to survive. Before ‘production,’ before ‘rational’ decisions of individuals who want to maximize their interests or be generous with others, there is always—tacitly or explicitly—the establishment of conditions that will make possible the continuation of one’s own life. This is what Picchio calls ‘living, like a daily process of reproduction of bodies, identities, and relationships.’

It is especially important to emphasize that these ‘identities and relationships’ are a fundamental part of what needs to be reproduced, as much as the bodies. Human life is never mere biological subsistence, it is always determined culturally, and understood and characterized linguistically. It doesn’t exist as an absolute fact, life is always socially thought, valued, felt. That’s why an offshoot of Picchio’s arguments is that in the process of the social reproduction of life there are always in play implicit or explicit conceptions of what is a life worthy of being reproduced. Or, as she says, what ‘quality of life’ must specifically consist of, ‘quality of life’ generically defined as ‘a state of well-being of individuals, men and women,

relations to the environment and to non-human forms of life, broadly considered’ (2010, 19)

characterized by a set of abilities to do, to be, and to operate individually and collectively in a social space' (29).

Let's return now to that answer the majority of the survey respondents in the study on 'audiovisual commons' gave about their motivations: 'the pleasure of doing it.' Of course, the way the idea is expressed already invites a reading in terms of rational choice theory, or at least from one of the variants of an individualistic worldview: the individual seeks not only money; she also seeks pleasure or recognition, and that causes her to participate in collaborative projects online. However, why can't we understand that 'pleasure of doing it' as one of those tacit answers to the question of a worthy, decent life that is constantly raised in the 'daily process of reproducing bodies, identities and relationships' that constitutes living? In that case, we might think that saying 'I do it for the pleasure of doing it' was equivalent to saying something like, 'Instead of giving my abilities and energies to a job market that subjects them to the market's ways of creating value, I choose to give them to another space of identities and relationships, the online collaborative cultures where projects are supported without having to go through money, private property, or competition among individuals.' The pleasure of doing *that*. Because doing is never only doing, but also reproducing certain 'ways of doing,' 'systems of value creation,' 'models of a life with dignity,' or maybe simply '*cultures*,' at the same time as rejecting others.

#### 4.3.2. Beyond utilitarianism vs. altruism: Identifying practices

If we view the cooperative, unpaid work done online in this light, we escape the (false) dilemma between altruism and utilitarianism. Because then it is no longer (only) about a job that an individual chooses to do, but about activities that contribute to creating necessary infrastructures for a type of collective reproduction of relations and identities based on collaboration, and not on competition among individuals. It is undoubtedly risky to contend that online collaborative work constitutes such a thing: a mechanism or system for reproducing relationships and identities (and even bodies, since culture is inseparable from them). Especially since that would make it comparable to the immense, omnipresent machinery of social reproduction that is the capitalist system. But why can't we accept that it is comparable, even on a much smaller yet still significant scale?

Emmanuel Rodríguez claims that cyberspace has given the world three fundamental cultural dimensions (which he considers potentially democratizing): a system for mass self-organization, a sphere of 'postmedia' communication (independent of the influence of big media and capable of squaring off with them), and a much broader and faster environment of rich daily sociability 'among peers' than others that have historically fed

social movements, like the factory or the city. Much has been said about the first two (for example in the well-known works of the sociologist Manuel Castells) and I will keep them in mind here also, but it seems to me that the third is perhaps the most important. Rodríguez certainly thinks so:

The Internet and [social] networks are today an existential territory founded on exchange among peers; a much broader social medium has been created that operates at a much faster speed than previous socialization spaces, like the factory for the labor movement, or the city for earlier democratic movements. In this sense, it has recuperated for the present the prior functions of those spaces, simultaneously public and private, where contact becomes routine and daily, where affection accompanies messages, and where the circulation of ideas, projects, and alternatives becomes possible again. And this, even when their scent is neither that of industrial oil nor of the sweat of bodies. (207)

In the face of this affirmation of the *existential* importance of networks, perhaps the most recurrent objection comes, very eloquently, from Rendueles: 'Often the production of free content online is parasitic, in the sense that it depends on the existence of other sources of support and free time. As the joke goes, the best way to make money with free software is to work as a waiter' (107).

Perhaps the problem with this type of objection is that it still takes too narrow a view of the meaning of 'sustenance' for human life. As Picchio says, there is no support for life if there is not also at the same time support for the culture that elucidates what constitutes a life worth living. Cultural life and biological life are inseparable parts of human life. So if the Internet is capable of contributing to the reproduction of a culture based on sharing without the need for money, no matter how often the bodies that maintain that culture also need to participate in the system of capitalist reproduction, then that online culture of sharing is in itself a remarkable 'source of support,' or at least of 'cultural support' (and the cultural is, according to Rodríguez, *existential*), as an alternative to the hegemonic support system for capitalist life (which, of course, is increasingly revealed as unsustainable in so many ways).

From there it becomes a question of degree since, naturally, the same could be said of many other social spaces that contribute in some measure to 'supporting' cooperative cultures that slow down the neoliberal commercialization of life to some degree. In that sense, Rendueles criticizes the excessive attention paid to the Internet while many offline cooperative work projects, like those of the Mondragón Corporation (for one well-known example), are ignored.

But to compare different cooperative cultures, again, it isn't enough to say that some provide their members with money to pay the bills and others only provide good intentions. The power of spaces like the Mondragón cooperative is that their workers receive money without having to go through all the unfair logics of the capitalist social reproduction system. But the power of the cultures of online sharing is to call attention to the possibility of and the need for alternative spaces to reproduction systems based on competition, scarcity, and the privatization of wealth. It seems to me that neither of these two powers should be underestimated, and the specific nature of both should be studied.

So when Rendueles says that the problem with the cultures of online sharing is that they don't guarantee any commitment, that they are not sufficiently 'normative,' it seems to me that something important is lost in the argument. 'If I systematically sabotage the conversations in a forum [on the web], the worst than can happen to me is that they kick me out' (107). But, first, what if it is, for example, a forum like *Spaniards.es*, where very precise, up-to-date information is shared about matters that affect the emigration of Spaniards to other countries? And suppose, as the last person to post in that forum at the very same time I am writing, you have two children, you are a heavy machine operator, you are on the verge of emigrating to Norway, and you need very specific information that will affect the viability of your family's emigration, and you need it as soon as possible? Perhaps we were a little hasty in underestimating the sometimes less than evident connections between the cultures of online sharing and the survival of those who use them.

Mainly because, second, we undervalue the cultural importance of social relationships and identities for survival. A life without human relationships and the construction of meaning is not a human life. Rendueles reminds us that in addition to 'instrumental behavior,' which is the only type considered by rational choice theory, there is 'normative behavior,' 'which is based on shared rules' (97). But it seems to me that the things that guarantee that human life has meaning are not just 'norms,' beyond individual instrumental decisions. They are, on an even more basic level, all those practices through which human life takes on some identity—and therefore some meaning—through exchanges in the bosom of groups (empirical or abstract). Or what Pablo Sánchez León and Jesús Izquierdo (2003), borrowing from the work of the sociologist Alessandro Pizzorno, call 'identifying practices':

[N]umerous social activities function as identifying practices for the members of different groups constituting the social fabric: the casuistry

of these activities is enormous, ranging from reciprocal exchanges of material and symbolic goods to communicative interactions using particular languages or meanings. Each one of these presupposes a community that grants them value. Integrity in the subjects' time depends on these practices, because they assure group cohesion, and with it the 'circles of recognition' in which moral criteria embody what individuals use to construct their identity. (80)

These identifying practices are the flow of construction of collective meaning that sometimes becomes cemented into explicit or implicit social norms, but that always comes back to 'values or groups' with which the subjects that use them express identification. For this reason, an evident condition of possibility for these practices is the visibility of those 'values' or 'groups,' since that visibility is sometimes essential for their ability to *matter* to the subjects.

In the case of cultures of online sharing, the struggles against the Sinde Law constituted a defining moment in the creation of that visibility. This happened as a kind of self-discovery as a group by those who were giving more and more time and energy to online sharing practices that 'had no name,' so to speak, for those who practiced them (or at least, they didn't have as powerful a shared identity as they would later achieve). From those struggles arose, above all, a characterization of what was rejected (the law itself and the restrictive conception of the Internet and the culture that inspired it), but also a rich, proud (though also often contradictory) perception of what was being defended.

#### 4.3.3. 'The dinner of fear': Dignifying Internet users

For the construction of that positive self-perception, the debates around the 'Manifiesto en defensa de los derechos fundamentales en Internet' were very important. But perhaps even more so were those unleashed by a post by activist, researcher, and editor Amador Fernández-Savater, called 'La cena del miedo' (The Dinner of Fear) published January 11, 2011 (2011c) on the blog of his publishing house, Acurela Libros. The text included essential fragments for the self-representation of the rising online culture in the Spanish state, among them:

[T]he idea that stereotypes try to impose on us is the following: if I hang out with my girlfriend at the movies on a Sunday afternoon watching any film at all, I'm putting a value on culture because I paid. And if I spend two weeks translating and subtitling my favorite TV series to share it on the web, I'm nothing more than a despicable

parasitic consumer who is sinking the culture. Incredible, right? Well, the Internet is made up of a million of those altruistic gestures. And thousands of people (for example, cultural workers pressured by precarization) routinely download material from the web because they want to do something with all of it: to know and to nurture themselves to [be able to] create. It is precisely this active, creative tension that moves many to seek and to exchange. Think about it!

Operations like this, of ‘dignifying’ the identity associated with web users (operations in which it was tacitly debated just what was the ‘decent life’ that needed to be reproduced) must have contributed to the fact that progressively more and more people felt that something essential about who they were had to do with the Web (and that therefore it was no longer so clear that when somebody was thrown out of an Internet forum, absolutely nothing happened to him). Fernández-Savater himself said in an interview in the newspaper *Público* that he personally tried to explain to Minister Sinde that ‘the Web is not only a useful tool for many of us, but a space for life and even an important part of our brain.’ Indeed, one only needs to see the explosion of favorable reactions to Fernández-Savater’s text to understand how the online culture of sharing was certainly becoming a dense nucleus of ‘identifying practices’ where many people risked not insignificant pieces of the meaning of their life.

The enormous interest and support the text generated was not due only to its defense of the Internet, it was perhaps even more its ability to create a critical image of those who were attacking the Web. Starting with its poetic title, the text asserted that it was the Web’s critics who were scared: ‘fear of the Internet,’ ‘fear of people,’ ‘fear of the future,’ it was saying. But the important thing, I think, was the pragmatics of the text itself, its format of a ‘revelation of the elites’ secret.’ While the ‘Manifesto’ continued to adopt some forms that owed much to the tradition of the cultural elites, and which fit poorly with the decentralized Internet culture, ‘La cena del miedo’ looked, as Padilla indicated, like a text from ‘just anyone’ who had infiltrated enemy lines and shared with other ‘anyones’ the information obtained from the powers that be.

The story is well known, and Fernández-Savater told it all in the text itself: he had received a surprise invitation to a dinner meeting arranged by Minister Sinde to talk about the Internet. When he got there, he discovered he was the only attendee in favor of free culture, surrounded by a cast of ‘culture professionals’ and defenders of ‘intellectual property.’ These included some very well-known names in the public sphere: Álex de la Iglesia, Antonio Muñoz Molina, Elvira Lindo, Alberto García Álix, Ouka Leele,

Luis Gordillo, Juan Diego Botto, and Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón. Perhaps the most impressive thing about Fernández-Savater's text was the way it exposed with critical clarity not only the opinions but also the attitudes of these well-known people who had prestige in the cultural world. Even more so because in doing it, he broke the secrecy that usually surrounds this type of gathering of 'important' people.

It was shocking to learn that somebody at the meeting (Fernández-Savater did not attribute words to specific people) had praised the United States' repressive Internet policies by saying, 'That's it, at least you need to make people afraid.' It was shocking that another of these figures complained bitterly that 'People use my photos for their Facebook profiles!' And it was shocking that, in general, Internet users were referred to as 'those irresponsible consumers who want everything for free' and 'those selfish, willful people who don't know the value of a job or the effort that goes into it.' Fernández-Savater sprinkled his report with these quotes to illustrate his assertions about the ignorance and fear that characterized the position of his dinner companions. 'It seems a very serious fact,' he concluded, 'that those who must legislate on the Internet should not know it or appreciate it for what it really is, that they should fear it. They don't understand it technically, legally, culturally, or subjectively. In any way.' The power of this assertion was multiplied by the fact that it was based on an observation of a 'they' from much closer than is normally possible for most people.

Time and time again, in the 461 comments on the original post, in the 135 that appeared on the shared news site Menéame, and in many other places online, people who read the text referred to the matter of excessive secrecy: 'These meetings really are the kind they don't invite the press to.' 'Thanks, Amador, for telling us what happens in those high circles and what they try to hide.' '[It's] a pleasure that you share conversations, that you infiltrate the secrets, and that you let us see what's cooking.' 'It seems that the Minister of Culture is so inept that she doesn't even realize she invited somebody from the Copyleft world to a discreet meeting.' 'I doubt they'll ever invite you back, knowing that afterwards you'll "air" what happened there,' etc.

The abundance of comments, on the other hand, shows that, again, we're not dealing with a simple text written by a single author, but rather with a collective process of thought and action initiated, to be sure, by a written contribution. Fernández-Savater was very careful, besides, to present his report not as the text of a cultural authority but, again, as a text by 'anyone.' He uses colloquial language, presenting himself as a 'small publisher' who has nothing to do with those famous ones, and showing his own vulnerability ('I wasn't what you'd call a conversational shining star'). He even includes references to mass culture, like the film *Downfall*, which

helped him create an image of the minister and her fellow dinner guests locked up in bunker, ‘raving about inapplicable plans to win the war.’

But in addition, people would soon make his text their own, responding to the thread with other articles and infinite debates, extracting fragments and phrases. (One of the favorites was, ‘what we have here is an elite that is losing the monopoly of the word and of the formation of reality,’ which alludes to the CT hypothesis.) Web users even came up with initiatives like the creation of offline meetings (called ‘Dinners against Fear’) to discuss the subject in several cities.

The text became a fundamental weapon in the struggle to defend the Internet, and huge numbers of ‘technopolitical’ actions proliferated around it. Technopolitics is, according to the research group *DatAnalysis15M* (2013), ‘the tactical, strategic use of technological devices (including social networks) for organization, communication, and collective action.’ This research group has studied in great detail some of those technopolitical tactics and strategies that drove the cycle, from the first struggles against the *Sinde Law* to the irruption of the 15M movement (cyberactivism campaigns, collective learning on how to use digital tools, connections between the Web and protests in the street, etc.). Somewhat more difficult to decode, but no less important, are the often unconscious processes of subjectification—understood as the cultural configuration of identity and ways of life—that accompanied those other processes. Moments like the ‘dinner of fear’ seem especially important in terms of the configuration of a ‘we,’ no matter how contradictory, diffuse, and still embryonic, that will serve as one of those arrays of meaning that allow the development of ‘identifying practices’ around Web cultures.

Synthesizing greatly, and at the risk of simplifying, we could say that the ‘*Manifiesto*’ suggested a plural ‘we’ made up of Internet users demanding their ‘fundamental rights,’ using the legalistic language of the very institutions they questioned. ‘*La cena del miedo*,’ then, proposes that this same ‘we’ is also made up of the ‘thousands of altruistic gestures on the web’; in other words, the ‘we’ of a culture of sharing that confronts a ‘they’ of cultural and political elites characterized by fear and ignorance.

As these identification arrays become stronger, they will keep forming more solid alternatives to the hegemonic forms of producing and reproducing cultural value associated with capitalism, the power of the experts, and individualistic consumerism. But that doesn’t mean there aren’t important overlaps between those different ways of articulating what a life worth reproducing is. The emergence of the cultures of online sharing, or at least of the defense of Internet freedom, like recognizable spheres self-represented by those who identify with them, is in no way the ‘pure’ emergence of

something completely new in the cultural panorama of a neoliberal Spain in crisis. Nor will their evolution move these cultures towards a clearer (self-)definition, but it will maintain their contradictory plurality, and may even exacerbate it, in mixing them with other 'we's,' as more and more subjects try to flee from a 'them' no less hybrid than themselves, who identify with the 'Establishment' that has brought the country to this hard economic crisis.

#### 4.4. Two Overlapping yet Clashing Value Systems

##### 4.4.1. 'Don't vote for them': Between liberal politics and collaborative cultures

The next, perhaps more significant, moment in the fight against the Sinde Law, the so-called cybercampaign 'No les votes,' is a good example of the hybrid and contradictory nature that continued to develop in those moments of the increasingly mass culture of the Web.

Let's recall the history: the 'dinner of fear' took place on January 10, 2011. At the end of that same month, the PSOE managed to reintroduce the Sinde Law in the Senate, thanks to the Partido Popular's support. The PP had previously opposed it, causing its rejection in the Congress. The tension among the Web's defenders increased, in part because the previous month *El País* had published revelations obtained by WikiLeaks that showed direct pressure exerted by the American government on its Spanish counterpart regarding downloading from the Internet.

So the moment when the PP changed their mind and decided to support the Sinde Law resonated with secret reports that had been leaked about their 'unofficial' position towards this law. For instance, there was one in which the American ambassador himself, Alan D. Solomont, declared, after meeting with Mariano Rajoy: 'On Intellectual Property Rights, we understood Rajoy's message to be that although the PP understands the necessity for Spain to do more, he is going to extract every political benefit from the debate that he can' (*El País* and WikiLeaks 2010a). In similar terms, another, earlier, American embassy dispatch, written soon after the PSOE's arrival in office, stated, 'Given the number of stars in the entertainment industry with a clear preference for the socialist government, it is possible that this government is especially sensitive to doing something in this sector' (*El País* and WikiLeaks 2010b).

The agitation against the Sinde Law, and against the whole world of secret meetings and dark strategies that seemed to surround it, would be channeled in February 2011 into the creation of the 'No les votes' campaign. This initially appeared to be an invitation to refuse to vote in the municipal

elections, to be held in May, for the parties (all the majority ones) that had supported the Sinde Law, which had finally also been approved in the Congress.

But something else extremely important was happening. On March 30, following the trend revealed by the debates about the campaign, the project's initiators decided to change the manifesto ('NoLesVotes.com' 2011) that appeared on its main page, and to remove all references to the Sinde Law, now putting all emphasis on the problems of endemic corruption plaguing the Spanish political system. What was, in principle, a 'sectorial' fight related to a specific legal matter (regulating Internet use) thus became a huge challenge to what the manifesto defined as 'the corruption at the very foundation of the system.'

In the new text, this corruption was attributed to a series of institutional and social problems: the perpetual alternation of 'political organizations grasping at power for decades,' the lack of mechanisms for 'active participation of the citizenry,' a voting law that had been 'jury-rigged to favor the major parties by excessively handicapping minority representation,' and, perhaps even more incisively, a 'party-tocracy' that internally imposed a hierarchical discipline within each political organization and which externally made decisions according to 'pressure groups that only represent the interests of economically powerful or media minorities.' It was, therefore, a turn towards that type of 'crisis of the system' narrative I talked about at the beginning of the first chapter, which was characterized by bringing up the need for drastic changes. Changes that, once again, would not mean merely a change of actors participating in that social and political game that is 'the system,' but a profound transformation of its own 'rules of the game.'

However, since it couldn't be any other way, the action-oriented part of this new 'No les votes' manifesto was left with the difficult task of translating that anger with 'the corruption at the very foundations of the system' into concrete suggestions for action. This consequently included having to enter the thorny terrain of explaining what, exactly, that 'corrupt system' consisted of, and what parts of it could and could not be saved to be able to transform its corruption. In fact, the manifesto suggested a specific measure that for many may well have sounded like a clear acceptance of one of the prime rules of the very system that was being condemned. They encouraged the exercising of what was, according to the manifesto, 'our primary democratic right: the vote.'

Of course, reducing the proactive dimension of 'No les votes' as a political platform to this phrase would be a terrible simplification. Even at the level of explicit language, besides requesting a vote of conscience, it also inspired an involvement in 'the network of fed-up citizens who think that improving the

situation is in our hands.’ But perhaps even more importantly, it is necessary to consider not only language but also the sphere of practices, because again, we are not simply dealing with a manifesto here, but with a text that opened the door to the creation not only of broad debates in this case, but of a whole movement. At the moment the second version of the manifesto appeared, this movement had already generated more than 700,000 unique users on its main page—shared some 7,800 times on Twitter and more than 36,000 times on Facebook—and above all, had inspired an active, diverse wiki (a website made by users) with 143 pages, 196 stored files, and 374 registered users. This movement, moreover, would shortly be mixed with others springing from diverse platforms, among them, significantly, ‘Democracia Real Ya!’ It would come together in the demonstrations that gave birth to the 15M movement, considered by many to be the most important political event to happen in the Spanish state since the transition to democracy.

As I noted earlier, the technopolitical dimensions of these connection processes and the viral growth of protests online that would later take to the streets in May 2011 have already been investigated carefully and exhaustively by others. But what I want to do here is delve into the different traditions and mechanisms of creation and support of material and cultural value that were latent in them, and that often clashed with each other, producing contradictions, or at least constant tensions. So when ‘No les votes’ proposes simultaneously that, on one hand, the voting law, the parties, and the existing mechanisms of political participation are all insufficient, and on the other, that the most important political measure is still the vote, this would seem to be a manifestation of one of these tensions. In fact, it was perhaps the most crucial tension, which would remain present during the whole course of the 15M and its later mutations. This is the tension that arises between the liberal political tradition and its way of understanding value—individual, private, convertible into money or at least into some type of instrumental ‘profit’—and the large outskirts of that ‘modern’ Western hegemonic tradition, made up of cultures in which value is understood as something that is always produced and enjoyed from relationships of interdependence, of which the individual, the private, and the quantification of wealth can only be derived, secondary moments.<sup>11</sup>

11 David Graeber has compiled quite a number of anthropological studies that show ways of life very different from the liberal organization of value around private property, the individual, and monetarization. For instance, he speaks of the existence of societies that use a kind of ‘primitive money’; he calls them ‘human economies’ (as opposed to ‘market economies’). This ‘primitive money’ served to organize and maintain relations between people, not to sell or buy people or objects—it wasn’t about accumulating wealth, but about making arrangements

This tension began to make itself strongly felt as soon as the taboo surrounding the notion of 'democracy' in the Spanish state ceased to be accepted. In that sense, the 'No les votes' campaign and later 'Democracia Real Ya!' constitute fundamental references for introducing a massive questioning of institutions that tacitly tended to identify with democracy itself, so that judging them was almost considered an assassination attempt against that very system.

#### 4.4.2. 'National sovereignty' vs. 'passion for the common':

##### Two concepts of democracy

Rodríguez clearly explains how problematic such an identification becomes when these institutions are analyzed from a historical perspective. Thus, as he indicates in his book *Hipótesis Democracia*, the belief that the only possible democracy is one, like the Spanish state, based on the principle of representation by 'popular sovereignty' (instead of self-government), and on political parties and parliament as mechanisms for exercising that representation, implies deliberately ignoring the actual history of political institutions.

It is necessary to understand, he continues, that the type of representation politicians exercise in the system of liberal democracies like Spain is not the only one to have existed, nor is it the best fit to the etymological definition of democracy (government by the population, government by the people). In this sense it must be seen that the representation exercised by elected political officials in Spain (and in liberal democracies in general) is not by any means a representation of its voters like that exercised by a mere spokesman, or a 'chief executive,' but something much more complicated and with less than democratic roots:

The chief executive responds to his 'superiors,' he must be revocable and subject to the decisions of the assemblies that have granted him his 'mandate.' On the other hand, the representative is much more than 'the representative of his voters.' First, and above all, he is representative of something much more abstract and difficult to comprehend, something that in the French Revolution took the name 'national sovereignty.' Sovereignty is, throughout the whole liberal tradition all the way up to the present, a transcendent authority inherited from the monarch's powers. That's why sovereignty, even when it resides in the citizens, is understood as unique, indivisible, inalienable, the result as much of

between people (marriages, treaties, solving crimes and disputes, gaining followers, etc.) (2011, 130).

the formation of a 'general will' as an expression of a 'general interest.' In short, it is the incarnation and legitimation of the state's powers over society, to which it only responds through 'sovereignty.' This explains why 'representatives' are legally invested with such a show of pomp, ceremony, and dignity that seems excessive to their condition as mere chief executives. (Rodríguez 216)

When, as in 'No les votes,' it is continually declared that the vote is 'our primary democratic right,' a tradition is assumed—or at least it is not being questioned directly—in which voting means choosing this type of *sovereign* representative. Nevertheless, when the same manifesto alludes to 'party-tocracy' and the need for greater mechanisms of 'civic participation,' it is moving more in the direction of other democratic traditions distinct from liberalism, for example, Athenian democracy. The latter, notes Rodríguez, is more in agreement with two principles that can be considered essential for the existence of something that could be called 'democracy' from a critical, well-informed perspective on the history of political institutions: on one hand, the existence of the conditions of equality necessary for anyone's participation in explicit power, and on the other, the existence of a truly common public sphere (and not just one of 'representatives') in which that participation can be exercised.

That truly common sphere, he asserts, is more than a mere aggregate of individuals, as liberal tradition would have it. Rather, it is a 'social body able to maintain its passion for the common.' The idea of 'popular sovereignty' (in itself an inheritance from monarchical absolutism) used by liberal democracies is founded on a supposed pact between individuals who would decide to transfer their 'sovereignty' to their representatives. But democracies like the Athenian (or those of the experiments of working-class democracy carried out in the Paris Commune, the Soviets, or the collectivities of the Spanish Revolution of '36), don't view society as an aggregate of individuals that possess a 'sovereignty' *per se* that they could transfer by mutual agreement. Rather, they are a 'social body' of interdependent individuals who, in the proper and necessary management of that interdependence, already exercise direct self-government. They have no need, says Rodríguez, 'to invoke laws that transcend the social body' (217).

In that sense, it seems to me, what is behind these different models of democracy is, once again, the difference between the liberal cosmivision that views society as an aggregate of individuals who have decided to be associated (who have decided to accept a 'social contract'), and the (premodern, communitary, etc.) worldviews that conceive of society as a weave of interdependent relationships without which individuals

would not exist, beyond their personal decisions, and which therefore it is necessary to reproduce for human survival. The interesting thing is that, even though individualistic language often speaks of liberalism, the tradition of collaborative online cultures has developed certain practices that, in a sense, are more attuned to a nonliberal worldview: they place more value on the reproduction of interdependent relationships that generate collective goods than on the production of private goods for supposedly independent individuals (or, rather, individuals who hide their relations of interdependence behind a veil of monetary quantification of their valuables).

In this regard, the tensions that surround the recognition of democracy as a political system in the online environment always involve other background tensions that concern the different ways of understanding, anthropologically, the relationships between individual, work (value creation), and property. It is here that we need to remember that other John Locke, the one who did not appear in *Lost*. As is well known, it was this philosopher who originated the famous theory about private property understood as the result of individual work with the resources of the earth. For Locke, property is individual because it is the fruit of individual work that transforms the earth, producing a value that can later be quantified in the market to enable its exchange.

However, what more and more people online experience daily is that work (or the creation of value) is never, in fact, purely individual. Furthermore, valuables tend to stop being valuable when they are privatized and quantified in the market. In other words, the experience of collective, open online work can easily lead to the realization that, as David Harvey says in *Rebel Cities*, the capitalist system, in converting everything into goods exchangeable for money, privatizes the greatest good humanity has at its disposal: its own, always necessarily collective work.

Much has been written on the ‘hacker ethic,’ on the new forms of sociability enabled by the Internet and NTICs, as well as on the general transformation of the human experience in the ‘information era.’ But perhaps, with respect to the question of human subsistence and the reproduction of (material and cultural) necessities for it, the most interesting thing about online cultures is that they have recovered the value of something so *un*-novel and so simple as collective work—in fact, a form of collective work in which it is not necessary to collectivize everything, or even to agree on everything, but rather to distribute tasks according to different abilities and come to a ‘rough consensus.’ Txarlie, the Hacktivist member quoted earlier, claimed that this type of distributed work is a legacy of the online cultures to the social movements that started springing up in Spain, beginning with the 15M movement. Specifically, he recalled that it was the mythic

'Internet Engineering Task Force,' created in the eighties to standardize online communication protocols, that began using the expression 'rough consensus' to refer to its methodology, in which it wasn't necessary for all the developers to agree on something explicitly for it to be considered acceptable.

The maxim of 'not solving a problem twice,' transparency in everything that's done, decentralization, and, in general, the capacity to do things together without having to be together on everything, are characteristics of the work of free software developers, 'hackers,' and those who customarily ascribe to the 'free culture.' In the historical circumstances of recent decades, and particularly in the recent years of the Spanish economic crisis, these characteristics have been an inspiration and a direct source for a reevaluation of collective work, understood in its broadest sense. In other words: understood not just as production of goods, but rather as reproduction of the necessary value for collective subsistence, at least for 'cultural subsistence.'

This reevaluation is essential for the practices developed by the cyberactivist campaigns I have been analyzing (the 'Manifiesto,' the 'Cena del miedo,' 'No les votes'), as it will be for the 15M movement. But if this is so, as I have tried to show, it's not just because these political campaigns and movements have used the work distributed online to make things they needed, but because that distributed work was already being experienced in many other social spaces as a way to create value capable of constituting an alternative, no matter how insufficient it might often be, to the hegemonic way of creating value based on liberalist assumptions and capitalist mechanisms of reproduction.

#### 4.4.3. Possibilities for cultural autonomy: Internet vs. school

To what extent, then, can online collective cultural work constitute an alternative to the mechanisms of creation and support of cultural value that reign in a neoliberal society like Spain? In an excellent study, 'Jóvenes y corrientes culturales emergentes [*trends*],' the anthropologist Francisco Cruces (García Canclini et al. 2012) emphasizes that although fundamental class restrictions obviously still exist, which determine which young people will be able to 'be creative' and to 'start a trend,' his fieldwork revealed that 'cultural reproduction (in Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) sense of the ability of dominant groups to perpetuate their distinction through generations) does not seem to take place automatically. There is no direct correlation between economic position and the ability to promote oneself in the new social space.' This could be, says Cruces, because we find ourselves 'in the process of a profound change in the reproduction of symbolic capitals.' And this change

would be brought about especially by the appearance of two aspects that seem to escape the established cultural power's logic of reproduction:

On one hand, a new type of specifically technological capital, which indicates differences in access to and familiarity with using TICs. On the other, the structure of opportunity certain communicative aptitudes offer, like extroversion, easy sociability, and the game of negotiating that characterize current well-known subjects of the Web 2.0. (This would undoubtedly be the case of a successful blogger who introduced herself as 'jack of all trades, master of none,' and was meteorically promoted to host/anchor of the television network Antena 3.) (165)

Perhaps the very framing of Cruces's study within the concept of 'emergent cultural trends'—whose aptness, by the way, he himself questions—causes him to interpret the new value these technological and social abilities produce in terms of 'access and familiarity' or 'notoriety.' But there are two things we must not forget. On one hand, those abilities don't necessarily pre-exist their use online; often they are developed because Internet use encourages them and enables their development. On the other, the value created with those online abilities is not always channeled towards the competitive logics that underpin the hegemonic system of value creation. Given that, often those young people who become proficient online users of technology and highly sociable subjects do not need to be 'promoted' to anything; that is, they don't need the recognition of institutions like a television network to be able to value themselves and to be valued by their peers. In short, they don't need society's 'teachers' to give them a certificate of value, because they share sufficiently rich learning networks to provide them with the cultural abilities they need and want.

Ultimately, if the ways of creating value shared online are often not enough to replace the institutions that manage goods as necessary as food, housing, or healthcare, they *can* be enough to unseat others like museums, big cultural industries, or even schools. Regarding this last possibility, young Mei (her online nickname) is a case in point. She was 19 years old in 2008, when discourse analysts Daniel Cassany and Denise Hernández (2012) interviewed her for their research on the online reading and writing practices of young people. Mei interested them because she was the prototypical young person who was active and creative on the networks:

She was webmaster of a forum called *Neolite*, where 12 young people wrote, read, and commented on 'stories' and poetry. There she had written fantastic narratives of more than 25 chapters, which her

companions evaluated positively. She also maintained a personal photolog and a private diary on paper, in addition to chatting online with friends and surfing her favorite sites. Every day she spent a lot of time reading and writing online. (127)

But if Mei was chosen as an especially interesting person for Cassany and Hernández's study, it was because, in addition to (or in spite of?) developing such a rich online life, she had failed several subjects in her second year of a humanities *bachillerato*. She had to repeat a course twice and still never managed to complete the *bachillerato*. Consequently, she wasn't accepted at the university, which she considered important.

Cassany and Hernández studied her case thoroughly to reveal the number of online abilities Mei had developed. They highlight in particular her writing and reading in three languages (Castilian, Catalan, and English), which she translates, transcribes, and uses indiscriminately within a single subject, moving between and among them, and among different registers depending on her audience. She is also proficient in the use of rhetorical tools as a result of her facility with narration, theater, comics, and the ubiquitous SMS language of texting, and in the use of computer programs that help her in her writing and her role as webmaster. If none of these abilities seems to have helped her pass subjects like Catalan and Castilian language classes, Philosophy, Latin, or History of Art, it is, argue Cassany and Hernández, because she applies them online within a context they call 'vernacular,' under conditions that don't exist in the educational sphere. Vernacular conditions basically consist of the immersion in 'groups or informal gangs of friends who act as "communities of practice," where they teach each other cooperatively and share each other's linguistic resources online and off' (135).

Faced with the activities of these 'communities of practice,' or cooperative learning, the school often demonstrates a lack of understanding, if not disdain. The researchers quote one of Mei's teachers: 'I've seen the photologs ... I don't know how to define it. ... [T]hey say a lot of nonsense, I suppose they'll outgrow it ... Me, I haven't been able to make anything of it' (137). Cassany and Hernández point to the advisability of changing this attitude, and of opening the school system to these types of online practices, seeking 'contact points.' They argue that 'If school is supposed to teach our future citizens how to live better, it should also teach to them how to do better what they like to do in their free time and their private life' (138).

But wouldn't it also be interesting to invert the argument? Since it is clear that in the collaborative online communities of practice, young people develop abilities and create value in a way the school can't emulate, wouldn't

it be more interesting for the school system to learn to do the things that are done online, instead of relegating them to the sphere of ‘free time’ and ‘private life’? Wouldn’t it be better for the school, as a place where citizens are prepared for the world of work and public life, to allow itself to be exposed to the kind of collaborative work and rich sociability found in online cultures, instead of trying to ‘integrate’ students and teach them to do what they already know how to do very well?

Ever since the advent of the narratives of ‘standardization’ and pro-European modernization that have served as a frame of hegemonic meaning for the Spanish CT, citizens have been treated a little like those ‘struggling students’ who, just like Mei, never manage to pass the subject of ‘modernity.’ But now we can theorize that online cultures also have their own important potential: the potential to transform that ‘great school’ that is society. A society in which, as Rancière says in *Le Maître ignorant*, ‘The government is nothing more than the authority of the best ones in class’ (12).

#### 4.4.4. Construction of ‘democratic subjectivity’ online

However, it is clear that adapting the online (digital) collaborative forms of creation and diffusion of value to analog contexts is no easy task. On this subject, Margarita Padilla (2013), defender, participant, and expert of those cultures, is emphatic: ‘Social change cannot come only from the Internet. It has to be done with bodies. We must go out and demonstrate in the streets, we must find food for those who don’t have it, stop evictions, protect the undocumented ...’

But at the same time, perhaps the best way of doing all those things is to have confidence in the abilities that online experience tends to foster in anyone, and which was essential when the movements in the plazas started:

What the Internet gives us is another way to experience the world. A joyful experience of abundance, cooperation, creativity, authorship ... I think that experience influenced many people to go to the plazas and not to see others simply as someone who walks all over you or bothers you, but as a potential associate.

The spread of this experience to a massive public is turning out to be a powerful antidote to that ‘passion for inequality’ produced by the still-hegemonic cultural elitism in Spanish society. The world of free software and hackers has contributed at least two fundamental things that are transforming the subjectivity of many people: the tendency to see the other as a potential collaborator, more than as a potential competitor who will set himself above or below me; and pride in one’s ability to create and

distribute cultural wealth (code, information, etc.) not so much from a group identity, but in collective processes open to anyone.

There is something crucial in the online world, and it is that, unlike modern bourgeois culture and the fields of aesthetics and the sciences that harbor it, the Internet is a space under construction, in which competition for prestige (the production of symbolic capital) is still to a great extent subject to the struggle for the reproduction of the common space itself (neutral network, 'free' information). But, in addition, in the neutral, decentralized network that hackers have built and that now defends many people who use it as a common space, 'intelligence is everywhere,' as Padilla says. In other words, it is a system that works not so much, or at least not primarily, because of the desire that my altruistic contributions be recognized, because of the desire that my intelligence be appreciated, but because of the desire that there be a common space where intelligences can freely develop their abilities in collaboration.

It's interesting to keep in mind, then, the exceptional potential for creation of subjectivity of ways of life oriented towards commonality rather than towards competition, which this version of the Web represents. It is, we could say, a whole 'passion for commonality' that proliferates around the experience of the decentralized network and, notably, around its defense. The struggles against the *Sinde-Wert* Law were a decisive moment for the construction of a subjectivity that was perceived as different, foreign to the rancidly hierarchical, competitive world of political parties, mass media, and even of the cultural, sports, intellectual, and artistic 'star system.' A rupture has occurred: not so much an attempt to defeat those elites, but to play a different game.

However, in emerging into the field of creating computer code and potentially transmitting all that immaterial culture, the cultures of sharing that extend from the Internet to the new movements locate their struggle for a common space, for good or for bad, in the heart of the capitalist economy, affecting the spheres of work, politics, and aesthetics. The interesting side of this is that they can't be easily locked up in the 'ghetto' of 'free time' or the 'art world,' as happened to the popular cultures of the twentieth century. The most complicated side of the matter is that, precisely because they affect the heart of the institutions of economic capital production, the capitalist systems for extraction of collectively produced wealth constantly find ways to benefit themselves, as they have always done, from these forms of collective value creation.

The lack of a strong identity and dense social ties, such as, for example, those possessed by the peasant cultures of survival, rooted at the local level, makes it difficult for the 'free culture' to limit, support, and defend

the wealth it produces collectively, in the face of the large mechanisms of privatization that parasitize the mutant space of the Web. When it comes to communities open to anyone, it becomes difficult to avoid the intrusion of ‘free riders’ like the big digital companies that make money thanks to the collaborative work of users to whom they give nothing in return. On the other hand, the pragmatic ‘hacker’ or ‘geek’ mentality, focused on the solution of specific problems, can lead to a certain degree of blindness regarding those same indirect processes of privatizing collective wealth, which often are not resolved simply by granting an open license or by the opening of a specific protocol. These types of ‘free culture’ resources can end up like small boats adrift on the sea of neoliberal privatization.<sup>12</sup>

In this regard, I think an interesting way to approach the 15M movement, which is the topic of the next chapter, is to understand it as a kind of attempt to respond to certain questions that arise from the contradictions inherent in the experience of online cultures, and particularly in the attempt to translate that experience to the analog world. Questions that, perhaps, could be formulated more or less in the following way: What if we constructed a small city where we could make everything we needed and it seemed worthwhile to us to do it using only distributed collaborative practices like those of the Web? What if we constructed a city removed from neoliberalism in the very heart of the neoliberal city itself?

12 The study about ‘audiovisual commons’ I mentioned previously points out that some businesses are commonly seen to commodify the volunteer work that sustains those ‘commons,’ thus privatizing the wealth that others produce without contributing anything. This is because, the authors assert, the value is not just in the results, in the shared resources produced, but also in ‘the information generated during the interaction process needed to produce them’ (142). And this interaction and information is sometimes used for private, profit-making purposes. In this way, ‘Wikiwashing’ practices are undertaken—a term coined by analogy with the ‘greenwashing’ of the oil companies. This happens especially in the case of big profit-based companies like Yahoo and Google, which associate their image with ‘the values of collaboration and sharing’ by disguising their profit mechanisms.

In this respect, see Lara (2013) regarding the unpaid collective work that benefits, for example, Twitter; see also Padilla (2010) on the inevitable ambiguity of Web 2.0 that makes it a niche for open value production, but also for privatizing business practices.