

**New Media Activism:  
Looking beyond the last 5 minutes**

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***Discussion Question:** Each successive generation of "new" technologies brings with it new potentials for collective action as well as mechanisms for reaffirming the existing social order. What structural factors suggest that contemporary new media represent a tactical advantage for social movements today? How may we frame an understanding of activist media that avoids the pitfalls of technological determinism while also accounting for the undeniable impact of shifts in technology on the deployment of these technologies within social movements? How would you theorize the relationship between the specific affordances of networked media and activist networks as a social phenomenon?*

## **I. Introduction**

The heady days of the rapid wave of networked activism that crested at the turn of millenium ended with the post-September 11th rise of the national security state and the global ‘War on Terror.’ Yet the networked activists bubbled along beneath the surface, gaining visibility again with the largest street mobilization in human history on February 15th, 2003, in an international day of action against the unilateral US war on Iraq that was conceived at the World Social Forum, then coordinated and circulated through the net. Meanwhile, the cultural industries were gearing up to appropriate, commodify, and monetize the tools and techniques of popular communication pioneered by radical tech-activists. By 2008, ‘Web 2.0’ and ‘User Generated Content’ had been adopted as the hegemonic concept for how new media firms could aggregate eyeballs to sell to online advertisers, while tech-activists prepared interventions in the ‘new’ spaces of mobile devices and virtual worlds. Everyday users, of course, continued the long war of attrition against the intellectual monopoly industries through constant digital poaching and piracy. To better understand the scene, in the following pages we will first clarify the relationship between technologies and their social shaping and use; second, briefly describe the evolution of the cultural industries, from mass audience to the individual as market segment; third, examine the grassroots appropriation of video technology; and finally, end with some brief speculative theory on the possibilities of the ‘new’ media space for tactical intervention by activists.

## **II. Technological determinism / social shaping of technology**

Raymond Williams’ classic (1974) study of television as a technology and as cultural form helps us traverse the narrow but steady path between the ideology of *technological determinism* and its flawed opposite, *determined technology*. Williams writes against the notion that technology is either an ‘engine of history’ or that it can be reduced to an ‘effect’ of existing structural factors:

"While we have to reject technological determinism, in all its forms, we must be careful not to substitute for it the notion of a determined technology. Technological determinism is an untenable notion because it substitutes for real social, political and economic intention, either the random autonomy of invention or an abstract human essence. But the

notion of a determined technology has a similar one-sided, one way version of human process. Determination is a real social process, but never (as in some theological and some Marxist versions) a wholly controlling, wholly predicting set of causes. On the contrary, the reality of determination is the setting of limits and the exertion of pressures, within which variable social practices are profoundly affected but never necessarily controlled." (Williams, 1974: 133).

All technology, then, is developed by specific groups at particular moments in order to be used in a way that benefits their interests. Williams' *cultural materialist* approach focuses primarily on class as a category of determination, but later thinkers extend this analysis with an understanding of how class, gender, and "race" operate in a mutually constitutive matrix. For example, Judy Wajcman explores women's (invisible) contributions to science, feminist critiques of the patriarchal culture of scientific and technological institutions, the use of technology by men to either replace women from the labor force or deskill women's work, and the gendered process of professionalization by which women's knowledge is appropriated or displaced (Wajcman, 1991). In addition, Sandra Harding reminds us of how 'Western' science and technology has actually appropriated a great deal of knowledge from 'non-Western' scientific traditions; how science is used to construct "race" and gender; of the unequal "race," class, and gender composition of scientific practice and institutions; of the long history of the application of science and technology in ways meant to control or destroy racialized and gendered subalterns; and of the permeation of "race" and gender bias in the philosophy of science (Harding, 1993). The *social shaping of technology* approach that Harding and Wajcman advocate considers technologies in terms of knowledge, processes, and objects, the development, deployment, and social uses of which are shaped by key forces including capitalist profitability, militarism, racism, and gender.

At the same time, Harding, Wajcman, and Williams all emphasize that technologies may later be adopted, adapted, modified, appropriated, hacked, and reused in ways never conceived by their initial developers. Potentially, this can be done by the initial developers' adversaries or by a competing group. As an example, Williams explores television: its historical development, its path into the home, the ideological and aesthetic contents of its audiovisual 'flow' (Williams, 1974). While of course always recognizing that the most powerful players exercise great shaping ability over the technical form, organization of production and distribution, content, and ideology of the messages deployed, he urges us to also look at people's radical and subversive practices using the (then new) media

technology. Williams is especially interested not just in ‘radical readings’ of popular culture by media consumers, but in alternative practices, processes, and technology use. This is in keeping with our interest in hacking, subversion, appropriation, and reconfiguration, rather than simply reading against the grain.

Beyond noting subaltern resistance in ‘alternative’ (marginal) practices, both cultural materialism and the social shaping of technology approaches also share the desire to articulate radically egalitarian visions and strategies for science and technology in the future. In his conclusion, Williams prefigures a potentially liberatory use of television technology:

"We could have inexpensive, locally based yet internationally extended television systems, making possible communication and information sharing on a scale that not long ago would have seemed utopian. These are the contemporary tools of the long revolution towards an educated and participatory democracy, and of the recovery of effective communication in complex urban and industrial societies." (Williams, 1974: 157).

Williams’ (1974) vision sounds very much like the current (2008) practice of the [transmission.cc](http://transmission.cc) video activist network, or the previous (2001) discussion around [video.indymedia.org](http://video.indymedia.org), or even earlier (1980s) efforts to construct a localized, decentralized, community run television network on the back of the public access system (Halleck, 2002). We will return to this below, but first it is worth briefly reviewing the technical, political, and social developments in the cultural industries that have brought us to the current moment.

### **III. Evolution of the Cultural Industries**

Some of the most interesting ‘prehistories’ of the present-day cultural industries include Daniel Headrick’s (1988) study of imperialist technology transfer in the expansion of European colonialism across the globe; Paul Starr’s (2004) social and political history of the rise of the telegraph, radio, and print press in the United States; and Raymond Williams’ (1961) analysis of the growth of the reading public and the popular press in England from the 1800s through the middle of the 20th century. Robert McChesney’s (2004) work also provides an important overview of repeated waves of battle between

grassroots activists and corporate power in the commercialization of each new media technology in the US. In the modern (electronic) age, however, we might divide the cultural industries into three rough periods of development. The first is the age of *mass culture*, which extends roughly from the emergence of commercial radio broadcasting through the appearance of television and the rise (in the US) of the three major networks. The second period is the *multichannel* universe of cable television, followed by satellite television. The third, and present, period is the increasing fragmentation and infinite multiplication of the segmented online audience, with the potential end goal of the *individual as market segment*.

During the first stage (mass culture), the primary critique from the left was articulated by the Frankfurt School theorists. Fleeing Nazi Germany, and having seen the power of the national socialist propaganda machinery, in the US they were dismayed by the rise of what they termed the *culture industry*. They saw in the Hollywood studios a mechanism by which the ideology of the ruling class would be fed to the duped masses, undermining their ability to develop class consciousness and make the socialist revolution (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1944). During the second stage, the unitary conception of mass culture held by the Frankfurt School broke apart as media firms increasingly pursued strategies of segmentation and target marketing. Curtin and Streeter (2001) describe the period of restructuring away from the 'high network' age of the 50s through the 80s, built around creating mass audiences between the 3 national networks, over to a multichannel, satellite and cable environment from the 1990s onward. The new industry buzzwords were market segmentation and diversification of content. In their view, by the 1990s there were two main strategies: the blockbuster, that shot for nonchallenging content to aggregate the largest possible audience, and tight market segmentation, which shot for 'edge' and intensity to attract a particular niche (Curtin and Streeter, 2001). Along with the fragmentation into myriad target markets, Dallas Smythe wrote about the way in which the commodity produced by commercial television was the audience itself: 'eyeballs' aggregated by particular programming flows, packaged and sold to advertisers (Smythe, 1981/2006). There was still a homogenizing effect, because the goal remained the aggregation of large numbers of eyeballs, but there was also a growing recognition of *multiple publics* (or rather, viewers/consumers). Each segment needed to be potentially large enough to be a lucrative eyeball package for advertisers, but space began to open for cultural content that diverged from the hegemonic (white, middle class, patriarchal heteronormative) norm. Oscar Gandy has extended this line of critique by examining the way that race, class, and gender inequalities are both reflected in and constructed by the advertising structure of

commercial media. For example, examining the advertising rates (the price per eyeball) of different groups of people (young white males; middle age Latinas, young Black males, and so on) Gandy demonstrates that it is actually possible to quantify the unequal value ascribed to each group by the cultural industries. The evidence, unsurprisingly, shows that white eyeballs are the most valuable (Gandy, 2000).

The new strategy of diversification had important implications for identity politics and the increased representation of formerly invisible or ‘marginal’ subjectivities in the new multichannel arena. For example, Larry Gross describes the long struggle of GLBTQ folks for representation, employment, and visibility within the cultural industries; Katherine Sender examines the role of advertising agencies in the creation of a ‘homogenized’ Lesbian market, Arlene Dávila documents the creation of a unified 'Pan-Latino' market in the United States (Gross, 2001; Sender, 2004; Dávila, 2001). In each of these cases, the construction of the market, and hence of nationally distributed (mass, but segmented mass) cultural reference points, came about through a combination of social movement activity, activist demands for increased representation and employment within mass media, and 'cultural entrepreneurs' within the advertising industry who managed to serve up a convincing promise of minority eyeball platters to both content producers, content distributors, and advertisers. However, in parallel to the ongoing cycle of minority demands for representation in the broadcast media, usually followed by incorporation, definition as new target market, and the resulting modification of subaltern subjectivities, there also lies a rich historical fabric of counterhegemonic cultural production rooted in communities and based outside the orbit of corporate conglomerates, or as Halleck (2002) calls it, ‘Hand-Held Visions.’

#### **IV. Histories of Activist/Alternative/Community/Independent Media**

Dee Dee Halleck might be described as the 'godmother' of community media in the United States. One of the cofounders of Paper Tiger Television and of Deep Dish TV, she worked both in hands-on workshop contexts and in policy battles, guided by a vision of participatory mediamaking that would see marginalized people move from being misrepresented in televisual mass media to producing their own video, TV, and cinema. Halleck's practice ranged from media educator, video artist, community media policy lobbyist, president of Association for Independent Video and Film, professor at UCSD, and radical technology activist. In 2002, she published *Hand-Held Visions: The Impossible Possibilities*

*of Community Media*, an insider's view into four decades of radical, grassroots communication in the United States and around the world. Key themes for Halleck include critical media literacy; public access; radical technology appropriation; North-South information inequality; the role of institutions in supporting democratic communication; and the bottom-up construction of a truly democratic public sphere. Her take on critical media literacy comes out of her experience making movies with children in New York City's Lower East Side, inmates in upstate New York, and many other marginalized groups of people (as well as undergraduates at UCSD). The key to developing a deep critique of the cultural industries, for Halleck, is to experience the creative process of video production, alongside viewing of alternative media examples and reading theoretical texts. She is not sympathetic to the 'active audience' thesis of a certain strand of cultural studies: "Critical viewing of a program that someone else has made is not equivalent to making your own program. The alienation that passive viewing breeds is practically impossible to overcome." (Halleck, 2002: 89). What's more, appropriation of video technology not only reduces alienation and empowers self-representation, it engages people in the larger political economy of communication and inserts the public back into policy debates about communication technology.

### *Public Access*

Along these lines, a key development for Halleck was the door opened by public access TV in the United States. In the cable franchise system, cities negotiate with cable companies over rights-of-way and market access in exchange for a cut of the profits, and in the US in the 1970s, activists also managed to insert provisions for 'first come, first served' public channels, production equipment, and often a cut of revenue dedicated to staffing, maintenance, outreach, and physical infrastructure. By the 1980s, literally thousands of public access stations were created across the country. While mass media has painted a picture of cable access as a dumping ground for wingnuts, Halleck describes the rich history of community based communication development that has taken place based on the public access structure. Public access, as she describes it, has overall served as a laboratory of alternative technology use and democratic, participatory media production. Public access provides physical space for face to face meetings, trainings, and decisionmaking, equipment for production, and channels of distribution for people who otherwise have (or had) no access to audiovisual communication. In addition, public access centers are useful in emergency situations, for local nonprofits, as vehicles for expression by artists, as forums for dissent even in times of mass media unity (the leadup to war), as a

mechanism to provide a forum for marginalized positions (of all political stripes) and 'airing' of sensitive undercurrents (for example, race relations) that are often too touchy for mass media to deal with. Finally, Halleck points out that the process of pushing for, creating, and participating in public access built a nationwide network of activists:

"However, perhaps the most significant development of the public access movement has been the informed practice of thousands of individuals who have taken an active role not only in the production of their own television, but in the implementation, the nurturing, and the defending of local telecommunications infrastructures. The process of organizing public access in the United States has created a diverse and significant group of media activists who are now knowledgeable and vigilant on issues of technology and communication policy." (Halleck, 2002: 108).

The public access movement, as Halleck describes it, was a broad coalition that emerged between labor, women's organizations, Black and Latino/a organizations, HIV activists, consumer rights groups, and a range of others. Public access provided a place for these groups to organize together, both on a local level and nationally, and served as an important node in the growth of a new generation of networked activists focused on radically democratic communication.

### *Citizen's Media (1.0)*

If Halleck provides a detailed history of community video in the US context, Rodriguez (2001) takes a transnational comparative approach to what she calls *citizen's media*. Rodriguez emphasizes that in addition to challenging state or corporate media hegemony, citizen's media has components usually undertheorized by communication scholars: "the survival of cultural identities, the expression of marginalized social and cultural symbolic matter, and the growth of subordinate groups in terms of empowerment and self-esteem." (Rodriguez, 2001: xii). Her main project is to challenge prior analyses of alternative and citizen's media, on the basis that most scholars see only failure in these forms since they seek a counterhegemonic project that will be able to challenge the domination of the cultural industries. Indeed, after a brief utopian moment in the 1970s, the failure of liberation movements and their associated communication projects to radically transform power relationships (between nation

states in the South and North, between men and women, against the expansion of capitalism at the hands of MNCs, and so on) led many academics of the old Left to pronounce 'alternative media' a failure. However, Rodriguez argues that this is due to the limitations of a binary conception of power in which each party is thought of as occupying a static position: dominant or subordinate; and the media produced by each interest group (class, gender, race, etc.) 'wins' or 'loses' based on whether it achieves the hegemonic position.

Instead, she invites us to begin with Chantal Mouffe's conception of radical democracy, where subject positions are not fixed or essential, each person occupies multiple subject positions simultaneously, subjectivity is historically and contextually specific, and power operates as a social relationship between people rather than as a fixed binary. The same individual may pass, in the course of a day, through many different subject positions and power positions, through interlocking axes of class, race, gender, age, and myriad other coordinates. From here, citizen's media - which Rodriguez prefers to 'alternative media' because the latter implies a binary opposition to Corporate Media - should be retheorized based on its contribution to radical democracy, rather than its ability to compete with the cultural industries head to head. Citizen's media, as a process that people engage in and through which they learn to speak and articulate their own subjectivities through electronic communication, helps regenerate cultural identity and produces empowerment and self-worth in marginalized people who take it up. In a symbolic universe where they are condemned to invisibility, citizen media enable speech for those in positions of relative powerlessness. Crucially, Rodriguez shows us how a focus on identity and the symbolic does not need to be a retreat to the 'active audience' stance:

"Chronicling the mediascape in terms of active audiences who negotiate the homogenous products of a few transnational media corporations would not only be narrow but also incomplete. Indeed, in a move that cannot but be called myopic, media academics have decided to almost entirely neglect a multitude of sites where media communication happens. Sites where women, men, and children are not exiled to the moment of reception, but where they have also colonized media production. Sites where a group of citizens has gained control over an electronic communication medium and uses it for its own agenda, whatever that is. Labeled with terms as diverse as "community-based media," "alternative media," "local media," "*média libres*, or "minority media," these sites of media production bloom in an astounding variety of contexts, complicating a

scenario made up exclusively of media conglomerates and their active audiences."  
(Rodriguez, 2001: 26).

After laying her theoretical framework, Rodriguez reviews the literature on community media from around the world, with an emphasis on Latin America and Spain. She considers successes (community empowerment, mobilization, cultural identity reinforced, gender subjectivity developed) and difficulties (funding structures, lack of autonomy from the state or from political parties, private foundations, and other funding sources; organizational structure and community accountability; sustainability on a shoestring). She then develops four case studies: popular correspondents in Nicaragua under the Sandinistas; community televisions in Catalonia; participatory video production among poor Colombian women; and the early stages of Latino radio in the United States. Overall, Rodriguez focuses on the role of citizens' media in creating symbolic legitimation for communities denied access and visibility in mass media, and in the prioritization of the local even as most media, acquired by multinational chains, shift emphasis to the national or global in order to aggregate larger sets of eyeballs.

### *The Black Press*

Rodriguez' emphasis on the value of community media for the participants, and focus on the elements of symbolic and cultural contestation as well as embeddedness in local specificity and ties to geographically localized community, are important correctives both to active audience theory and to failed Old Left visions of seizing all power in the realm of symbolic production. However, she perhaps goes too far to deny the possibility of community media as a counterhegemonic project. In Vogel's (2001) compilation of historical analyses of the Black Press in the United States, we find evidence that "community media" often does explicitly aspire to challenge, correct, and even replace the hegemony of the existing mass media. For example, Frederick Douglass' *North Star* was founded specifically to create a nationally distributed alternative to the white abolitionist press controlled by William Lloyd Garrison, and to capture the attention of the abolitionist public; David Walker's *Appeal* was both a vehicle for arguments against the 1820 Missouri Compromise and for the construction of a national Black counterpublic; *Ebony* was an intervention against the hegemonic symbolic coding of Black people as ugly, stupid, and degenerate through the language of modern photography. What's more, the

construction of a Black counterpublic was not limited to a nationalist discourse; in fact, from early on Black writers and the Black press were transnational in perspective. Langston Hughes' dispatches from the Spanish Civil War engaged the links between racism, class oppression, and imperialism, describing in poetic prose the encounter of an African American volunteer in an antifascist contingent with a dying Moroccan conscript in the fascist army. Internationalist perspectives in resistance to race and class oppression are also evident in the paper of the Black Panther Party (BPP), which at the height of the BPP's power reached a circulation of between 100,000 and 200,000 and, through revenue from subscriptions, paid for itself and generated funds for the BPP's other activities - free health clinics, afterschool food for children, and community monitoring of police brutality (Vogel, 2001).

## **V. Contemporary 'New' media activism and the political economy of web 2.0**

We have thus far taken a long view of the transformation of the cultural industries and the parallel evolution of radically democratic, grassroots media. What has changed, if anything, with the rise of the net? Some theorists heralded the arrival of *digital democracy*, but technotopian predictions have a way of crashing against the cold shores of structural inequality. Jenkins and Thorburn (2003) summarize the recent debates on the relationship between the internet and democracy, moving from the optimistic predictions that the net would radically change electoral politics in the 2000 election, to the minor (but significant) realities: Bill Bradley raised record contributions online; the Bush and Gore campaigns posted responses to the presidential debates on their websites; campaign coordinators used polling data and sophisticated modeling software to organize get out the vote and fundraising drives. They argue that observers looking for a 'critical moment' of transformation to a new digital political regime are likely to be disappointed:

"We will not discover a single decisive moment when the Internet emerges as a force in our national politics. Instead, digital democracy will be decentralized, unevenly distributed, even profoundly contradictory. Moreover, the effects some have ascribed to networked computing's democratic impulses are likely to appear first not in electoral politics, but in cultural forms: in a changed sense of community, for example, or in a citizenry less dependent on official voices of expertise and authority." (Jenkins and Thorburn, 2003: 2).

If we look beyond the framework of liberal representative democracy to consider the implications for direct democracy, we find a rich field of ‘new’ ICT practice among networked social movements. The main implication for social movements has been to amplify the circulation of struggles through strategies of networked *counterinformation*, discussed below; *tactical media*, and *mobile activism*. The recent arrival of *Peer-to-Peer IPTV* has important implications as well. At the same time, the cultural industries have rapidly moved to enclose and monetize networked cultural production. In this section, we will briefly examine the transformation of counterinformation by activist adoption of networked ICTs, then discuss the political economy of Web 2.0.

### ***Counterinformation***

López Martín and Domínguez (2004) document the conceptual history of *contrainformación* (counterinformation), drawing from the specificity of the evolution of autonomous media practices over three decades in Spain but developing a theoretical framework applicable to the globalized anticapitalist movement of the late 1990s and early years of the 21st century. They begin by identifying the key characteristics of counterinformation, which they locate as media practice geared towards and rooted in social movements that share an identity as ‘autonomous from the state and the market.’ Under this umbrella they include strands of anticapitalism, the antiwar movement, antipatriarchies, and even the punk nihilism of 'anti-everything' that often serves as a bridge to bring youth into the countercultural underground. Counterinformation works against the cultural industries, and operates through specific agendas and styles of work. They identify two eras of counterinformation in Spain: the first phase takes place in the 1980s, dominated by the zine scene, the first free radios, the anarko-punk movement, and *autonomia*. *Autonomia* was mostly focused on the politics of the personal, the denunciation of mainstream politics and mass media, and the geographically local, and operated through tactics of protest and conflict. The second phase coincides with the spread of the internet and broader inclusivity of gender, human rights, work, *okupación* (squatting), ecology, free software, international solidarity and global resistance. During the second stage, counterinformation practitioner-theorists developed a more specific and systematic vision of an information system based in the social movements and transnationally articulated to local struggles everywhere. The working styles of counterinformation groups are consciously horizontal and collective, against the verticalism of both the

mass media and the propaganda organs of the old left political parties. However, they identify a paradox internal to counterinformation practice: on the one hand, counterinformation ruptures the fiction of journalistic 'objectivity' and reveals that all information is produced, selected, and framed within particular political ideologies. At the same time, counterinformation makes truth claims of its own, thereby replicating the discourse of objectivity that it pretends to disrupt (López Martín and Domínguez, 2004).

In response, Italian free radio activist and media theorist Franco Berardi (Bifo) began to write about *media activism* as a superior phase of counterinformation, in the sense that counterinformation fails to transcend the goal of objectivity while media activism questions the media spectacle itself. The emphasis shifts from providing a readymade counternarrative to transforming passive information consumers into producers and remixers. What's more, in direct confrontation over 'truth' between the media of power and the contrainformation guerilla, contrainformation will always be limited to a subordinate, marginal role. Finally, contrainformation imagines that the conflict is mostly over content, while Bifo maintains that the power of the mass media operates constantly, subliminally, bathing the mind in constant media flows and through general media immersion eroding the desire to think critically. The mass media operates primarily on the level of emotions and desire; counterinformation that targets rationality alone has little chance of disrupting this process. The argument is thus for strategies of 'brain hacking' or 'subvertising.' Key terms for Bifo are 'mediascape,' 'mindscape,' media activism, and infosphere. Bifo advocates the construction of new public spaces that will allow an 'exodus from the privatized space' of the mercantiled and militarized mass media (Berardi, 2007).

These thinkers have also noted an evolution in discourse about the relationship between the internet and social movements:

"The first discourses about cyberspace presented it as a space with an absence of control, where the State could turn off machines or dismount networks, but in which it would be technically impossible to regulate, monitor identities or perform administrative control. In the imaginary of the first hackers and above all in the imaginary of the first cyber activists, this discourse, which defined the technical and social ideal in which the majority of social movements on the net worked, crossed elements halfway between the desired and the real." (López Martín and Domínguez, 2004: 3.1, trans. from Spanish).

This cyberlibertarian view of the Net was always a fiction, since none of the supposed properties of 'the internet' (free circulation of information, anonymity, lack of monitoring or censorship capability, openness to content from anyone connected) are necessary or automatic. Rather, they are constantly produced (or not) by the arrangement of hardware, software, laws and regulations, technical bodies, and social norms.

### ***The political economy of Web 2.0***

By 2008, a new layer of private firms has come to dominate the infrastructure for online cultural production, and activist-theorists have embarked on an attempt to interrogate the political economy of Web 2.0. Tiziana Terranova (2006) approaches this area through the concept of *immaterial labor*, which she traces from Marx's "Fragment on Machines" in the *Grundrisse* through Italian autonomist thinkers like Maurizio Lazzarato and Paolo Virno. For Terranova, immaterial labor in the age of general intellect is not a way to force affect and subjectivity back into class analysis, but to trouble the false analytical division between economy and subjectivity. She argues that much of the writing on immaterial labor in the early 2000s went too far in over-privileging the 'knowledge worker,' somehow collapsing a wide range of 'immaterial' labor practices into a catch-all category attractive to intellectuals but missing the degree to which division of labor persists and intensifies in 'knowledge industries.' 'Immaterial labor' is broad enough to include highly skilled software programmers and call center workers; nearly any form of managerial work as well as data entry. In addition, there is nothing 'inherently' liberatory about immaterial labor. Quite the opposite:

"Immaterial labor, in fact, is not immune to new diagrams of control, on the contrary. As the experience of the digital economy and network culture demonstrate, such diagrams work by reimposing centres and hierarchical distinctions against a much larger background of continuous variation (as the work on scale free networks demonstrate); by preemptively assigning objectives, outcomes, and deadlines against the uneven temporality of processes of autonomous organization which do not always follow their rhythm (as in the software industry); by channeling desire to prop up identities against the threat of dissipation (as in movements such as evangelical and nationalist blogs); by policing the rights of property against the indiscipline of nonlinear circulation (as in the

legal wars against peer-to-peer systems)." (Terranova, 2006: 33).

Following Terranova, we might say that there is a bifurcation, or split, between immaterial labor that self-organizes in autonomous formations, and the move to capture, control, monitor, monetize, and extract value from immaterial labor, as well as to mobilize immaterial workers towards the reproduction of older subjectivity formations (ethnonationalism, religious fundamentalisms). Media activists have begun to grapple with these problems: in a recent edition of *Mute magazine*, Dmytri Kleiner and Brian Wyrick denounced Web 2.0 as "a venture capitalist's paradise where investors pocket the value produced by unpaid users, ride on the technical innovations of the free software movement, and kill off the decentralising potential of peer-to-peer production." (Kleiner and Wyrick, 2007). Andrew Lowenthal of Engage Media dissected the business model of Web 2.0 media darlings like YouTube and MySpace:

"One of the key business models for these "Web 2.0" start ups has been the basic idea of providing an infrastructure and technology for users and then selling those eyes to advertisers and the contributor community to a larger company – it happened with Flickr, YouTube, MySpace and more. There is a huge rush of companies trying to create the next big site to bring in the people and make their pot of gold. Users need to become far more savvy as to the imbalance in power that is being generated and who they are helping make millionaires." (Lowenthal, 2007).

Moving from critique to action, Lowenthal is part of the team responsible for producing *Plumi*, a customized version of the FOSS content management system Plone, tailored to the needs of video activists (<http://plumi.net>). This is part of a broader recognition by networked tech-activists that the construction of autonomous infrastructure must continue despite the current domination of online cultural infrastructure by corporate providers. The rise of Web 2.0 firms also forces media activists to abandon once and for all the discourse of technotopia or 'digital democracy,' and to return to the long, difficult, but ultimately crucial and rewarding work of engaging with social movements of the marginalized base.

## **VI. Conclusions**

We have clarified the ways in which ‘new’ ICTs, like all communication technologies (and indeed, like all of science and technology) are developed and deployed within conditions of great structural inequality along interlocking lines of race, class, and gender. Nevertheless, the structures that condition technological development are never total; accordingly, counterhegemonic social movements constantly seek to adopt and modify ICTs to circulate their struggles. We have also seen how the cultural industries have moved decisively to incorporate, appropriate, monetize, and exploit the cultural and affective labor of community mediamaking through the strategy of ‘Web 2.0.’ In return, social movements make use of popular (commercial) social networking and video sharing sites in order to reach larger audiences and achieve visibility without the need to attract the broadcast media. While this is an important strategy, ‘Movement Generated Content’ also provides a rich layer of information deposits for state and corporate datamining, and corporate infrastructure proves pliant to State demands for takedowns and censorship. So, what is to be done? Social movements should continue to appropriate corporate Web 2.0 spaces and use them to circulate their struggles, while educating themselves about the corporate exploitation of mediamaking and social networking labor, state surveillance of social network sites, and the ease of corporate or state censorship of material on such sites. At the same time, they need to help build and participate in the already existing autonomous infrastructure of communication. Meanwhile, independent mediamakers, tech activists, bloggers, and popular communicators should think about how they can contribute to training and capacity building for community-based organizations that are currently marginalized in both broadcast media and online spaces. This means doing the hard work of powersharing (in mediamaking practices, equipment and infrastructure access, funding access, and so on) with grassroots, poor-led, community based, people of color, youth-led, and queer organizations.

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