A Vision of and for the Networked World: John Perry Barlow's *A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace* at Twenty[1]

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> Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather.
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> We have no elected government, nor are we likely to have one, so I address you with no greater authority than that with which liberty itself always speaks. I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. You have no moral right to rule us nor do you possess any methods of enforcement we have true reason to fear.
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> John Perry Barlow—*A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace*, 1996

John Perry Barlow wrote his famous *A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace* in Davos, Switzerland on February 8, 1996 while attending the World Economic Forum. In passionate prose, Barlow both gave voice to and crystalized a set

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of themes that had been circulating in the social worlds he traveled through as a lyricist for the Grateful Dead in the 1970s, an early member of the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link (WELL), founding member of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, and writer for *Wired* magazine. Barlow, and his fellow travelers, believed in the power of information technologies to create an independent mind and media space free from the terrestrial strictures of government, bureaucracy, institutions, and law. In this new (Cyber)space, psychologically whole individuals were already gathering in new forms of collectivity supported by media and governed only by an emergent sense of "ethics, enlightened self-interest, and the commonweal." Cyberspace was giving rise to an independent, technologically-enabled, disembodied, and stateless "civilization of the Mind" (Barlow 1996).

The *Declaration* is a product of a particular time and, as the cultural historian Fred Turner (2006) has extensively documented, the collision of the unlikely actors, technologies, and media forms that gave rise to a "New Communalist" vision of cyberspace as an independent society of consciousness. Turner shows how the New Communalists, unlike the New Left during the 1960s and 1970s, turned away from politics in the streets to head back to the land, living out alternative forms of community on communes equipped with cold war tools from the *Whole Earth Catalog*. By the early 1980s, with the collapse of the communes, the terrestrial frontier had transformed into Barlow's "electronic frontier," as personal computers and networked systems such as the WELL became the new locus of projects for alternative forms of community-building. Experiments in mediated sociality were also the outgrowth of the new, unstable, freelance economy in the technology development hub of California's Silicon Valley, where networking and gifting became essential to securing future paid work. The electronic frontier metaphor helped these

homesteaders imagine their work as a project of independence and new world making, even as they lived out their economic lives in precarity. It was from this social world that the *Declaration* emerged in 1996, hot on the heels of Barlow's co-founding of *Wired* magazine in 1993, itself a publication with techno-utopian cultural stylings. The *Declaration* joined *Wired* as an artifact that both codified and distilled the particular ways of imagining cyberspace that emerged from these networks, making their metaphors for technologically-enabled social life visible to wider publics. And, like *Wired*, the *Declaration* encoded a particular vision that aligned sweeping socio-economic changes with libertarian dreams of cyber independence.

In the years since their crafting, the cultural artifacts of the New Communalists, from the *Whole Earth Catalog* and *Wired* magazine to Barlow's *Declaration*, have influenced how computer programmers, policymakers, engineers, journalists, and scholars think about the internet and its relationship to society and the state. Among these artifacts, the *Declaration* has served as a particularly visible and markedly portable media object around which people from disparate fields gathered and found frameworks for understanding their own domains and cultural tools to challenge extant institutions. For some outside of the networks that converged to create it, the *Declaration* provided a language to interpret experiences of technological change. For others, it served as a rhetorical tool that could be used to animate and achieve the aims of a broad economic, social, and political project of 'cyberlibertarianism' that exists in many forms (Golumbia 2013), or more narrow deregulatory aims (Turner 2006). For still others, the *Declaration* served as a foil through which to critique a particular cultural and social vision (Flichy 2007) or propose new frameworks for interpreting social and technical change (Goldsmith and Wu 2006).

Although twenty years later it is now a historical artifact rather than an actively cited manifesto, Barlow's *Declaration* forms part of the discourse that constitutes how we imagine the internet. Robin Mansell (2012: 155) argues that Barlow's *Declaration* can be located in the "prevailing social imaginary of the information society," with its suggestion "that the state should not be involved in Internet governance because this will discourage innovation and the creativity needed to sustain a flourishing Internet system." Barlow's *Declaration* neatly encapsulates the belief that the internet is an independent, self generating, and adapting system best left to its own evolution outside of the meddling of governments, bureaucracies, and laws that seek to influence its development towards particular ends. At the same time, in Barlow's formulation, the normative desirability of an emerging social order and ethics is neatly entwined with the free functioning of markets for information goods.

While the *Declaration*, and the other founding documents of the *Wired* era, may no longer be actively cited and referenced, they form part of the cultural backdrop that both produces and constrains the ways that social actors imagine technologies and their relationships with society. It is this cultural vision that courses through high profile contemporary projects of independent, utopian new world making such as WikiLeaks and open-source technical production. In its initial formulation, founder Julian Assange conceived of WikiLeaks as a nationless, cosmopolitan, information liberator that could take down massive state governments through radical projects of transparency waged from an independent and autonomous networked space. The outcome was, however, very different, as Assange encountered the continuing presence and expansive reach of the state, and needed old institutional allies—news organizations—that have proved markedly enduring and symbolically powerful (indeed, perhaps nothing speaks to the importance of institutions as much as

the fact that Assange now also remains dependent on diplomatic asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London). For the open source movement, the imaginaire of which the *Declaration* is a key tributary enables hackers to envisage their labor in romantic and creative terms, independent of the industry that subsidizes and profits from it.

In sum, this chapter argues that there is a myth of independence that courses through the *Declaration* and dominant internet imaginary it helped give rise to. Barlow's *Declaration* is performative, an attempt to conjure into being a media space that was independent from the political, economic, and legal systems of terrestrial life. In the end, however, independence was always a myth, a utopian animating vision that elided all of the ways that media are always premised upon inter-connection. It was the defense department's funding and high-technology economy of the Valley that gave rise to cyberspace, and the latter shaped the tenuous labor practices that undergirded a romantic vision of digital independence. In the case of WikiLeaks, Assange learned that independence must be premised upon institutional support. Ironically, it was legacy media organizations that could function relatively independently of the state through the symbolic power of the fourth estate and legal codes that seek to protect it. Open source software programmers, meanwhile, realize their independence to code only through forms of material subsidy offered by large corporations.

The resonant myth of independence is, as James Bennett sets out in this volume, a "vision that promises to fulfil that which is perceived to be missing." It was both economic uncertainty and the longing for a more communal, egalitarian, and ultimately nonhierarchical society that was behind the New Communalist ethos (Turner 2006). For Assange, independence meant the absence of democratic checks

on the state and the institutional power of organized economic interests. For many contributors to free and open source software projects, it is the desire for un-alienated labor and freedom from the strictures of the property rights that can stifle human creativity.

All are laudable goals, but they are premised on a myth of independence that leads us to misdiagnose all the ways that media spaces are *always* entangled in economic relations, governmental and regulatory structures, and the workings of institutions. As Bennett (this volume) notes, utopian visions of independence matter in the world. They matter when people such as Assange believe they can go it alone in an independent networked media space and face the institutional power of states. The ways that imagining practices of coding as neoliberal critique matter when they work to preclude consideration of neoliberal subsidy. Myths of independence shape not only how we imagine the possibilities and potentials for internet governance, but also the industries that supply much of our digital infrastructures. These myths matter when they shape desires to live in stateless worlds, devalue existing institutions such as news organizations as outmoded and outdated, or make organized-wage labor seem passé (see Khiabany's chapter for more on this issue).

This chapter proceeds in three parts. I begin by historicizing Barlow's *Declaration*, drawing on the work of Turner to show how this famous statement of independence emerged from, helped make visible, and distilled the understandings and rhetoric of a particular sociocultural formation. In the process, I provide a critical reading of the document, showing how the *Declaration* makes certain understandings of independence, technology, freedom, and social order visible, while eliding the complex workings of economic, political, and social power in play within networked space. I then chart the *Declaration's* specific influence as a media object, showing

how it was taken up by a variety of technologists, practitioners, and scholars. Third, I show how the animating ideas of the *Declaration*, and the New Communalists more generally, are resonant today in the ways the myth of independence served the emancipatory aspirations of Wikileaks and helped the free and open source movement to entwine working for freedom with working for free.

Ultimately, this chapter is concerned with how aspirations for, normative ideals of, and empirical beliefs in independence elide analysis of the relationships that exist between networks and entrenched institutions. The independence of cyberspace was ultimately an aspirational ideal that could be rhetorically invoked and performed but not enacted. For Wikileaks, it was the instability of the network form vis-à-vis powerful institutions of government and journalism that led to the recasting of its tactics and mission. For hackers in free and open source communities, the forms of institutional subsidy that underpin collaborative gifts of code are elided in ways that limit political critique. Similar to Mansell's project of creating new imaginaries to open a productive space to recast dialogue, this chapter hopes to offer an alternative imaginary that highlights the interaction of networks and institutions, and critiques both understandings and values of independence.

Imagining and asserting the independence of the electronic frontier

To understand Barlow's vision for an independent cyberspace requires detailing the social, cultural, and technical worlds that the *Declaration* emerged from. Many of the ideas in the *Declaration* had already been circulating for nearly thirty years when Barlow penned his influential statement. For example, the *Declaration's* use of the frontier metaphor to conceptualize cyberspace, which Barlow helped come up with during his co-founding of the Electronic Frontier Foundation in 1990, has a

rich history. As Turner (2006, 172) details, the electronic frontier metaphor "capped a long process by which the countercultural and cybernetic ideas that had informed the Whole Earth publications for two decades had migrated into the digital arena." The frontier metaphor helped networked information workers with precarious employment in a rapidly changing economy imagine their lives in terms resonant with countercultural critique and aspirations of mobility and independence (173). In the *Declaration* and other writings, Barlow imagined the cyberspace frontier as a space of back-to-the land freedom, where information workers lived at the margins of the military and corporate bureaucracies that structured off-line social and professional life.

In this vision, cyberspace was a refuge, an independent, alternative space that had to be fought over and protected much like early frontier towns. It was the perceived threat of governmental persecution that gave rise to Barlow's writing of the *Declaration*, which simultaneously rhetorically *describes* an independent cyberspace and attempts to *perform* it into being by declaring independence. Responding to the *Telecommunications Act* of 1996 and the ongoing arrests and prosecutions of hackers, Barlow declared that cyberspace was an "act of nature" and asserted its independence, ironically from the very heterarchical entanglements of the military, university, commercial, and political worlds that had given rise to computer networking over the preceding two decades (Abbate 2000). Within this independent cyberspace was an unfolding project of democratic new world making. In claiming the specific mantle of "Jefferson, Washington, Mill, Madison, DeToqueville, and Brandeis," Barlow situates cyberspace within a discourse of "liberty" and "freedom and self-determination" (see DiMaggio et al. 2001). Even more, within cyberspace order will be emergent. Barlow argues that governance will "emerge" "from ethics, enlightened self-interest, and the

commonweal"—a vision of direct democracy (Jenkins and Thornburn 2003) that would not be out of place with many of the participatory democratic projects of the 1960s and indeed, more contemporary movements such as Occupy Wall Street (Kreiss and Tufekci 2013).

This project of democratic world making worked across many registers. Barlow's *Declaration* performs the rhetorical work that enabled different social actors to gather around this ideal of a utopian, independent cyberspace, forging a cultural space that supported the advancement of projects ranging from libertarian statelessness and anti-censorship practice to building new social tools and protecting "the wealth of our marketplaces." As Turner (2006, 208) argues, in the context of *Wired* magazine:

> Thanks in part to a confluence of extraordinary economic, technological, and political currents, its technocentric optimism became a central feature of the biggest stock market bubble in American history. Its faith that the internet constituted a revolution in human affairs legitimated calls for telecommunications deregulation and the dismantling of government entitlement programs elsewhere as well.

The interpretative flexibility of Barlow's *Declaration* mirrors the worlds within which it, and publications such as *Wired*, were crafted. As Turner explains, by the 1990s the New Communalist ethos of the communes was wedded to the "technological and economic legitimacy of the computer industry" and fused with a libertarian desire for smaller government (219). The elite among the New Communalist network, Barlow included, cycled between the worlds of Silicon Valley, media publishing, and the corridors of power in Washington D.C., particularly those

of Gingrich's new right revolution. 'Independence' here also works as part of a libertarian imaginary, unlike its usual articulation from the political left (see King, this volume). Indeed, part of the appeal of the New Communalist cultural style was its fundamental malleability as a social vision of egalitarianism and claims for the technological means to secure it; technologically-enabled commerce and sociability alike could be harnessed into fostering psychologically whole individuals and a new world order. Liberation through unfettered markets, along with the romance of high technology, was particularly appealing to the new right generation.

This was as much a social vision as it was a response to the demands of the new economy. Barlow himself was, as Turner notes, a refugee from an older economy as his Wyoming cattle ranch failed. Those in his cohort experienced different, if no less dramatic, shifts in the economy of the Valley. Denizens of early sites such as the WELL were often networking for their daily bread, as the de-institutionalization of the computing profession made for 21st century piecework with an ever-advancing set of requirements for technical mastery, high risk and uncertainty, and a lack of stable benefits and income.

These shifts were made all the more palatable by the ability to imagine this new mode of work on the margins as liberating and free, even subversive. In his study of the New Economy during this era, Andrew Ross (2003: 9-10) noted the ways workers in technology communities believed they were playing by different rules: "In the Valley's technology startups, an anti-authoritarian work mentality took root, and over time it grew its own rituals of open communication and self-direction, adopting new modes and myths of independence along the way." As Thomas Streeter (2006: 123) has noted, even the use of the term 'cyberspace' offers "a taste of rebel-hero selfhood." The myth that cyberspace was actually independent contributed to the

mistaken belief that the New Economy was independent from old financial institutions. All of which meant that cultural longings for more humane workplaces and practices eased the blending of personal time and work time and acceptance of deferred wages. Meanwhile, the reliance of New Economy companies on stock valuations left employees newly vulnerable to market and technological changes.

The Declaration as a media artifact of the internet imaginary

As the preceding discussion makes clear, the *Declaration* can be historicized and socially located as emerging from a distinct social and cultural world (*see also* Jordan 1991; Streeter 2011). This was a world that, as Turner (2006) persuasively argues, was highly influential in shaping the very ways that we understand online social interaction in terms of 'virtual communities,' not marketplace transactions; networked computers as the agents of personal and social liberation not social control; and, the internet as a space apart for collaboration that exists independently from the terrestrial strictures of government and bureaucracy. Even more, this cultural framework for understanding the internet has influenced technological development, spurred investment in technology companies, shaped regulatory policy, and created a cultural style that has drawn thousands to the technology industry and contributed to the current cultural cache of 'nerds' and computing culture.

Indeed, in the years since its publication the *Declaration* has served as a crystalizing document that made these cultural stylings visible and portable to wider publics. The *Declaration* works simultaneously as a manifesto and set of rhetorical resources that computer programmers and other internet advocates drew on in the course of debate—even while at times disavowing its utopian language. In essence, the *Declaration* became a media object through which a range of social actors found

new languages and frameworks for articulating their experiences and understanding technological change. Even more, it offered a powerful framework for imagining and working towards normative ideas of cyberspace. For example, the *Declaration* is cited hundreds of thousands of times across a vast sea of journals, magazines, and websites. According to Wikipedia, over 40,000 websites have reprinted the document. Within the technology community, designers, gamers, and programmers have all drawn on its metaphors in popular writings in the years since its publication.

Perhaps as a result of its wide cultural reach, the *Declaration* has also been an extraordinarily contested object. In her decade retrospective, Morrison (2009) offers a trenchant textual criticism of its rhetorical strategies, showing how while the *Declaration* resonated in the mid- and late- boom 1990s its sweeping claims increasingly became the subject of derision in the years since. Even more, Morrison argues that Barlow's utopian rhetoric undermined the sorts of "specific coalition-building and lobbying which might have rendered the declaration more effectual in the long run, and less easily dismissed as a silly artifact of a long gone moment of naïve idealism" (66). Within the scholarly literature, for instance, the *Declaration* is now often perfunctorily cited as a footnote to early technology culture and its extreme rhetoric (Jenkins 2013) and misguided regulatory thinking (Goldsmith and Wu 2006; Morozov 2012; Murray 2007; Slane 2007; Tehrainian 2007) during the early boom years of Silicon Valley.

Other scholars, however, have shown how the categories of thought in the *Declaration* continue to resonate culturally. A number of scholars situate the *Declaration* within a broader cultural turn toward cyber-libertarianism (Dahlberg 2012; Golumbia 2013) and utopianism (Burns 2008). Brown and Duguid (2000: 66) note that Barlow developed the idea of the 'information worker' posited against

industrialization. Zittrain (2008) cites Barlow as both offering an early critique of intellectual property and a cogent forecast of the distinctiveness of ideas in the knowledge economy. Corrin, Bennett, and Lockyer (2012) argue that the *Declaration* was the first use of the term 'native' to describe generational shifts in computing.

Despite their disparate substantive areas of interest, these scholars all point to the ways that the *Declaration* contributes to the broader "imaginary" of the internet. The idea of the 'imaginary' has a long history in social analysis (for a contemporary review, see Mansell 2012). Most broadly, the concept relates to the ethos, orientations, and structures of feeling that make certain forms of action and social organization possible and legitimate. Analyzing imaginaries reveals how people see themselves and their societies, how they situate and ascribe meaning to their practices in the world, the values they have and what they consider to be a meaningful social life, and the expectations they have of and for others. Importantly, while there are dominant imaginaries, alternatives open up the possibility of subverting or altering those entrenched, shared understandings that routinely shape social life.

A number of scholars have applied the concept of the imaginary to the ways that people understand, make sense of, and experience technologies, mediated social life, and the possibilities for alternative practice. For these scholars, Barlow's *Declaration* is often a touchstone for discussions of the cultural ideas that animate technical practice, as well as scholars' own categories for analyzing those practices and the effects of technologies. For example, Patrice Flichy situates Barlow's *Declaration* within what he calls the "internet imaginaire," the collective sociological imagination of the medium that spans entire professions and sectors, as well as users. Flichy argues that this imaginary shapes internet adoption, the design of applications and architectures, and the frameworks for understanding and valuing the types of

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actions technology affords. The discourses of imaginaires constitute "the utopias and ideologies associated with the elaboration and possibly the diffusions of technical devices, and the description of an imaginary virtual society" (Flichy 2007: 13). The imaginaire of the internet, for instance, helps guide the creation of particular technical systems and their design characteristics. Designers and engineers have to invest technologies with value and meaning and situate them within cultural frameworks for them to be taken up, even as they are guided by ideological frameworks that legitimate particular conceptions of design and use.

Flichy argues that Barlow and his fellow travelers became the cyber-elite that offered an imaginaire sweeping in its implications. As it circulated through their media objects such as the *Declaration* and *Wired* and national popular media, the "cyber-imaginare" offered a new way of thinking about the relationship between individuals and their societies, the distinctions between body and mind, and politics and marketplaces. For Flichy, Barlow and others were:

> specialists of discourse who produced the information society
> *imaginaire* in the mid-1980s. This was not only the *imaginaire* of a
> technical project or information highways of the Internet … but that of
> a new society whose relationships with individuals, the state, and the
> market were changing. The digerati's discourse presented us with new
> forms of politics and economics, and a new definition of the self that
> emerged with the digital revolution (2007 104).

Similarly, Mansell (2012) locates the *Declaration* in the dominant imaginary of the internet focused on economic growth and free markets. This imaginary, along with another on collaborative production, both converge around allowing the internet to independently govern itself – an idea that is remarkably resonant with Barlow's

Declaration. Indeed, Barlow's manifesto ties together both the idea of exogenous technological change—which Hartley, Burgess, and Bruns (2013: 2-3) describe broadly as "turbulent relations across a range of different media"—as a key driver of social innovation and the difficulty of controlling these changes. It also encodes an idea of the wealth that technological changes make possible, as well as the emergent forms of collaboration that will supposedly humanize these changes. While Mansell's concern is ultimately with "creating the means of encouraging a new social imaginary with more diverse choices involving neither the excesses of hegemonic governance from above with its neoliberal ideology of the market nor naïve trust in the generative power of dispersed online communities as a means of governance from below" (184), I now analyze how the idea of media independence has shaped particular forms of activism and analysis.

In the first case I analyze Wikileaks, which was marked by the failure to reconcile the persistence, legitimacy, and power of institutions with a world of networks, at least in its early stages. In the second, I argue that there is a widespread elision of the subsidies provided by the capital arrangements that underpin collaborative technical production. While Barlow's *Declaration* is twenty years old, I argue that these two cases reveal a similar failure to analyze the institutional and economic worlds that are entwined with our experiences of being online. That is, how our freedoms are often premised upon particular relations of *dependence,* in the first case on the institutional resources and legitimacy of the institutions of journalism in confrontations with state power, in the second on subsidies provided by large corporations to open source laborers.

The myth of independence: Anti-institutionalism and the dream of stateless information

> The first serious infowar is now engaged. The field of battle is WikiLeaks. You are the troops.
>
> John Perry Barlow, quoted in *The Washington Post,* December 4, 2010

Barlow's dream of digitally-enabled, stateless cosmopolitanism continues to animate projects of democratic renewal two decades later. Barlow makes a simultaneous claim of, and for, the un-governable nature of cyberspace and the internet more broadly given its supposed 'innate' independence from the material world (*see* Barney 2000). Despite skepticism towards Barlow's rhetoric, a decade after Barlow's *Declaration* this claim is alive and well as a dominant way that we imagine digital technologies.

This is apparent in Julian Assange's launch of his global technological effort to undermine conspiratorial authoritarian state efforts to control information flows (see, for instance, Assange 2006). The principals behind Wikileaks explicitly framed the project as a stateless informational effort, one designed to leverage the decentralized structure of the internet to undermine the effective functioning of institutional power. While interpreters such as press scholar Jay Rosen (2010) called Wikileaks "the world's first stateless news organization," it was closer to Barlow's vision of an emergent and distributed social order premised on non-hierarchical collaboration than anything as stable as a 'news organization.' Indeed, Rey (2012) analyzes the political theory of Assange, revealing his deep distrust of all institutions and championing of "individuals" and "small voluntary associations"—language resonant with Barlow's *Declaration*. WikiLeaks was conceived as a networked

project that would enforce accountability over states and power over institutions through transparency, brought about by independent actors.

WikiLeaks was formulated within an imaginary that entails both anti-institutionalism and the general failure to appreciate the persistent role of institutions in shaping social life or analyze the role of individuals vis-à-vis those institutions. For example, the most extensive empirical study of WikiLeaks to-date (Beckett and Ball 2012), reveals how the project struggled to define itself throughout its history, undergoing a series of phases where it served as a neutral file repository, a utopian technological social movement, a radical press outlet, and finally a partner to the professional press. WikiLeaks was launched in late 2006. The original site was built according to a Wikipedia model, where users could comment on documents and edit the site, and leakers could anonymously upload information. The site accorded with Assange's theory that information and transparency can provide accountability over powerful institutions (see Rey 2011). In its first few years, the site released, generally unedited, some high profile information leaks, such as then Vice President candidate Sarah Palin's emails and emails between prominent climatologists. In April 2010, WikiLeaks took on more of the trappings of an advocacy press outlet, releasing documents and videos about the killing of two Reuters journalists by an American Apache helicopter in Iraq under the title "Collateral Murder." WikiLeaks also issued an edited 17-minute film and sent correspondents to Baghdad to report the story. Collateral Murder drew international attention to the site. Soon after, WikiLeaks began publishing classified documents leaked by Private Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning—including the Afghan War and Iraq War Logs and diplomatic cables. In publishing these, WikiLeaks actively collaborated with media partners (such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *Der Spiegel*). By the end of 2010, WikiLeaks

was under extraordinary pressure by the U.S. and other governments. Many of its commercial infrastructure providers such as Amazon, EveryDNS, and Pay Pal had severed ties with the site, resulting in a financial and organizational crisis.

As Beckett and Ball argue, this organizational evolution occurred partly as a response to the instability of the network form itself when faced with state power. This power was manifest in the state's ability to reach through the commercial institutions, such as server hosting companies and PayPal, which provided WikiLeaks's critical infrastructure. As such, Beckett and Ball (2012, 13) suggest that networked efforts are often ill equipped to confront well-established institutions:

> WikiLeaks has made us reconsider how politics and journalism work. It also makes us think again about its future. But ultimately its real value may be to show that the very nature of journalism and news has changed from a socio-economic structure that produces journalism as an object, to a contestable, unstable networked process, especially in its relation to power.

The very flexibility and de-institutionalization that Barlow celebrated—and social theorists such as Manuel Castells (2009) proclaim to be the great strength of informational networks—are precisely what led to WikiLeaks's power being so fleeting and Assange's ultimate embrace of powerful press institutions to disseminate the diplomatic cables that caused an international sensation. Lacking resources, WikiLeaks needed the professional press to deal with the massive amounts of material to be verified, filtered, made meaningful, and redacted where necessary. And, it was the publicity that professional journalism organizations could secure that Assange desired in the wake of WikiLeaks's failures at independent crowdsourcing efforts: "Assange and others had grown disillusioned with the site's original intention to

simply publish material in the hope Internet users would sift through it for stories. They wanted more high-profile results and a more direct way of achieving them" (Beckett and Ball 2012, 50). Finally, and most important, was WikiLeaks's relative weakness when up against organized interests wielding symbolic and material power. It was only when WikiLeaks was able to leverage the established institutional forms of professional, national news organizations—including the ways they serve as mediators between governmental officials and national publics in ways that both recognize as legitimate—that Assange could make progress towards his goals.

Even that was short-lived, which reveals that independence is always in crisis, a point that a number of other chapters in this volume have made (see chapters from Bennett, King and Khiabany in this volume). WikiLeaks faced incredible retaliation from the U.S. government, pro-government hackers, and commercial infrastructure providers. With deteriorating and even hostile relationships with its former collaborators among institutional journalism outlets around the embassy cables, WikiLeaks was marginalized. Even more, WikiLeaks lacked much in the way of infrastructure, a defined organization, and routinized financial and symbolic resources that would have helped it independently weather the onslaught of public criticism and state pressure. In the end, WikiLeaks proved little match for the institutional forces arrayed against it.

WikiLeaks encoded a stateless, informational, and democratic vision that courses throughout documents at the founding of contemporary digital culture, such as the *Declaration*. This is a vision of an independent networked world that is as subtly appealing as it is doomed to fail. The deep irony here is that despite proclamations of independence WikiLeaks, like Barlow's "civilization of the mind," was itself bound by both nation-states and civil societies (and the politics of social

media platforms themselves, which Poell and van Dijk explore in this volume.) In a cogent analysis Yochai Benkler, the foremost scholar of the networked society, argues that WikiLeaks:

> forces us to ask us how comfortable we are with the actual shape of democratization created by the Internet. The freedom that the Internet provides to networked individuals and cooperative associations to speak their minds and organize around their causes has been deployed over the past decade to develop new networked models of the fourth estate. These models circumvent the social and organizational frameworks of traditional media, which played a large role in framing the balance between freedom and responsibility of the press. At the same time, the WikiLeaks episode forces us to confront the fact that the members of the networked fourth estate turn out to be both more susceptible to new forms of attack than those of the old, and to possess different sources of resilience in the face of these attacks. In particular, commercial owners of the critical infrastructures of the networked environment can deny service to controversial speakers, and some appear to be willing to do so at a mere whiff of public controversy. The United States government, in turn, can use this vulnerability to bring to bear new kinds of pressure on undesired disclosures in extralegal partnership with these private infrastructure providers (2011: 311).

The ethos at the heart of the *Declaration*, and the particular imaginary of the internet of which it is a part that posits both the independence and ungovernability of cyberspace and order through emergent forms of collaboration, proved a powerful

animating force in projects such as Assange's WikiLeaks. As in other domains of institutional life, however, this particular dream of independent statelessness proved fleeting, information warfare decidedly subservient to established state power.

The myth of independence: Disappearing labor

> You have not engaged in our great and gathering conversation, nor did you create the wealth of our marketplaces. You do not know our culture, our ethics, or the unwritten codes that already provide our society more order than could be obtained by any of your impositions. *A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace*

The cultural objects of early cyberculture, such as *Wired*, enabled technologists to imagine their work as a social and creative activity. As Barlow's rhetorical slide from 'conversation' to 'marketplace' to 'culture' and finally 'society' in the *Declaration* makes clear, in New Communalist rhetoric there are heterarchic regimes of value. The personal and social shaded into economic and democratic registers rather quickly. As Turner (2006) points out, this cultural work enabled the early information workers on sites such as the WELL to imagine their online interactions in terms of social and cultural renewal while eliding the underlying economic contexts in which they took place. By the 1990s, the *Declaration* as well as other artifacts of the time enabled participants to cast their networking in terms of building new social ties and creating new forms of community, while also engaging in relationship-building to survive the piecework of the Valley and rapid technological churn of the information economy. Indeed, for the vanguard of the cyber-elite it was not just about survival but fortune, which in turn fashioned the *Declaration* into a cultural resource for those espousing a particular brand of libertarian, new right

politics premised on individual liberty and economic freedom from governmental interference. For example, the *Declaration* expressly frames the independence of cyberspace in the context of protecting liberty, while roundly ignoring the institutional economic work that was taking shape to support and facilitate the "transactions, relationships, and thought itself" of cyberspace.

Cyberspace, in Barlow's attempt at a performative declaration, is independent from the economic, material basis of the terrestrial economy, in addition to the regulatory regimes of states. This form of thought, which involves bracketing digital social relationships and cultural production off from their economic and regulatory underpinnings, is echoed in the dominant imaginary of our own time. This is particularly apparent in the context of free and open source technical production around projects such as the operating system Linux. The ability to imagine the collaborative spaces and software of the internet as a commonweal, while generally eliding the ways they are circumscribed by a set of structural material relations is a cultural achievement, one made possible by the imaginary of the internet. Two decades after Barlow's cyber manifesto, the basic premise of imagining social life online separate from the economic structures that give rise to it continues to animate how practitioners and scholars talk about such things as collaborative behavior on digital networks.

For example, in his study of the annual Burning Man event's importance to the economy of Silicon Valley, Turner (2008: 76) argues that "commons-based peer production depends on particular structural and ideological scaffolding." While a technological commons provides opportunities for collaboration, it is premised on forms of material subsidy that ensure participants can make a living. Even more, it requires an ideological framework that allows participants to imagine themselves in

particular ways and motivates contributions of gifts to the commons, whether that is the WELL, Wikipedia, or the repository of code that is Linux. And yet, in keeping with the logic of the gift (Bourdieu 1990), no one can name the material underpinnings of the symbolic economy of the gift if it is to continue to work.

This cultural dynamic is clear in the dominant ways we have for imagining open source technical production. A decade before Barlow's *Declaration*, in 1984, a new mode of collective labor and technical production was being forged by the programmer Richard Stallman: free software. Stallman helped assemble a group of hackers and computer programmers who saw themselves threatened by the expansion of intellectual property rights within the computer industry under the banner of a free operating system called GNU. Aside from its technical properties, it was the cultural ideal of freedom that created collective identity around GNU. Free software provided users with a reverse form of copyright called the GNU General Public License that grants users the ability to share, modify, and redistribute the operating system, provided that future uses remain under the same license (see Kelty 2008 for a full discussion). In the ensuing decade, a host of free software tools such as Linux and Apache grew in prominence.

Many scholars have explored Stallman's innovations in free software and his motivation to undermine the regime of intellectual property rights, as well as its intersections with decidedly more business-friendly 'open source' software. Programmer and cultural entrepreneur Eric Raymond, who is prominent in the open source movement and authored a number of its key texts, stripped much of the ideological valence from free software's powerful critique of intellectual property rights in favor of a distinctly capital-friendly open source approach (Berry 2007). For open source proponents, the rhetoric was distinctly about the "corporate discourse of

technical efficiency and market power" rather than the ethical precepts of free

software in "sharing, freedom, and collaboration" (Coleman 2012: 82). Although they

developed from within different cultural worlds, Raymond's cultural work served as a

complement to Barlow's own rather market-friendly *Declaration* that was also

prompted, in part, by a perception of overbearing state intervention (see Judd 2011).

Both of which serve to illustrate the dominant imaginary of the internet where "state

intervention is unlikely to benefit anyone who believes in freedom and democracy"

(Mansell 2012, 156).

Aside from the fact that free and open source software took shape in reaction

to the expansion of government-secured intellectual property, it is significant that the

cultural understandings of the movement *require* the elision of the material forms that

support sociability and creative cultural practice online. To demonstrate that software

could be produced outside of a compensatory model required giving up claims to be

directly compensated for labor. Indeed, in order to advance a critique of intellectual

property, labor *must* proceed without compensation—spurred on by any number of

potential motives, from the thrill of the hack to altruism and sharing. Production

without compensation, as Coleman argues drawing on Latour's work, operates "as a

'theater of proof' that economic incentives are unnecessary to secure creative

output…" (2012: 185). Labor must be gifted voluntarily to the collaborative network,

based solely on the individual free desire for technical efficiency and achievement. As

Weber (2004) noted in his study of open source, non-monetary forms of

compensation, collective identity, and external enemies such as Microsoft motivate

participation and keep collaborative projects together.

For some interpreters, this is a radical political critique. Coleman (2012)

argues that free software represents a "targeted, if not wholesale, critique of

neoliberalism in challenging intellectual property law" (11), even as there is an "aesthetic" of hacking that enacts a "romantic sensibility" (4) undermining the liberal values and the self it is premised upon. The freedom of the hacker is "the utopian promise of unalienated labor, of human flourishing through creative and self-actualizing production" (Beebe quoted in Coleman: 15),

On another reading, we can see this 'romantic sensibility' as a potent cultural achievement, similar to the crafting of the discourse that enabled New Communalists such as Barlow to imagine their informational labor as forms of self-expression and community-building – even while there were differential economic returns on digital labor. For one, similar to the logic of the gift economy, the subsidies upon which voluntary gifts are premised are often completely absent from discussion of these communities' political and social values. All forms of collaborative production—and especially those that take advantage of the lowered costs of the internet—are premised on having

> sufficient material, social and psychological resources already in hand to take
> the time to join such communities. If they do not have those resources,
> participation in the group must generate sufficient material value to replace the
> work they otherwise would have to do to keep body and soul together (Turner
> 2009: 76-77).

Coleman (2012: 26) notes, in a composite life history, the growing financial independence of young hackers "thanks to lucrative information technology jobs as a programmer or system administrator that gave him the financial freedom, the 'free time,' to code for volunteer projects, or alternatively paid him explicitly to work on free software." This includes, in some cases, working for firms such as IBM, Red Hat, and Hewlett-Packard that directly subsidize particular contributions to open source

projects. In this sense, the freedom to work for free is premised upon a material subsidy granted through the structure of the technology industry, an industry full of billion-dollar firms such as IBM that profit off this code (for a discussion, see Coleman 2012: 191-193).

The issue is that the value of free software is differentially returned. For some, compensation is indirect, such as through the hiring of hackers who make contributions to free and open source projects by firms that monetize what was gifted from those acting according to other social and psychological motives, such as to realize the expressive freedom of coding. For those outside of the direct compensatory system, voluntary contributions are often premised on other forms of subsidy that secure material needs, such as jobs outside of the computing industry (or voluntary contributions are made in anticipation of gaining more permanent employment in the future, as Ross (2013) details. Either way, the value that firms derive from open source technologies far outstrips the returns that hackers achieve—a point that Stallman himself made repeatedly, as he hoped that "programmers would be paid for their labor" (Coleman 2012: 82).

Even more, the aesthetic of hacking and romantic sensibility that animates it can work ideologically to motivate 'working for free.' An ethos of productive freedom and a romantic sensibility translates into economic value. Ironically, independently working *with* and *for* freedom is, in essence, working *for* free—given that free and open source software projects often fail to provide direct compensation and job security. This is a point that Andrew Ross (2006) has made: communities of hackers have a very limited degree of labor consciousness. And, while scholars such as Coleman have shown the value of the legal and contextual knowledge these communities develop, in addition to their broader critiques of intellectual property,

what is clear is that the relationship of capital to the common and the way that cultural understandings spur people to gift their labor is generally left outside of the political critique of the free and open source software movement.

Conclusion: *The Declaration* at twenty

At twenty years old, Barlow's *Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace* is both an artifact of an earlier, headier time, and an important tributary of our current cultural understandings of the digital age. It was a powerful rhetorical invocation (and simultaneously a failed performative enactment) of the independence of cyberspace—premised on forging a utopian world apart from the terrestrial governments, laws, marketplaces, and institutions that gave shape to the inequalities of our own social world. At its most idealistic, the *Declaration* is a clarion call for stronger forms of democracy and community, greater individual liberty and expressive freedom. And yet, it is a deeply flawed document. Cyberspace never was—and never could be—independent from the governing institutions, economic structures, and cultural and social worlds that gave rise to it. Indeed, cyberspace has always been dependent on those worlds for its very existence and form.

As the case studies of WikiLeaks and free and open source software make apparent, the myth of independence works ideologically to elide the complex embeddedness of all social action (online and off) in larger structures of economic and cultural power. Ideas of independence undermined WikiLeaks's political effectiveness, at least initially, even while the enduring power of states, national journalistic outlets, commercial platforms, and cultural ideas of the press's obligations to society was clear. Assange's idea of independent, de-territorialized, and stateless information ultimately undermined WikiLeaks's ability to build enduring alliances

with powerful and socially legitimate institutions. At the same time, the aesthetic sensibilities of free and open source software enable hackers to imagine a world apart where they pursue the expressive practice of coding for intrinsic reasons, and forget the deeper ways they are still imbricated in the logics of neo-liberalism.

Ultimately, despite attempts to create new independent media—cyberspace, WikiLeaks, and open source software—free from the strictures of the market and state, we may be too quick to turn away from the 'old media' that often can be more 'independent' of other powerful institutions. Ironically, legacy media's institutional entanglements with the state are often its positive sources of freedom. It is difficult to imagine similar attacks on professional journalistic outlets as those experienced by WikiLeaks, at least in the United States, because they have evolved institutionally to have certain legal, ethical, and regulatory safeguards positively guaranteed by the state—such as the courts (see Allan and Jukes' chapter in this volume). New media sites such as WikiLeaks lack those safeguards and forms of institutionally-secured independence. Meanwhile, open source laborers may trade as much freedom as they gain when they turn from the old to the new economy—the freedom to earn a living from their labor or freedom to be paid a minimum wage, both of which are secured by state regulations.

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