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Piracy Cultures

Piracy Culture in Greece: Local Realities and Civic Potentials

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Departing from a critical perspective on intellectual property rights, this article investigates the popular phenomenon of free online file-sharing beyond its hegemonic framing as piracy. The article focuses on the civic potentials entailed in free and participatory culture of new media and ICT. A "civic" focus, in the context of free sharing, aims at assessing the potential of a democratic culture that scholars (Castells, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009) distinguish to be developing through new media and new ICT uses in the everyday life and communication practices of different people worldwide. Empirical research draws on users' ideas, practices, and experiences of new ICT and file-sharing, contextualized in the local experience of Greece. The local example aims at foregrounding particularistic, sociocultural variants defining cultural practices, while also addressing the controversies of global IP policies. The analysis shows that civic elements may be developed through P2P practices, but they rely on material social experiences, ideological issues, events, and social and communicative relations that are "external" to the realities developing through technologies and digital networks.

Introduction: Piracy, Policy, Politics

The study of "piracy cultures" that the current special issue of the *International Journal of Communication* proposes concerns a largely understudied area of popular media uses: the online (and offline) sharing of intellectual material, usually in digital form. The term "piracy" is a metaphor describing informal uses of media, technology, and products of intellect that cannot be controlled by the industry, the market, copyright security code, or law. In this article, "piracy" is distinct from the phenomenon of counterfeiting (Mathews, 2008). Although the aforementioned distinction is controversial, it is

nevertheless maintained in order to highlight the reality of free sharing (Boyle, 2008; Lessig, 2004) with no monetary transactions involved.

Research (Andersson, 2009; Cammaerts, 2011) has shown that people sharing copyrighted material for free do not see such sharing as "theft." Free exchange of culture and information are important aspects of human communication. Furthermore, the hardware industry and the market itself provide the tools enabling the sharing of copyrighted goods, through new information and communication technologies (ICTs). The concept of "free culture" (Lessig, 2004) is used in this article as a general framework to problematize hegemonic notions of piracy and IP, in relation to institutional, ideological, and material processes, such as cultural production and consumption in late capitalism.

The term "piracy" is controversial. I will therefore be referring to "free culture" or to digital file-sharing and peer-to-peer(s) (P2P) practices instead. What corporations, media campaigns, and policy makers worldwide frame as "piracy" is a practice developed through the diffusion of new media with old media uses (Flew, 2007, p. 24). The term "culture" is used in the article's title to define the local, everyday life and economic and political contexts of pirate (file-sharing) practices. The study of "piracy culture" looks at the voice of the agent of P2P file-sharing, beyond his or her criminalization by intellectual property rights (IPR) owners and policymakers.

Departing from a critique of the political economy of copyrights, the article focuses on the civic potentials entailed in the free and participatory culture of new media and ICT by looking at the experiences of people from Greece. IP regulations worldwide have a strong pro-private interest "bias." Intellectual property regulations are an important social issue (Zizek, 2008) related to undemocratic policy developments worldwide (Agamben et al., 2009). A "civic" focus, in the context of free sharing, aims at studying the democratic potential of new media and new ICT (Castells, 2009; Couldry et al., 2007; Dahlgren, 2009). Civic culture concerns the pre-political base where concrete grassroots engagement with social affairs, the development of democratic citizen consciousness, and participation in political activities all occur. Democracy is a social imaginary horizon of a polity that is relatively open and "in the making" (Mouffe, 2004). The paper favors a radical democratic model of polity, concerned with social demands of universal justice, equality in material distribution, recognition, popular sovereignty, and inclusion.

Critique of IPR

Critical political economy studies explain IP regimes as rents (Harvey, 2005, 2010) where surplus value is extracted from cultural production. Knowledge and creativity are important assets of value production. Simultaneously, cultural and informational products are important commodities, consumed by an increasing number of people worldwide. IP policy—through the political work of organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Intellectual Property Rights Organization (WIPO) and constant lobbying of national governments by related industries—aims to produce a homogenous global IP regime in order to transcend local "barriers" to global "free trade," and in particular, to delimit the contingency of use that new ICTs provide (Flew, 2007; Siochru et al., 2002, p. 100; Freedman, 2008, p. 14). Transnational laws based on international trade treaties, such as the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) agreement, organize a global, tight framework of IP laws. IP regulations encourage

monopolistic tendencies in IP trade. This occurs due to the political and economic inequality of power between different IP stakeholders, as well as to inequalities between central and peripheral (or semi-peripheral) countries in the global capitalist framework.

Critical scholars (Flew, 2007; Freedman, 2008; Fuchs, 2009; Harvey, 2005; May, 2009; Siochru et al., 2002; Webster, 2006) note that IPR is a site of social antagonism between private and public interests. The acceleration of digital file-sharing due to the popularization of the Internet and new ICT (Siochru et al., 2002, p. 101) is a source of anxiety to cultural industries (David, 2010, p. 98; Freedman, 2008, p. 189). Digital technology—primarily developed to minimize production costs (Garnham, 2005, p. 19)—offers people the possibility of costless reproduction. People appropriate ICT according to their particular needs and interests, through creative and playful practices.

"Piracy" also concerns broad tensions and controversies between cultural "creative" sectors and hardware industries in particular (Lister et al., 2009, p. 205). Tight copyright laws can also block the development of creativity and innovation. Reforms towards the "loosening" of IP laws may primarily concern the flexibilization of production within the late capitalist economic framework, than the advance of democracy and freedom. Debates between free software and open source software (Söderberg, 2002; Berry, 2008) developers and supporters are indicative of the ideological differences underlining different socio-technological projects. "Free market" aspirations (Lister et al., 2009, p. 164) coexist in a mutual constitutive relation to the social potentialities unfolding in new ICTs uses (Terranova, 2004, p. 84).

Civic Discontents and Civic Potentials

The interest in the civic potentials of new ICTs uses concerns the possibilities of real-world practices producing a culture that may broaden democracy in a time of diminishment and decline of democratic politics (Agamben et al., 2009). This can be attributed to the prevalence of the economy over all fields of social activity, as well as to the acceleration of material inequalities on a worldwide scale. Furthermore, critics perceive capitalism as destructive to citizenship due to consumer societies' failure to provide people with cultural resources to develop "autonomous subjectivities" (Dean, 2003, p. 11). Autonomous subjectivity is crucial in developing responsibility to participate in public activity and develop interest in social affairs. Human autonomy concerns the development of limits that will define one's needs. Furthermore, limits set the frames to critically apprehend reality. Consumerism and commodity fetishism—elements upon which capitalism relies—develop a narcissistic, introverted self. Needs are replaced by desire that is constantly fed by commodity culture, desire that has no acute form, end, or limits (ibid., p. 141). The production of subjectivity, as a form of individual autonomy, is therefore endlessly deferred. Instead, the individual is subjected to the reflexive control of commodity culture.

Culture (in the sense of the ethos, values, and meanings of social life in local or global contexts) as Dean (ibid., p. 13) argues, is a form of a system that seeks closure, but is always open to change. Culture exists in a dialectic relation to nature and human agency. Intentional human activity can develop nature and culture toward particular ways that are always susceptible to change. In that sense, commodity culture can always be reversed and changed into something new and potentially more democratic.

Scholars of popular culture, media, and technology (Carpentier, 2011; Castells, 2009); Couldry et al., 2007; Dahlgren, 2009; Mumford, 2005/1967) see a great democratic potential in new media and new ICT uses. New media and new ICT are understood as potential facilitators of a civic culture that will sustain civic engagement and political participation. The interactive and participatory aspect of new media is considered empowering (Bakardjieva, 2009). Furthermore, participatory media provide acute possibilities for presentation and representation that "old" media had concealed. Participatory media allow for the formation of new public spheres where a variety of issues can be discussed, debated, and prioritized by the user-creators of media themselves.

Technology, as Carpentier (2011, p. 269) argues, is an undetermined site of social struggle. The meanings and social relations underlining technological development and technology uses are in constant negotiation by industrial stakeholders, policy makers, and users. The democratic possibility of technology prioritizes the interest of the whole, rather than the imposition of partial interests. Mumford (1967/2005) foregrounds the potential of autonomous technology uses for a humanistic and enlightening development of society. For Mumford, the creation of small-scale technological projects—in opposition to industrial, large scale technological systems—controlled by autonomous human agents, may advance the democratization of society and secure humans from the alienating and dehumanizing effects of machines.

Feenberg (2007, p. 17) argues that creative practices of technology bridge the gap between art and technique. Sennett (2008, p. 24) notes that P2P is a form of "public craft," potentially a solution to the alienating form of today's dominance of competitive labor. For Sennett, the Linux software code symbolizes an ideal form of communal practice to organically revive interest in public affairs. P2P structures are perceived as maximizing users' participation (Carpentier, 2011, p. 275) in production, distribution, and consumption of media (as texts and technologies). Bauwens (2006) discusses the potentials held out by P2P networks to foster broader social change through the development of new, organic, democratic models of production, distribution, and consumption beyond the commodity circle of planned obsolescence.

The civic element refers to the pre-political characteristic that can lead to political thinking and political praxis and concerns the possibility for democratic politics to occur. The article's main concerns are the relation of "free culture" to aspects of civic engagement and the assessment of "free culture" as contributor to the development of a post-capitalist culture, not guided by economic interests and providing a potential answer to the material scarcity that capitalist relations of production impose on the majority of human populations. Considering free culture practices as "organic" forms of civic activity though, may prove to be a displacement of politics (Dean, 2009, p. 113; see also Mouffe, 2004). Politics require articulation. Following Jodi Dean (ibid., p. 115), technologies are tools that can and should be politicized if one needs to address broader social issues, and to develop political praxis (ibid., p. 113).

Research Case and Method

The relation of "piracy" practices to aspects of civic engagement and their political assessment are examined through interviews with local P2P users. The reality of "piracy" unfolds in the Greek context,

as expressed by (some of) the people's own voice. Issues of class, historicity, global policy, and power unfold in the respondents' words. Locality functions as an indicator of particularism, demonstrating contradictions in the global logics of IP laws. Although one can identify global similarities in ongoing social processes related to citizenship, consumerism, and democracy, one should also note that such processes are "translated" within local, nationally orientated contexts (Flew, 2007, p. 170; Freedman, 2008, p. 216), and are underlined by specific historical, cultural, political, and economic variables.

Greece is interesting for studies concerned with global policies, due to its semi-peripheral position in broader transnational institutional constellations like the European Union. "Harmonization" is the principle guiding the appropriation of the European Commission's General Directives, envisioning a framework of rules and norms defending IPRs, common to all member states. Critical theorists of international policy (Castells, 2010; May, 2001; Sell, 2003) observe the power inequalities involved in the formation of IP policies, due to the politically, technologically, and economically weak position of specific nation states to make any meaningful difference to their benefit, in a global antagonistic "free market" framework. Christopher May (2009) argues that the rules of global IP governance empower the political and economic position of states with highly developed cultural industries.

Local Variables

Piracy of copyrighted products became popular in Greece from the 1980s onward, due to the popularity of home taping of music and films. Copyright infringement of U.S. products in particular, was noticed occurring during the 1990s by private mass media for commercial uses (OECD, 1998)—a phenomenon that can be seen today in Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube (Jakobsson & Stierstedt, 2010). A 2011 report by the International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA)—a private-sector organization of U.S. copyright industries—noted "street piracy" (where immigrants sell pirate copies of CDs and DVDs to earn a living) as the main threat to copyright stakeholders, with Internet piracy forming a secondary—but growing—threat. Spring 2010 saw the first persecution and closing down of a local popular torrent tracker site, "gamato.gr," which triggered spontaneous protests of users throughout the country.

In Greece's popular context, media piracy traces its origins to radio pirates, starting in the late 1960s and reaching their peak of activity in the 1980s (Theodosianou, 2010). Just like elsewhere, radio piracy concerned the eagerness of small groups of individuals to communicate their favorite music, due to dissatisfaction with both state monopolies of airwaves and commercial music. Theodosianou notes that social capital—related to the pleasures of clandestine adventure and amateurism, popularity, communication with people, and community service—is the central motivation of pirate radio stations. Political issues relating to information control and discontent with state power also related to the development of pirate and clandestine radio stations (ibid., p. 40). 1990s media deregulation policies resulted in the professionalization of radio pioneers, and the minimization of pirate radio influence through the expansion of media privatization.

Pirate radio in Greece also relates to the do-it-yourself (DIY) subculture that grew in the country from the late 1970s onward. DIY culture has strong influence in Greece, due to the popularity and persistent presence of grassroots, subcultural projects related to underground political activity.

Furthermore, DIY culture is connected to widespread public discontent with the authoritative function of official (e.g., state-level) institutional structures (be they economic, cultural, or political). Alternative artistic scenes (such as the local punk scene) were intrinsic to the development of the local anarchist and radical left political movements, particularly in their cultural aspects, related to free social kitchens, self-organized concerts and cultural events, or squatting for the creation of social housing or autonomous public spaces in main urban centers. A strong anti-commercial stance continues to appear in such projects, concerning the importance of producing a new form of culture through grassroots attempts to heal social injustices.

Sampling and Research Questions

Understanding piracy primarily as a hegemonic regulatory discourse has implications for defining the targeted group for an empirical study of the phenomenon. A critical researcher of IPR uses does not seek "pirates," but focuses, instead, on particular widely popular new media uses. Local peers of torrent trackers were the target group of the research. Eight mini-focus groups (of two to four participants each) and six personal, semi-structured interviews (the overall number of respondents was 29) were conducted in one main Greek city, Thessaloniki. It is the country's second biggest city, with a population of over one million inhabitants, and it hosts large universities and a large population of young people. Greece's (growing) Internet penetration rate is 46.2% (http://www.Internetworldstats.com/europa.htm#gr, June 2010). Users are mostly concentrated in the country's larger urban centers. Young people who have received higher education are the most common users of the Internet (Lagos, 2008, p. 567). Young people were purposefully targeted for this study, following relevant research (Olsson & Miegel, 2010) suggesting that P2P use is a generational characteristic, relating to a generation that grew up with Internet access and new media literacy. Research participants were approached through snowball sampling (Bryman, 2010, p. 184), a purposeful and not random mode of data collection. Research focused on regular P2P users. Participants were asked to propose other people who would be eligible to participate in the research. A detailed outline of the research, including the participants' profiles, is found in appendixes A and B.

Questions were formed using Dahlgren's (2009) six-moment circuit model of civic connection as a general research framework on citizenship. Dahlgren's categories (explained in the next section) provide a useful framework to assess the civic-democratic potential of P2P practices in the critical context outlined above. Interview questions can be found in Appendix C. Data was analyzed through thematic analysis (Bryman, 2010). Relevant social theory on culture and politics was reflexively used in a critical discussion of the points raised by the respondents. The research was conducted during a time of important political upheaval in the country, an issue that was reflected—to a greater or lesser extent—in all respondents' accounts.

Thematic Analysis of the Respondents' Words: The Civic Circuit Model

The civic circuit model developed by media scholar Peter Dahlgren (2009) is used as an analytical framework to discuss civic aspects and civic potentials, developing through people's engagement with new, participatory, free sharing technologies and media. The civic circuit model emphasizes important

elements that one should take under consideration before qualifying a given everyday life practice as democratic. The civic circuit model entails six categories (moments) to review social practices in relation to their political-democratic relevance: values, trust, knowledge, practices, identities, and space.

Values

Values are central in all discussions on politics. Values are normative ideas. Normative ideas are transcendental entities, in the sense that they relate to an external position that lies outside everyday reality. Normative principles offer people the resources to evaluate their actions and broader social events and realities. Normative principles—explicit or implicit—are ideological constructions.

Transcendental normative principles have been challenged by the post-modern collapse of "grand narratives." No privileged position exists outside reality. Honneth (Honneth & Fraser, 2003, p. 244) argues that everyday life experiences produce immanent values that serve as sound principles to judge reality (e.g., events and actions). Yet, immanence alone may be proven a very subjective and fragmented tool to organize and evaluate social life. Fraser (ibid., p. 207) proposes a dialectical normative framework of "immanent transcendence," in order to foreground both subjective and structural aspects of normativity, a framework that is supported by other critical scholars as well (Fuchs, 2009).

Dahlgren's civic circuit model is concerned with civic values in particular. Dahlgren (2009, p. 111) distinguishes between substantial and procedural civic values. Substantial values relate to the universal principles underlining particular acts and practices. Procedural values relate to practical principles of activity organization. Democratic civic values involve a reflexive commitment to solidarity, liberty, recognition, equality, and distribution, accompanied by a practical application of the latter in everyday life contexts.

Substantial values were the prevalent ones in the respondents' words. Procedural values will be further discussed in the "practices" section. Substantial values were expressed as loose beliefs in community, equality, and individual freedom, but also as structured sociopolitical critique, particularly in relation to the commodification of the lifeworld. Critical issues of control arose tacitly in the respondents' perceptions of IP restrictions. Respondents participating in political projects and political organizations were more eager to politicize their file-sharing habits than those who were less politically active.

When politicized, copyrights were connected to a totality of societal issues relating to social exclusion, inequality, exploitation, and surveillance. The persecution of file-sharing is often articulated through information relating to the disposition and commoditization of commons:

> *In a system that continuously builds up, forbids and encloses—one can think of the forbidding of food cultivation in your garden at the US, or the forbidding of rain water collection in Utah—to have something circulating for free, with free as in free speech and not free beer, as Stallman would say, is dangerous to them. (Sotiris)*

Participation in P2P networks and file-sharing activities is seen as a positive popular habit, developed by affordable technology, allowing the development of a free, unmediated, non-commercial culture of creation, exchange, and communication:

Participation in P2P networks is a kind of general attitude towards social life, as one surpasses the market system and deals with people directly, through sharing. This is the freedom of the Internet itself, its uncontrollability. (Vassilis)

Free file-sharing is normatively evaluated, on the basis of the common good. Although formally illegal, respondents saw file-sharing as socially beneficial. Furthermore, free sharing of culture and information is declassified as illegal because it is connected to unmediated lifeworld habits:

Companies lose, artists lose, the state loses, but society on the whole gains from it (- free file-sharing). (Apostolos)

Why should you pay for something as natural as the practice of listening to a song, when everything generally is so expensive? (Stefanos)

A "social interest" and "social needs" issue was frequently discussed by different participants, articulated in relation to the potentiality unfolded by ICTs uses. Technology reveals capacities (Feenberg, 2005, p. 12) mediated by values and ideological positions:

[L]aw of all sorts need to reflect and to be in line with social developments. Copyright laws and intellectual property are far behind the demands of today's society. (Telemachos)

The "demands of society" and "social developments" are central sites of antagonism between neoliberal norms underlining social needs in strict consumerist "choices" (Bauman, 2007), and oppositional discourses and material processes, relating to modernist and Enlightened aspirations of universal social ascent (Mumford, 1967/2005).

Space

In this article's context, the dimension of space concerns the terrain where particular communicative and creative practices can develop. Space is both a symbolic and material terrain. The symbolic aspect concerns the rules, norms, and limits of what one can do in a given spatial entity. The symbolic aspect of a space is therefore institutional and discursive. The material dimension involves the infrastructures enabling practices, as well as the concrete topicalities where practices occur. New affordable private technologies, the architecture of Web 2.0, bandwidth, and privacy protection laws all form the infrastructural and institutional dimensions of the space where "free culture" develops. The absence of common space (the lack of an institutional framework, or the lack of a physical setting, e.g., a

public space or public infrastructure) delimits or nullifies the possibility of developing civic cultures and politics.

The Internet is a space that enables experimentation and play, which, according to Sennett (2008) and Mumford (2005/1967), are ontological entities defining human life and crucial elements for the development of individual autonomy. The presence of the virtual space is central in the acceleration of creative and collaborative uses of new ICTs. Digital file-sharing habits and communities develop and spread due to ICT affordances and the openness of the Internet. As Castells (2001) notes, the Internet is largely based on hacker culture. The Internet is a space of freedom, experimentation, cooperation, and play, which users—particularly the younger ones (the so-called digital natives)—perceive and utilize accordingly:

> The nature of the Internet and new technologies are in controversy with copyrights. If such laws go further, then the medium itself will change and digital technology will obtain an analogue sense. (Dimitris)

Cyberspace appears as a domesticated space by its users, who appropriate it according to their practical convenience and their personal interests. The possibility of unlimited creation of spaces within the broader terrain of the Internet, due to its abundance, is a fact for all respondents. Restrictions are bypassed through technical knowledge of ICTs, as well as through tacit knowledge of the medium (computers) and the space (Internet). The creation and the quest for new cybernetic "enclaves" for free-sharing in cases of cybernetic restrictions, is a possibility shared by all respondents. Carpentier (2011, p. 268) notes that individual uses of technology are highly discursive, with private meanings dominating over hegemonic ones, relating to institutional orientations of technology uses. The personalized understanding of technological potency becomes a source of exploration for alternatives to policy circumventions:

> There are always solutions to those wanting to spread information. No matter how many laws they create, and no matter how many sites they close down, people will develop ways to share; it cannot be delimited so rules are not a problem. (Theodosis)

Institutional and industrial controversies expanding throughout the globe seem to open the space for free ICTs uses:

> Although theoretically it is possible to control the Internet, it is technically impossible to process and to classify and to use such a massive amount of information. It requires massive technical and human resources to do that. (Argyris)

> There are clear clashes of interests in different corporate sectors; on one hand we have music industries developing DRMs and on the other, we have computer companies developing DVD recorders. (Michalis)

> There are sites that made money out of sharing, like YouTube. Nobody ever went after them. (Christos)

Practical knowledge exposes controversies between technologies, sociopolitical interests, and policies. The institutional framework is central in the uses of cyberspace and digital technologies. Normative issues on Internet policy were explicitly developed by particular users who used political frames to interpret reality, and to connect everyday life to issues of social polity:

> They have the power to control the Internet but this will cost them. If they go that far they will create a society similar to that of China. (Christos)

Communities and practices are formed due to the enabling possibilities of the cyberspace and ICT tools:

> I created an online data base with back catalogues and anecdotal information on recordings and artists, with a Danish guy, also into jazz. We exchanged rare recordings . . . What is great is that one can make friends with different people, see how music develops in their country and possibly meet them once. (Grigoris)

The development of spaces such as the above, which are produced by the passionate, cooperative, and voluntary work of different people, form a particular sort of craft that is closer to artistic than technical production (Feenberg, 2008, p. 17). The open and moldable nature of cyberspace helps imagination to develop and amateur production to flourish. Imagination guides the making of distinct, durable things, distinct from the alienating activity of capitalist laboring (Dean, 2003, p. 34). Furthermore, cyberspace also provides the space of public voice, which is a further humanizing quality (ibid., p. 35). A universal consciousness of similarity in difference among people across the globe may be accomplished through collaborative practices. Niche networks, developed in international virtual spaces, grow transnational connections, foster cultural encounters, and advance presences.

Knowledge

New media literacy, technical know-how of new ICT, and a level of knowledge about issues related to media policy form technology-related knowledge. Knowledge in the context of politics involves the affiliation of people to issues of common concern—the familiarity of people with issues related to polity, civic rights, and duties, as well as with ongoing sociopolitical-economic affairs. Knowledge is a developing domain, advancing through explicit and tacit sources (DeCerteau, 1990/2008), developed from practices (Feenberg, 2008, p. 11; Flew, 2007, p. 101). As Feenberg argues, "concrete experience reveals the world in its multifarious and unpredictable connections and potentialities" (2008, p. 26). Practical, "tacit" knowledge forms the most extensive variable defining the limits and potentiality of new media. Tacit knowledge is, in some cases, deeply integrated and non-articulate, as it is not framed through language (DeCerteau, 1990/2008, p. 180). Short answers given in our interviews (e.g., "yes" or "no") were indicative of the latter case.

Ideological meanings, in the sense of the broader beliefs and values of a person, seemed to play an important role in the integration and meaningful translation of tacit knowledge:

> *No I do not see file-sharing this way* [author's clarification: whether downloading is anti-capitalist*]. Some people might be seeing it this way, but for me this is not the case. (Apostolos)*

Respondents expressed deep technical knowledge. Technical knowledge was often not combined with an equivalent knowledge of socio-political issues. For Mumford (2005/1967), the proliferation of technical knowledge is indicative of the ongoing impoverishment of culture and democracy. Controversial statements suggest the respondents' difficulty in addressing the complexities of today's world, due to an absence of theoretical frames for issues transcending the level of everyday experience. In the absence of theoretical frames for issues transcending the level of everyday experience that relate to global, political, and economic processes affecting their reality, respondents failed to grasp the socio-political ramifications of the issue at hand:

> *I used to use Pirate Bay but I don't know anything about Pirate Parties. (Dora)*

> *I think that music does not lose from trackers. On the contrary many groups became big because of it. Films lose though. Films cost more to produce. (Anna)*

Younger participants were less accustomed to the political, economic, and social issues of IPR, although (as will be shown later) they were aware of different sorts of problems they could encounter on the Internet, mainly related to privacy issues:

> *Anyone can find out anything about you. I don't use Facebook because I might have troubles in finding a job. Any supervisor can use Facebook to check what I have been doing and he might not like it. (Stefanos)*

New media, as texts and technology, form an environment that is present (though sometimes invisible) in all aspects of life. A lack of adequate knowledge on the diffused, global interconnected sphere of communications; a lack of adequate knowledge of civil rights; a lack of privacy in personified Web 2.0 structures; and broader anxieties on class, power, and surveillance, all compromise the practices of particular users.

Subjective experiences, such as the memory of earlier practices of cultural exchange, particularly through analogue technology, constitute the lived experience of the "commons" and legitimize free cultural exchange as a continuous practice, despite the enactment of new IP laws. Sociopolitical knowledge organizes frames and estimations for the future of digital free sharing and the respondents' own engagement:

> *I remember in the times of the tape recorder, they were saying, this would kill the music industry; later it was the CDs, now mp3s and so on. The music industry, like all industries moves slow and adjusts hard on new variables. What is certain, unfortunately, is that they always end up on the winner's side and get into play again. (Odysseas)*

Critical positions to IPR were developed in relation to common, transnational experiences of social problems with global extensions:

> I was not worried by the fact that some people were persecuted. I was mostly outraged by it, big companies persecuting poor single mothers in the U.S. for having downloaded a few songs. (Alexia)

Obtaining and exchanging information is an important motivation behind file-sharing. Information, though, does not link to civic knowledge. As Bauman (2007, p. 39) writes, the excessive amounts of information available "backfire," resulting in accumulation, closure, and negation, as well as collective oblivion and social ignorance.

Practice

Practice involves the development of cooperative and practical skills that can be developed by individual and collective creative uses of technical tools and new media platforms. Usage—to use De Certeau's (1990) term—concerns the creative appropriation, re-contextualization, and transformation of given entities into expressive forms that fit the community of individual users. Practice foregrounds the obstacles met (e.g., produced by policy or technology) in a given form of ICT usage. Alternatives are found through playful practice. Dahlgren (2009, p. 117) argues that the development of practical skills— particularly through creative, autonomous work—can potentially be utilized in the development of public action.

Participatory technology and media structures enable the rearticulation of the identity of the machine (Carpentier, 2011, p. 273) through users' generated modes. Technology thus changes consumption habits (ibid., p. 272) and allows for the creation of a new way to perceive both production and consumption, but also the products themselves. The emancipatory potential of everyday life functions through the domestication of new ICTs. Technology integrates in everyday life habits, and new hybrid practices and norms develop:

> The pirate product is superior as it allows you to do more with it. A DVD does not allow much use; everything is locked with DRMs, you can't take it with you and watch it while travelling; it is delimiting. I happened to buy a product and end up using its pirate version because it fitted my needs better. (Kostantinos)

All respondents are involved in different forms of active creative usage of the Internet and new technologies as consumers, producers, and distributors of music, software, games, and films. The respondents' roles in online free culture activities vary: Some are administrators of blogs and file-sharing trackers, while others are regular participators in online communities and networks where different creative activities occur. Practice is connected with each respondent's own background. The main personal aspects where free culture practices anchor concern the vocation, the economic background, the social status, and the personal interests of respondents.

The active aspect of new media use is important, because ICTs do not produce active users by default (Terranova, 2004, p. 75). Furthermore, the active or creative aspect of media usages is not, by default, democratic. Late capitalism increasingly relies on free labor of users, commoditizing a vast scope of people's interests, habits, and joys. A good deal of unpaid labor occurs on the Internet, which nevertheless is not always assimilated by capitalism (Terranova, 2004, p. 91). P2P production seems to develop a new work ethic (Bauwens, 2006), relating to the acquisition of social and cultural capital. P2P structures are maximalist participatory structures (Carpentier, 2011, p. 275). Pleasure in P2P practices is evident in all users' responses, relating to the freedom to make, to create, and to control the outcome of one's work.

Practical knowledge organizes users' levels and limits of engagement into different P2P networks. Users demonstrated different parallel cultural interests related to file-sharing. P2P practice is eclectic and reflexive:

> Streaming is a good solution too. You can see at YouTube that a company may withdraw
> one track but still you get ten other versions of the same popping up by different users.
> (Dimitris)

Self-control is evident in some of the respondents' usages, in the form of support to artists, brand loyalty, and also compliance with IP laws:

> When we were running the blog on music, we used to upload a couple of tracks each
> time so that if interested, people would look for the album on their own. (Dimitris)

> I am a big fan of Apple. (Chloe)

Privacy-related concerns may lead toward the seeking of socio-political information regarding civic rights of users. Anxieties about control also lead to the development of personal technological security skills:

> Unaware of privacy issues I was only taking the easy precautions, like tracking scripts
> and cookies. Lately though, due to the new legislations I began to embrace the solution
> of Virtual Private Networks (VPN). The problem is that those supporting file-sharing
> protocols are still under fee. (Giorgos)

Practice combined with explicit civic and technological knowledge organizes sufficient defenses of illicit IP uses. Practice, though, does not lead to explicit, collective political projects. The respondents' evaluation and critique of P2P practices relate to personal aspirations and ideological beliefs. Two different assessments of open source software and licenses are indicative of ideological perspectives underlining private practices:

> There are a lot of benefits with open source software but not from the very beginning. It
> can be that one works on software for months from its beginning and then one other can

take it and due to his better skills and knowledge develop it further so that the first loses the prime idea. In every case, the final product, like Linux, is better to the end user, but not to the initial developer of the idea. (Stefanos)

We are talking about different things. Free software is antagonistic as their developers talk about a broader idea of freedom and not just software. Open source on the other hand, supports the free circulation but they do not take it further to broader social issues; it is therefore an entrepreneurial conceptualization of free software. (Sotiris)

Trust

Trust concerns the quality of social relations between members of different communities, networks, groups, or organizations. Trust relates to the category of social capital, which, according to Putnam (2000), is central in people's involvement with social affairs. Dahlgren and Putman argue that social capital is central in the reinvention of citizenship and community today. Trust is a prerequisite in the construction of social bonds and relations of affinity and intimacy between people, in order to shape communities and achieve communal goals.

As an analytical category, trust explores the ways relations of individuals are built up. Trust is evident in the relations respondents construct in P2P communities. All respondents were eager to contribute to the online networks they participated in, and felt part of a broader, global community providing them with information and resources to cover particular social, cultural, creative, or informational needs.

Trust can also be seen in expressions of fandom, through expression of artists' support:

In many cases I have bought albums after downloading them, mainly to support the artists. (Michalis)

Cultural production and artistic work are appreciated by all respondents. Respondents are willing to support artists while exploring culture and technological capacities. Such a case indicates the possibilities for alternative methods of economic support based on solidarity and trust. Trust is essential in the development of free-sharing communities, particularly online. Trust regulates the exchanges between distant users of digital networks. The Internet, though, is full of malaises, like computer viruses. The knowledge of threat possibilities shapes the sort of tracker sites and networks people will use. Trust, then, is reflexively positioned, relating to knowledge, given tasks and social aspirations.

Usage of public or private torrent trackers reflects individual and communal concerns. For some people, the use of private trackers is safer and more intimate. Public trackers are viewed as impersonal. Private trackers seem to offer adequate answers to particularistic cultural needs, and to privacy needs. Particularistic needs and interests (like being interested in a particular music or film genre) and the need for deep specialization on specific issues, are aspects that go into forming online digital sharing communities.

Public torrent trackers were supported by politicized users, who argued for both the need for inclusivity and the possibility of opening spaces of information, usage, and knowledge distribution to (potentially) all Internet users. Idealistically, private trackers were viewed as elitist and non-political.

Nevertheless, critical concerns were raised through practical knowledge, obtained by usage of both private and public trackers. Public trackers were susceptible to users' accumulation tendencies of "free" cultural goods, related to the norms of consumer society.

I prefer public sites, because anyone online can access the material. (Michaela)

Most people there download blockbusters, porn and Lady Gaga stuff; there are plenty of contaminated torrents too, viruses disguised. (Thanos)

One does not become part of a community there (in public trackers); I am part of a community in the trackers I participate by contributing with new material; I mainly visit public trackers only to download something too mainstream to be found in the sites I generally use. (Giotis)

Trust and community is not constructed by default, but according to particular norms and contexts. The architecture of private trackers obliges users to share, and therefore, sharing is promoted by the technology itself. Estimations on the coming of accumulation fatigue to users, and a more creative use of intellectual abundance, are also evident through the users' experiences of P2P networks. As Carpentier (2011, p. 274) noted, that consumption does change through technology affordances:

I used to pile up loads of megabytes of music, music that I did not listen too. I think this happened in the early days of downloading. Nowadays, people function more selectively and more maturely. (Vassilis)

The political potential of digital sharing is something that makes people more cautious in terms of the extents to which politics are concerned with cyberspace:

One should fear couch activism; no matter how many clicks and posts are made, the street is the natural space of movements. (Giorgos)

Identity

As a research category, civic identity concerns the personal aspect of involvement in particular social projects, ideas, or communities. Engagement and participation in civic issues do derive from individual concerns and interests, as well as from personal assessments and evaluations. Identity further relates to late modern social changes and the broader individualist tendencies they brought along (Bauman, 2004; Lasch, 1979/2004).

Social identity is grounded in local and temporal characteristics. Economic, cultural, historical, and political issues develop in the participants' responses. The effects of the global capitalist recession that began in 2008 and struck Greece in 2010—through the speculative power of financial institutions (Vatikiotis et al., 2010), instrumentalizing an arbitrary debt (Graeber, 2011, p. 13) for the imposition of deep austerity measures, for neoliberal "structural adjustments" to revive capitalist growth (through the process that Harvey [2010] describes as "accumulation through dispossession"); a permanent, "soft" state of emergency governance performed by local (the Greek government) and transnational (the so-called "Troika": the European Union, the European Bank and the International Monetary Fund) political agents— bear direct effects on the respondents' views on file-sharing. Lack of funds to afford the market price of CD or DVD formats and the continued need for culture—further evoked by the Internet and the cultural industry itself—legitimizes digital file-sharing as a widespread and commonsense activity. A proto-political, anti-authoritative class sentiment is evident in the participants' responses toward corporate and state campaigns against "piracy," mediated through the lens of immediate economic oppression.

A transnational, generational aspect is also evident:

> It is way too much to name a whole generation as thieves, the crime of whom is to use available technologies in order to educate, to communicate, to entertain themselves, especially in an era where, due to the economic state of most young people, the Internet is the only solution to many things. (Thanos)

Corporate "antipiracy" campaigns were ridiculed by the respondents, demonstrating the campaigns' failure in making any kind of serious public impact. A global-local dialectic is developed, one where the local characteristics unfold along with broader global cultural and socioeconomic issues, and which is relevant to media, lifestyle, and power. Cosmopolitan class solidarity is expressed by many respondents while discussing cases of persecutions within the country and abroad:

> The campaigns against piracy are ridiculous and anachronistic; I don't think they convince anyone really. (Michaela)

> Piracy is a discourse similar to that of terrorism in contemporary society. It is propagandized in a way so that the real pirates appear to be the victims of theft and not the real thieves. It is the corporations that steal the users of a copyrighted object and the producers as well. (Telemachos)

For some respondents, file-sharing offers a more efficient and "authentic" model of cultural consumption than what the market offers:

> I can find more things and many rare things in trackers. Things you don't find in stores. I can also get information and knowledge and learn about more things through the discussion in forums with other users. The market can't compete with that. They create artificial suggestions based on Google hits and sales statistics. (Michalis)

Sharing of intellectual material appears to materialize on an everyday basis, a certain freedom naturally existing in the private sphere. Free sharing of knowledge and culture is a way of appropriating developments that are not controlled by the individual or society. As De Certeau (1990/2008) notes, the free and reflexive appropriation of imposed societal relations, discourses, and social changes organizes a level of control in everyday life processes. The element of control is connected both to the understanding of the individual in society, and to the material and symbolic ways that one practices one's freedom, particularly the freedom of expression. The distinct position of culture and intellectual products from material products and commodities concerns issues relevant to the identity of the respondents and the ways they communicate with others. An intimate relation to culture de-legitimizes IPR:

> [T]he Internet is not an informational revolution; it is a communicational revolution . . . prohibiting downloads on IPR issues is a violation of human rights, primarily of the right to free communication . . . the Internet is a means of communication, through the sharing of digitalized information; it is like prohibiting from listening to an album in your room with others, just because the others did not pay for it. (Grigoris)

Respondents expressed a high level of skepticism toward political parties. Several expressed a lack of interest in politics. Political identity was foregrounded by the most politicized respondents as a prerequisite for change:

> I believe that downloading in itself is not a political act. If you have a conscious position towards the broader realm of IPRs and you try through different ways to publicize your beliefs, through collectivities or through actions that speak about the free flow of material or attack corporations, then the act is political. There has to be a substance behind the act to constitute it as political. (Angeliki)

Discussion and Concluding Remarks: Issues on Citizenship and Control

The findings of the research are in agreement with existing literature on new media and public responses to IP laws (David, 2010; Lessig, 2004). Research participants do not see file-sharing and other unauthorized uses of copyrighted products as theft, due both to the long habit of sharing cultural goods and to known interest biases of IP laws. P2P file-sharing networks, in particular, are highly successful and have managed to produce changes in production, consumption, distribution, and technology uses in Greece, as well as in the rest of the world.

 Dahlgren's model was useful in researching the civic potential of "free culture." Input from theory on technology, agonistic citizenship, and political economy that is critical of copyright industries was also helpful in elaborating the case and the analysis. Civic moments do exist, and they are advanced through creative and free ICT practices. Nevertheless, they also rely on other forms of experience, social relations, practices and ideas that are external to the networks and technology uses. A dialectical relationship seems to exist between different aspects of everyday reality, one which mutually shapes the meanings and practices of social life.

As Gary Hall (2009, p. 2) writes, "there is nothing inherently emancipatory, oppositional, leftist or even politically or culturally progressive about digital piracy." Participants in the research perform "pirate" activities (downloading, copying, reusing, remixing and appropriating copyrighted material without authorization) as part of their general media usage. Some respondents politicize piracy in relation to broader contemporary social problems. It remains unclear whether the general multitude of P2P users may organize political strategies (Andersson, 2009, p. 64) to change current IP laws. It is quite possible that file-sharing will work on a tactical basis, through "underground" networks, in spaces where restrictions cannot apply.

P2P depends on capitalism, and capitalism depends on P2P (Bauwens, 2006). P2P depends on the hardware industry. Access to new media relies on economic factors (Castells, 2001, p. 248). People who can afford ICT and fast Internet connections are the ones with access to free digital culture. Despite their civic and creative potential, P2P practices cannot provide solutions relevant to the growing labor and living precariousness worldwide. Lovink (Lovink & Spehr, 2007, p. 86) notes that "there is a strange dialectical relationship between Mcjobs and Linux," with P2P practices often producing a trap of "amateurization," exploitable by capitalism. Neoliberal tendencies relating to entrepreneurialism are likely to occur through the usage of free culture as a resource for entrepreneurship, due to structural exclusion from employment and the scarcity of material capable of sustaining biological life for an increasing number of people worldwide.

There are many aspects of consumerist accumulation and exploitation of free (as in free beer, and not free speech, to reverse Stallman's famous dictum) downloading of digital material online. As May (2000, p. 102) notes, most users are not contributing to the networks; they are mere consumers. Nevertheless, consumption habits do change through technology affordances, communication, and new uses. The development of communal habits is a case that partially appears in the respondents' words. Possibly, the development of communal experiences and self-organization are the most valuable "lessons" growing through P2P. The knowledge and experience obtained in digital networks needs to be connected to broader forms of self-organization, in order to defend society and life in the face of its deterioration through economic austerity, stagnation, impoverishment, and indignity.

File-sharing cannot be fully suppressed due to the material conditions underpinning it. May (2009, p. 137) demonstrates that piracy and counterfeiting flourishes in poor countries, and for that reason, corporations adjust to this fact and attempt to regulate it, so as to establish their brand name and introduce product uses in those particular countries. The economic oppression experienced by the lower and middle classes of Greece delegitimizes enclosures of intellectual commons. Furthermore, discipline toward IP rules cannot succeed within conditions of impoverishment. The vicious attacks on society by transnational and local neoliberal policies expose the irrationality of capitalist rationality to the vast majority of the population, and also open new possibilities for the development of the new civic subjectivities required for social change (Dean, 2003, p. 165). As Polanyi (1944/2007) emphasizes, society resists classical (and today, neo-classical) economic ideological aspirations on the premise of its own survival.

A central question regarding progressive social change concerns the extent to which the cultural industry will succeed in appropriating practices developing outside the laws of global capitalist markets. David (2010) suggests that discourse can be the most successful means of discipline to particular forms of uses favored by the cultural industry. Politics, then, are essential in moving toward a new social philosophy underpinning the economy. What is crucial—beyond the level of necessary reforms restricting "free markets"—is the continuous political grassroots' engagement to produce and sustain democratic social change, and to constrain corporate aggression. A broad, pragmatic new social imaginary is required to organize majoritarian counter-hegemonic political struggles (Lovink & Rossiter, 2007, p. 236). Constant counter-hegemonic action is necessary to meet challenges to democracy, and to move toward a public orientation of social needs (Freedman, 2008, p. 52). Following Mouffe (2004), the continuous political activity, through popular engagement and participation on different segments of the social world, is both the guarantor of democracy and the means to deepen it.

Appendix A

Some additional information on this research:

The research was conducted between December 2010 and January 2011. The ages of the group of people researched fell in the range between 16–46 years old, and the majority of the interviewees were in their mid-20s and early 30s. Males were overrepresented in the research group (8 females and 21 males). A summary of the respondents is found in Appendix A.

Mini focus groups and private interviews were deployed to get people's discourses and reflective views on usages, experiences, and rationales. The interviews lasted from 30 to 90 minutes. The use of focus groups added an element of dynamic engagement with participants to the research, by foregrounding new dimensions and developing further discussions and reflections on particular topics.

Appendix B

Participants' first names, ages, and occupations, organized by focus group or interview:

1:      Alexandros, 30, freelance sound engineer; Giotis, 29, PhD scholar; Maria, 28, dance teacher
2:      Michalis, 27, part-time employed archaeologist; Dimitris, 28 part-time employed archaeologist; Nicos, 30, university student
3.   Kostantinos, 32, Web designer; Argyris, 30, Web designer
4.   Vassilis, 30, chemist; Dora, 27, unemployed university graduate; Odysseas, 30, environmental engineer
5.   Theodosis, 16, high school student; Stefanos, 17, high school student; Eugenia, 46, nurse
6.   Christos, 25, unemployed university graduate; Thanos, 24, university student; Michaela, 24, university student; Eva, 23, university student
7.   Sotiris, 28, IT technician; Giorgos, 25, unemployed university graduate; Telemachos, 24, university graduate, waiter
8.   Alexia, 27, graduate student; Chloe, 29, unemployed university graduate

Interviews:

1.   Katerina, 25, teacher
2.   Apostolos, 37, teacher
3.   Grigoris, 35, unemployed musician
4.   Angeliki, 31, film director
5.   Anna, 22, unemployed university graduate
6.   Agis, 25, student

Appendix C

Interviews were conducted in Greek, recorded, and fully transcribed. Fragments used in the article were translated from Greek into English. Research participants were posed the following interview questions:

- What the reasons were for file-sharing.
- What they generally thought of copyright, and what their opinion-experience of copyright issues was.
- Whether they were aware of anti-piracy policies and discourses in relation to local and global contexts (e.g., the media campaign "piracy kills music" or "you wouldn't steal a car"; the arrest and legal persecution of the administrators of the country's largest torrent tracker, "gamato.gr" in May of 2010; or the persecution of the world's largest tracker, the Swedish "Pirate Bay"), and if these affected their habits.
- How they use P2P platforms; whether they "rip" material to upgrade the content of a torrent tracker, whether they share along with downloading; when online, if it is public or private trackers they use.
- How they affiliate with and act around the broader community of users in P2P platforms and more broad online discussion forums on topics of their concern.
- Whether they considered that losses were involved in such practices, and if so, who it is that is losing.
- Whether they considered file-sharing and P2P as political or potentially political.
- Whether they were familiar with free and open source (F/OSS) systems and licenses, if they used such systems or licenses, and how they would evaluate them.
- Whether they were familiar with the formation of pirate parties abroad, and what they thought of such a development.
- Whether they were concerned with privacy issues and issues of online control.
- Whether they would be willing to give up file-sharing practices.

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