

## Hilary Wainwright: Brainstorming questions responding to the challenge to think about the political implications of free culture

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I would distinguish two kinds of implications, though they are related I imagine. First the potential reverberations throughout society of free culture especially of free knowledge in all its diversity and plurality; second the way that organizational logics developed in the context of free culture illustrate forms of co-operation which are beyond present options of state and market (though this might involve/lead to/shape different/non-capitalist kinds of state and market institutions).

Thinking about the first led me to put the ICT revolution and the political implication of free culture into a historical context and ask how far this technological revolution combined with the mass expansion of higher education, from the 60's onwards (though distorted and unequal in all sorts of ways) lays the basis for the transformation of politics in the way that the development of the printing press in the 15th century and the translation of the bible into accessible languages transformed religion. Just as these changes in this earlier era (closely tied to a multiplicity of movements for a free press, the banner of free culture in that context) led to overthrowing the monopoly of the priest over religion and the nature of belief, is the present revolution in the means of communication laying the basis for ending the monopoly of the political class over the nature of government? This would make the present and future struggles for free culture central to the future of politics.

Then coming to the second implication, of the organizational logics of free culture – the commons, diversity ('and' rather than 'or') forking, mutuality, co-operation, transparency – and their implications for wider questions of social organization, especially going beyond present, capitalistic forms of market and state. Here I would suggest exploring the implications of the understandings of knowledge and the new possibilities for its production and organization opened up by the development and use of the new technology on the principles of free culture. Maybe this is too long a question to pose in a note like this, and I should write a distinct note as a background material. But the gyst is this: the theoretical underpinnings of both the capitalistic 'free' market and the paternalist, 'social' state are based on distinct understandings of knowledge, its character and its organization. Traditional social democratic notions of state intervention have placed much faith in basing public policy on scientific laws of society that can be codified, centralized and made the basis of planning and regulation. At the opposite end of the spectrum, we know that the free market ideology which rhetorically at least inspired the revival of neo-liberalism was based as on Hayek's head on attack on this notion of knowledge and his extolling of the practical, tacit knowledge of the entrepreneur. For Hayek and neo-liberals this tacit and practical knowledge is essentially individual. Any economic order must be the result of the haphazard interactions of entrepreneurs the medium of the market and the price mechanism. The social movements since the late 60's have gone beyond these two polar opposities in understanding knowledge and holding out new possibilities for its production and distribution. They insist on its plurality: tacit and practical, rooted in experiences and emotion for example as well as based on theoretical research and investigation; and they insist on its social and sharable character whether it is practical and tacit or theoretical and codified. The ICT revolution massively, qualitatively strengthen and helps to systematize the intuitions developed in the practice of the early movements. This it seems to me is a fundamental reason why the organizational logics of the free culture movement in all its forms hold out the possibility of new models of social organization, including rethinking/transforming state and market institutions – based on very different understanding of both social and the plural nature of knowledge. Of course that leads, as Mayo Fuster's paper to discussion of the conditions, in terms of equality of access, of time and resources including public resources to the means of communications.

The kind of social relations these logics hold out have neither the atomistic, socially blindfold character which free marketers imply is a necessary feature of tacit skill and practical know how, nor the heirarchical, command relations which is the corollary of a presumption that the only valid knowledge is that of the professional experts ... acting in the interests of the people. They could be best summed up as relations of mutuality (the relations which I guess underly the commons ) –or at least relations which aspire to mutuality.

In this sense they are about a lot more than ‘voice’, ‘consultation’ even ‘participation’ and all the other conventional categories of democratisation. They involve a sharing of knowledge in the mutual production and consumption (‘prosumption’ I think people call it) of a public good.

In that sense they also demonstrate the material as well as social nature of knowledge ... The question then is what are the implications of achieving or more realistically struggling for, relations of mutuality relate to a wider systemic vision? How does it relate to using the perspective of knowledge and capacity to think beyond the dichotomies of state and market?

As I say just some brainstorming!!

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