SEMIOTIC PRACTICE AND INTERNET FREEDOM DISCOURSE

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The purpose of this presentation is to demonstrate how the theory of semiotic practices advanced by Jacques Fontanille (2008) can be applied to the study of Internet Freedom discourse. The fundamental hypothesis is that any practice can be experienced as a signifying whole, with its own semiotic function (*semiosis*), but its full meaning can only be appreciated through its participation in a hierarchy of semiotic expressions, a generative and integrative trajectory composed of six formal instances: signs/figures, text-utterances, objects, practical scenes, strategies, and forms of life. Our primary focus is on the level of the practical scene (*practice*) and how its relationship to these other levels can contribute to defining Internet freedom discourse within the framework of a Semiotics of Culture.

Today, the semiotics of discourse offers us a point of view that neutralizes the difference between text and context: “to adopt the point of view of discourse, is to admit from the start that all of the elements that work toward the process of signification belong by right to the signifying whole, that is to say, to discourse, no matter what they are” (Fontanille 2006: 52). Situations and contexts are not extra-semiotic realities “for they are thoroughly ‘semiotized’ and by that fact alone genuinely pertinent” (Floch 2001: 39). The “context” of a text-utterance is in fact an integration of objects, practices, strategies and forms of life, as well as other texts and figures, all participating in the production and interpretation of the text. Each of these planes of expression offers an immanent form of *semiosis* through which a sensible, perceiving body experiences meaning. In the case of Internet use, *practice* presents us with an optimum level for analysis because it serves as an interface between online and offline semiotic situations for which the Internet user (the body-center) serves as the *epi-semiotic* instance that organizes the practice into a signifying whole.

A detailed account of all Internet freedom practices is beyond our reach here, but we will demonstrate how a semiotics of practices can help us orient and organize our approach to the theme. To do this, we will rely on textualizations of the Internet Freedom struggle, primarily in the work of Internet Freedom expert Rebecca MacKinnon¹ and the

¹ Rebecca MacKinnon is the co-founder of Global Voices Online, a founding

WordPress Foundation. Our primary text is MacKinnon's book, *Consent of the Networked: The Struggle for Internet Freedom*, a meta-discursive presentation of the variety and complexity of the freedoms at stake in, through, and around the Internet. We will also examine how WordPress (2012) and the WordPress Foundation (2012) textualize their role in the "struggle".

The struggle for Internet freedom is expanding and intensifying every day. As MacKinnon explains:

Human society has acquired a digital dimension with new cross-cutting power relationships. The Internet is a politically contested space, featuring new and unstable power relationships among governments, citizens, and companies. Today's battles over freedom and control are raging simultaneously across democracies and dictatorships; across economic, ideological, and cultural lines. (2012: 5)

Many of us who use the Internet daily may not even be aware of these "battles", yet most would agree that what we can do with the Internet as a medium of communication and expression does in fact depend on how it is structured. The Internet is a "stratification of technologies" (Zinna 1998: 248) and imperceptible processes each of which can be manipulated via the intervention of others. It is shaped "by the Internet service providers, e-mail services, mobile devices, and social networking services" (MacKinnon 2012: 6). Consequently, "the companies controlling our digital networks and platforms represent pivotal points of control over our relationship with the rest of society and with government" (MacKinnon 2012: 165). Each of these "pivotal points" is the result of a practice or a set of practices that was strategically placed there to "shape" what we can achieve pragmatically, apprehend cognitively, and even feel passionately. These points correspond roughly to what Fontanille calls "critical zones" which present themselves as discontinuities in space and time that are "negotiated" to adjust to a user's trajectory, like negotiating a turn (2008: 30). On the Internet, however, most of these "zones" are imperceptible and non-negotiable at any given moment unless you have the competence (knowledge and/or power) required to apprehend them.

When the Internet first arrived on the scene it was immediately recognized as an enabling and liberating technology due to its extreme potential for engagement and *brayage*.² It has emerged as a powerful

board member of the Global Network Initiative, and a Bernard L. Schwartz Senior Fellow at the New America Foundation.

² I will use French terms *brayage*, *débrayage*, and *embrayage* instead of the terms *gagement*, *disengagement*, and *engagement* used in Heidi Bostic's translation of *Semiotics of Discourse* in order to avoid confusion with the French term *engagement*, which is used in a different sense in the semiotic theory of practices.

modal conditioning of human activity, primarily based on its ability to turn *motivations* into *aptitudes* (i.e., by actualizing new kinds of /being able to do/ and /knowing-how-to-do/).³ However, with the potential for free, virtually unlimited expression would also come the potential for manipulation, suppression, and censorship that would suspend the realization of free expression. The ever increasing constraints on Internet use have turned this modal predicate into a battle ground in which the struggle for modal conditioning can assume many forms depending on the orientation of the practices and strategies involved.

The overall struggle is grounded in a fundamental schema of tension articulated by the internet in general. In *extent*, the Internet can multiply, duplicate, and deliver semiotic objects and discourses to millions of receivers around the world, through multiple computer systems; and just about anything that goes on the Internet stays there forever. This seemingly unlimited *débrayage* means that an object can be separated from its original environment and planted in new ones, thereby permitting the invention of new discourses and situations *ad infinitum*. The Internet also has an *intensifying* effect with its ability to bring people closer together by facilitating instant communication and live interactions. It maximizes *embrayage* by simulating proprioceptive instances of others, giving people the impression of being immediately present to each other and permitting them to share affective experiences.⁴ When one considers the modal and axiological weight that this tension could bring about, it is no wonder that this struggle reaches the most far reaching and abstract extremes of ethical arguments and ideological conflicts. We have already seen a *tensive schema of amplification*⁵ help push people to a tipping point and motivate action against or for governments (e.g., the so-called "Arab Spring"⁶).

Given the fact that the Internet is a meta-semiotic technology that continually re-defines the conditions for its use, we can already assume that a primary concern of Internet Freedom discourse is about freedom of online semiotic expression (or manifestation), whether as a means or

³ The distinction depending on whether it was relatively easy for anyone to learn how to use it (i.e., user friendly) or if it required specialized knowledge.

⁴ A perfect example of this is the world-wide distribution of the video of Nēda Agha-Soltan's dying after being shot in 2009 during the Presidential Election Protest in Iran. It is considered to be one of the most widely witnessed deaths in human history.

⁵ A *tensive schema of amplification* is when an increase in extent is directly correlated to an increase in intensity.

⁶ On their website, the U.S. Department of State says that, "in many ways, the Internet is the largest collaborative effort humankind has ever seen, magnifying the power and potential of individual voices on a global scale" (2010).

an end. Therefore, our first hypothesis is that the Internet freedom struggle, as a recurring form of content (i.e., a thematic isotopy), can be articulated at every plane of expression. Our second hypothesis is that Internet Freedom discourses are also concerned with the freedom to integrate expressions from one level to another, to move through and between them. Regardless of their specific forms, these discourses all seem to articulate a struggle within and around the *actant of control* which determines what can come about in the positional field of practical discourse and how.⁷ If we suppose from the outset that every semiotic expression—textual or other—is a heterogeneous whole, and whose limits can only be determined after that fact, then the very process of signification (production and/or interpretation) becomes, as Fontanille puts it, a “pressure of homogenization, or more precisely, a pressure with a view to the resolution of heterogeneities” (2006: 53). This synthesis carries with it a constant negotiation and assertion of control from the initiation of a practice to its completion.

Because we are not actually observing practical discourses as they occur, we are only attempting here to understand how practices *may* present and orient themselves as discursive instances on and through the Internet. More specifically, we are concerned with the discursive schemas that mediate singular acts of enunciation and the acts of enunciative praxis that underlie them. To begin with, we can follow Jean-Marie Floch (2001: 14) by distinguishing discourses *about* Internet Freedom from discourses *of* Internet Freedom. While the first is usually in the form of a text-utterance, an icono-text or linguistic text (oral or written), the second can be a social practice itself.

Discourse *about* Internet Freedom has been well painted at the textual level and is very revealing. For example, we use figures from the offline, non-digital word to describe online, digital forms, such as *platform*, *network*, *forum*, *window*, *virus*, *browser*, *application*, and *web*—all of which imply a variety of practical scenes in which they can participate. The Internet is also described in spatial terms (e.g., *digital world*, *blogospheres*, *World Wide Web*), as well as temporally and aspectually (e.g., *high-speed*, *instant messaging*, *live stream*), in a manner that continually re-iterates its potential for extreme extent (e.g., size, expansion, reach, multiplicity) and intensity (e.g., speed, concurrence, shared experience). Because most Internet Freedom discourse is inherently political, we will also see a wide use of geo- and socio-political imagery and constructs such as *netizens*, *hactivists*, *piracy*, *digital terrorism*, *digital bullying*, *Googledom*, and *Facebookistan*. This digital world is run by “digital sov-

⁷ Two of the principle definitions of the word *freedom* found in the dictionary (2013) are (a) “exemption from external control, interference, regulation, etc.”; and (b) “the power to determine action without restraint.”

ereigns" (MacKinnon 2012: 17), and the "global community of people who rely on Google services" are "digital residents of Googledom" (MacKinnon 2012: 9).

While many references to the non-digital world are humorous, they also make an important comparison that illustrates inequalities between the online and offline worlds: "constitutional norms govern people's free speech rights in public spheres, but not in Appledom" (MacKinnon 2012: 128). These metaphors also reveal different stances taken in relation to the Internet. Wary of its potential for anarchy, the former French president Nicolas Sarkozy called it a "territory to be conquered", but one that should not become a lawless "Wild West" (MacKinnon 2012: 197). Highlighting its necessity in today's world, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called the Internet "a new nervous system for our planet" (2010) and described it as "the public space of the 21st century—the world's town square, classroom, marketplace, coffeehouse, and nightclub. We all shape and are shaped by what happens there" (2011). The Internet may be what we make of it, but who exactly is this "we"? And why does it often feel like we have so little control over how it is shaped? The layers of complexity that give it form and keep it going are abundant. As MacKinnon puts it, "we live in an informational rain forest that sprang up around us practically overnight" and "we are not prepared for such an overwhelming ecosystem of rapidly growing info-organisms" (2012: 223-224).

From a semiotic point of view, all of these discourses *about* the Internet (i.e., text-utterances) *integrate* the semiotic expressions found at the other levels (signs, objects, practices, forms of life). Consequently, they offer us a set of representations that can orient and guide us to a global understanding of the "scenes" and "situations" of struggle for and against Internet Freedom, including a variety of polemical and contractual trajectories, thematic and figurative roles, elements of genre, stereotypes, ethics, and enunciative simulacra. The practical discursive acts that "embody" this struggle present themselves as discourses of Internet Freedom, and they are only interpreted as such as they move forward accommodating and revealing values (Fontanille 2008: 175). This is possible thanks to the projection of pre-existing discursive schemas—the products of enunciative praxis—onto the sensible experience under construction as well as the improvisation of new schemas.

In order to discuss the syntagmatic "unfolding" of these internet practices, we will use Fontanille's Elementary Predicative Scene of Practice (2008: 215, 2007: 15) (see Figure 1). This "scene" consists of 3 actantial instances (*operator actant*, *objective*, and *strategic horizon*) and one predicative instance (the *practical act*). The act is the place of thematic predication, aspectual segmentation, and modalization of the process (e.g., writing code for open-source blogging software). The *operator* articulates the thematic identity as well as modal and passion-

Figure 1. The Elementary Predicative Scene of Practice

al roles (e.g., the programmer or Internet activist). The *objective* carries the values of the practice as a closed course of action: it is an *objective* when it is intended (e.g., the blogging software to be designed), but a *result* when apprehended (e.g., the completed software). The *horizon* is the “other scene”—or “scene of the other”—which carries other roles, values, and modalizations beyond this practice and serves as a gateway to strategy. It contributes to defining the *situation* of the practice (e.g., an open source blogging program that can be modified and shared by others) and may include other actants, indirect consequences, and “final causes”.

The arrows between each instance represent *practical bonds* that assure the consistency of the scene (Fontanille 2008: 280) and generate ethical effects. Because the operator is defined through the practical act itself, the bond between them is one of *inference* and its ethical effects are *imputation* and *responsibility*. The bond between the act and the strategic horizon corresponds to *consequence* in so far as the act influences the horizon. This example is important because many ethical debates revolve around whether or not responsibility for an act overlaps with the consequences of the act. Fontanille proposes a complex typology of tensions between these bonds, which is beyond our scope here.⁸ Simply put, the consistency of the bonds and the movement corresponds roughly to when people speak about their actions as having “meaning and purpose”. Signification in act resides in the global consistency of the scene which imposes a general on-going equilibrium constantly put into question and reconstituted in the process of accommodation (Fontanille 2008: 176).

⁸ For more on this, see Fontanille (2008: 281-292).

The syntagmatic unfolding of a practice, the *sequence of accommodation* (Fontanille 2010: 7), begins with the inevitable confrontation between a practice and its alterity that initiates a quest for meaning. A practice follows a sequence of resolution that begins with what Fontanille calls the "*possibles of meaning*" and then passes through three more phases: *schematization*, *regulation*, and *resolution* (or *accommodation*) (2008: 132). With the "*possibles of meaning*", the situation is actualized and there is a confrontation between the practice and its alterity as something new, strange, or resistant (e.g., getting on an elevator with other people). In the *schematization* phase (Fontanille 2008: 133), the situation is analyzed and the operator looks for organizing schemes, either by calling up a situation-type for which one already knows the solution, a *hetero-adaptive* solution, or by inventing an unforeseen, *auto-adaptive* solution (e.g., deciding how to behave on the elevator). When the solution is projected onto the occurrence, we enter the phase of regulation which characterizes the syntagmatic regimes (*protocol*, *procedure*, *conduct*, *ritual*, *routine*) that carry the modal and axiological weight of the practice (e.g., adhering to a tradition of facing the elevator door vs. facing other people). Finally, in the *accommodation* phase (Fontanille 2008: 134), the practical trajectory is put into strategic form: it faces the strategic horizon and signifies that the "situation-occurrence" is now part of a coherent set of practices (e.g., conversing with others, holding the elevator door for someone else, etc.).

For a given an Internet practice, a *non-neutral* Internet will limit and constrain an operator's action and quest for meaning at each stage. As a digital medium, the Internet will limit the "*possibles of meaning*" from the outset. At the schematization phase, a non-neutral Internet will limit the operator's auto-adaptability by limiting the possibilities of modification or innovation. At the regulation phase, a non-neutral Internet will constrain the "*efficient form*" (the *solution*) projected onto the occurrence by forcing the user to adhere to established *protocol*. By the time practices effectively accommodate its strategy, the non-neutral Internet will offer it an array of counter-strategies. Proponents of Internet freedom are perfectly aware of this, for their mission is to minimize constraints in all the phases of a practice.

In any given Internet practice, different forms of freedom may be at stake. In her meta-discursive analysis of Internet Freedom, MacKinnon distinguishes five "meanings" of "Internet Freedom":

It can mean freedom *through* the Internet: the use of the Internet by citizens to achieve freedom from political oppression. It can mean freedom *for* the Internet: non-interference in the Internet's networks and platforms by governments or other entities. It can mean freedom *within* the Internet: individuals speaking and interacting in this virtual space have the same right to virtual free expression and assembly as

they have to the physical pre-Internet equivalents. It can mean freedom *to connect* to the Internet: any attempt to prevent citizens from accessing it is a violation of their right to free expression and assembly. Finally, "Internet freedom" can also mean freedom *of* the Internet: free and open architecture and governance, which means that people and organizations who use computer code to determine its technical standards, as well as those who use legal code to regulate what can and cannot be done within and through the Internet, all share the common goal of keeping the Internet open, free, and globally interconnected so that all netizens are free not only to use it, but also to participate in shaping it themselves. (2012: 188)

Other kinds of Internet freedom have been proposed,⁹ but we will limit ourselves to these. "Freedom *to connect*" is about access: in this struggle, Internet connection itself often becomes an object of value in an offline quest or ordeal (e.g., denial of service attacks). "Freedom *through*" refers to the use of the Internet as a means to an end, a medium, such as in the online organization of an offline, anti-government protest. We see a case of "freedom *for*" the Internet in the imposition of censorship laws on Google services in China in 2010. "Freedom *within*" is primarily concerned with equating internet rights with human or civil rights,¹⁰ including the Freedom to use anonymity to protect oneself from online and offline persecution. This type of freedom is difficult to achieve because "legislative code does not cover most aspects of computer code, and it certainly fails to anticipate innovations" (MacKinnon 2012: 116).¹¹ Even if the Internet was able to mirror the legal structure of the offline world, it would still be a zone of conflict simply by virtue of being an international space. The lack of "freedom *within*" the Internet also limits your ability to achieve "freedom *through*" it. For example, if your privacy isn't protected online, it will inhibit your ability to use the Internet for civil disobedience (MacKinnon 2012: 147).

All five kinds of Internet freedom can be characterized, in part, by the kind of relationship they articulate between the online and the offline worlds (see Table 1). This is a crude simplification, but it highlights the importance of the relationships established between online and offline activities. In fact, it seems that all Internet practices involve

⁹ The U.S. Department of State (2010), for example, supports and defends what it calls the "five key freedoms of the Internet Age": "Freedom of Speech", "Freedom of Worship", "Freedom from Want", "Freedom from Fear", and "Freedom to Connect".

¹⁰ See Wagner (2011).

¹¹ "Internet and mobile telecommunications companies[...]create computer code that functions as a kind of law, in that it shapes what people can do and sometimes directly censors what they can see" (MacKinnon 2012: 115).

Freedom <i>through</i> :	offline --> online --> offline
Freedom <i>for</i> :	online <--x--> offline
Freedom <i>within</i> :	online = offline
Freedom <i>to connect to</i> :	offline ---> online
Freedom <i>of</i> :	online

Table 1. Five Internet Freedoms

an accommodation of online and offline activities in their acts, objectives, and horizons, and to some extent or another, may involve several of these freedom struggles at the same time. This is one reason why the Internet Freedom debate is often a struggle over which type of freedom to prioritize, sometimes at the expense of another. Because “freedoms” inevitably over-lap, the fifth type (“freedom *of*”) deserves special attention, for it determines the extent to which the other freedoms are possible. Because of this, we will focus on WordPress as an example of the role that the digital commons plays in the Internet Freedom struggle, and their mission to promote the freedom *for*, *within*, *through*, and *of* the Internet.

Regardless of the type of freedom sought, every scene of Internet use requires a taking of position both offline (e.g., the office, the street, the party) and online (e.g., the IP address, the website, the blog), some favoring one side more than the other. With this in mind, the level of practice becomes decisive, for it constitutes the “critical level” where one can “come and go” between the online and offline “worlds”, a passageway for integrations from digital to non-digital expressions and vice versa. For example, a digital file can be copied and circulated as a digital, online object or it can be copied onto a CD and circulated as an offline object. Because the epi-semiotic instance of an internet practice is centered upon at least one offline operator (i.e., a human body), the Internet freedom struggle is still fundamentally rooted in the offline world—which, of course, supports the idea that internet rights are in fact human rights.¹²

This epi-semiotic dimension is the heart of practical immanence that brings together all the operations that manifest the engagement of the operator in the optimization of the course of action (Fontanille 2010: 9). It is an *interpretive instance* in which we find a permanent tension between its forms of accommodation, schematization, and the reduction of possibilities, on the one hand, and its openness to alterity on the other. This *internal cognitive dimension* coincides with the operator-actant, but it also includes all operations of regulation (e.g., manage-

¹¹ Consider, for example, the practice of torturing people for their Gmail, Yahoo, and Facebook passwords in Iran (MacKinnon 2012: 55).

ment, interventions) whether automatic, preprogrammed, improvised, involuntary, or not (Fontanille 2010: 6). Because of this, a practice also has a *hermeneutic objective* which Fontanille describes as a “quest for the meaning of the action in the course of the action itself” (2010: 7), and therefore seeks a resolution of heterogeneity.

Within the flux of the Internet’s “glocalizing” effect, Internet use offers a myriad of heterogeneities to be resolved, including poly-sensorial (or multi-modal) heterogeneity, varying modes of existence of expression, the syntagmatic co-existence of semiotic objects, layers of enunciation, not to mention the diversity of software programs employed. Of course, much of the resolution will be automated, but synthesis and coherency will ultimately be found through the realization of formal situations (i.e., practices) by an operator. On every plane of expression, the place of heterogeneity is the *material situation* and the product resolving this heterogeneity is the *formal situation*, in which we find coherence, optimization, and adequation (Fontanille 2008: 184). The key to Internet freedom is to generate optimal formal situations that favor freedom of expression.

The formal instance of each immanent plane of expression (*semiosis*) is the result of a *type of experience* that seeks its own coherence via internal modelization (Fontanille 2008: 50-51). Immanence means that this activity of modelization is inherent to enunciative praxis because the pertinence of signifying wholes is constrained simultaneously by rules of construction of the expression plane and by the point of view from which one intends the structuration of the content plane. Each type of experience can in turn be reconfigured as a constituent pertinent to a hierarchically superior level: the formal instance of one level can serve as the material & sensible instance for the next level up. A perceptive and sensorial experience gives us *figures*; an interpretive experience of coherence and cohesion gives us *text-utterances*; a corporeal experience gives us the *objects* and their praxic morphology (or affordance); a practical experience gives us *predicative scenes*; an experience of managing & accommodating practices gives us *strategies*; and the experience of strategic styles gives us *forms of life* (Fontanille 2008: 49). Together they constitute the hierarchy of semiotic experiences (Fontanille 2008: 34) and a generative trajectory of the plane of expression, but they do not occur independent of each other (see Table 2). They are all present in any given situation (give or take some syncopes¹³) while still maintaining a relative autonomy in terms of their semiotic function.

While each plane of expression is a place of discontinuity, it is also a place of “conversion”, an interface where the material and sensible properties of one level are schematized and converted from one experi-

¹³ See Fontanille (2008: 58-63).

Type of Experience	Formal Instances	Interfaces
Figurativity	Signs/figures ↓	
		Recurring formants
Interpretive coherence and cohesion	Text-utterances ↓	Figurative isotopies of expression
		Device of enunciation/inscription
Corporeality	Objects ↓	Formal support of inscription
		Praxic morphology (affordance)
Practice	Predicative scenes ↓	Predicative scene
		Process of accommodation
Conjuncture	Strategies ↓	Strategic management of practices
		Iconization of strategic behaviors
Ethos and behavior	Forms of life ↓	Strategic styles

Table 2. The Planes of Semiotic Experience

ence (n) into a semiotically pertinent expression at the next level up (n + 1). Therefore each semiotic-object is a double morphology with two distinct faces: one that faces the inferior level (face 1), and one that faces the superior level (face 2). Face 1 is the formal instance that emerges from the material support of the lower level, while face 2 is only substantial and won't be formalized until it is articulated at the next level up (Fontanille 2008: 24). In sum, each semiotic manifestation participates explicitly as an *interface* in a trajectory of *integration* between planes of immanence, a progressive elaboration of the experience in which all the material and sensible properties are already present a conglomerate from first level of experience (Fontanille 2008: 35).

The combination of this material continuity with the enunciative discontinuity that each level presents us permits us to achieve two kinds of synthesis: one by *syncretism*, of multi-modal heterogeneity, and another by an *integrative trajectory*, the passage from material to form. *Syncretism* is assured only when the ensemble of the integrated semiotic modalities correspond to coherent structures of content. In other words, a predicative scene (a practice) stabilizes and resolves the multi-modal heterogeneity *because* we can associate a structure of content to it. *Integration* makes us pass from material to substance, substance to form, a process of resolving the heterogeneities of substance resulting in a syncretism. Thanks to these forms of synthesis, each plane of expression is susceptible to being used by all the others, and it will be defined by the manner in which it enters into relationship with the them

(Fontanille 2008: 116). Practices, for example, can interact with or be integrated by all other levels.¹⁴

A *descending integration* is a condensation of semiotic properties from the higher levels, submitted to rules and properties of lower level in order to be reduced.¹⁵ It establishes “distinctiveness” between semiotic-objects, because their values remain “potential”. An *ascending integration* is a cumulative complexification, involving the addition of supplementary dimensions. It allows values to “find their meaning” by participating in a higher level. In ascending integration, a text will be found inscribed on an object and manipulated in a practice. In descending integration, a practice will find itself emblemized by an object, or *mise en scène* in a text. The two trajectories are reciprocal, but asymmetric (Fontanille 2008: 61): an ascending trajectory has a cumulative effect that “adds dimension” while a descending trajectory reduces of number of dimensions in a sort of “flattening” (Fontanille 2008: 62).

Following the high-speed-rail crash in Wenzhou in 2011, the Chinese government’s Internet tracking and censoring efforts prevented the outpouring of anger toward the authorities “from *morphing* into offline protests or any broader movement for political change” (MacKinnon 2012: 44). This is an example of how the Chinese government inhibited the propagation of textual (or icono-textual) utterances resulting from descending integrations (i.e., textualizations of the event) along with their potential for integration “upward”—their *projection*—into objects circulated through Internet practices (emails, postings, videos, etc.) thereby limiting the realization—through ascending integration—of unwanted practices and strategies that could pose a threat to order. They, in effect, constrained the actualization and realization of anti-government expression both online and offline. In general, proponents of censorship are concerned with ascending integrations when they want to eliminate textual utterances that may entice unwanted offline activities. They are concerned with a descending integration when they want to prevent photo or narrative accounts of an event (e.g., a massacre) from going online.

An integrative trajectory may also serve to liberate someone, as in the incident cited by Mackinnon (2012: 40-41) where a Chinese citizen was “saved by twitter”. After being arrested and facing an undetermined

¹⁴ The concrete production of particular semiotic objects through these ascending and descending integrations is also called the *Trajectory of Manifestation* (Fontanille 2008: 58-63).

¹⁵ This is important in Internet discourse because the activities of actors like ISPs or Social networking sites, contribute to defining the rules & regulations of descending integration. In addition to rules restricting the size of a photo that may be posted, there may also be rules regarding the icono-textual content of your photo.

amount of time in prison, he was able to twitter a text for help. Because of this textual utterance and its circulation through twitter (practice), a critical mass of people was able to rally for his release. Through descending integration, the man was able to textualize his practical experience. Through ascending integration, his textual-utterance was able to be circulated as the object of a practical scene, and thereby trigger a chain of events (a strategy) that resulted in his release. Much of the power of the Internet is found in this ability to facilitate integrative trajectories. This is why the struggle for Internet freedom is a struggle for controlling how the material support of the Internet can be converted (via interface) into formal support of Internet expression at one or more levels.

Since, as we propose here, all online experiences necessarily include an offline component, their material support will include both digital and non-digital properties. The latter could include elements of the entire offline situation in which the internet is used (e.g., the office, political protest). Nevertheless, the heart of internet practice is in the digital expression constituted by hardware, software, and energy (e.g., electricity, wireless technology). Consequently, the formation of any internet experience will require a selection and systematization of these materials (Fontanille 2005: 7). As material supports, hardware and electricity propose lines of forces, substantial tendencies, limited to a defined set of possibles. When they are combined with software, they generate a formal support that modelizes the material support and gives it a configuration which, when fixed by convention, hides and virtualizes certain material properties.

The usual distinction between hardware and software is that hardware is perceptible and software is not. Fontanille doubles this distinction based on their roles as material support and formal support in computer writing (2005: 8). He identifies two different modes of existence: (1) the *internal and imperceptible mode of existence* which involves a material support (physical and electronic); and a formal support (the computer code) that manages the rules of inscription and interpretation of the machine's signals; and (2) the *external and perceptible mode of existence*, found on the graphic interface, which involves a material support (physical screen + technology of luminous inscription) and a formal support (the page-screen or window). In both cases, the material support is hardware and electricity, and the formal support results from the intervention of software. The passage from one mode to another is a case of semiotic translation, from one text (computer code) to another, aimed at facilitating the realization of other signs, objects, practices, etc. In sum, software and hardware are both ergonomically designed to work together and serve as interfaces between levels semiotic expression, thus participating in all integrative trajectories.

As a physical interface between online and offline worlds, hardware alone offers a set of formal instances in the offline side of the prac-

tical scene by providing useful objects such as mouse, mouse pad, printer, monitor, as well as material support for software (e.g., CD's and flash drives). At the extreme end of Internet oppression, it can be a matter of cutting off or destroying this hardware or imposing economic and physical constraints that will limit "freedom to *connect*" to the Internet. However, most of the power struggle seems to take place in the often unnoticeable manipulation of software—which is already inherently manipulative and constraining¹⁶—and therefore participates in the enunciation of predicative scenes. From a positional standpoint, it controls—along with the operator-user—the mode of existence of the process one intends to realize and the depth of presence of what comes about in the field of discourse (but only partially, for you still have the option to participate or not; to negotiate critical zones or not). Above all, software is appreciated for its role in constructing and defining the *interactive scene* of computer use.

In order to "see" an imperceptible object like an electronic file, we may use a simulacrum (e.g., an image of a page or a "file name.pdf") to give us an "illusion" of corporeality and continuity. When we send a file to another computer through the Internet, we are in fact sending it a set of instructions to reproduce the qualities of the file (i.e., a copy of itself). Yet, it is still treated as a genuine object, and we "believe" it is there through figurative, iconic, or textual representations of it or through the hardware-object (e.g., CD) in which is inscribed. This can make the interface between text and object blurry. For example, a hypertext permits interactivity in the access of its contents (Zinna 1998: 250) by serving as an interface between text and object, like an object-text. From the object it retains the possibility of being used and manipulated (its praxic morphology); from the text it keeps the signifying structure of the written elements (1998: 250).

The signs, texts, and objects manipulated by the internet—and computers in general—serve to simulate the objects of an *interactive scene*, but one that exists because it operates like a practice and we believe it to be so. In fact, a fundamental purpose of the Internet has always been to make it "easy" (i.e., structurally economical) to communicate and interact through the graphic user interface.¹⁷ The creation of a website

¹⁶ An online store, for example, is designed for a specific modal orientation that requires someone to follow a certain procedure—not so different offline shopping experience—in order to make an online purchase (= a practice). The site, guided by its software, determines what you /can do/ and what you /have to do/ in order to reach your objective (i.e., to make a purchase).

¹⁷ A significant problem arises when people associate the ease of internet use, it's "user-friendliness", with a degree of freedom. Empowered to do things we could not have done thirty years ago, we may find it easy to overlook to the underlying constraints.

is in fact the practice of manipulating signs and texts (via software) to create the *illusion*, or *impression*, of an interactive scene, in which audiovisual supports are treated as objects, and manipulated as such.¹⁸ They are "metaphorically" corporalized, iconized, and aspectualized¹⁹ to create the illusion of a practical scene. A hyperlink, for example, is a digital construct that functions as a genuine object in a practical scene, as well as a "critical zone" where a strategic decision can be made. In the predicative scene of Internet navigation, the hyperlink serves as an "*engaged interface*" (Fontanille 2008: 188), a "gateway" where one can pass from a *proposition* (or *promise*) to its *acceptance*. As we call forth texts and images and integrate them into the perceived forms before us, their progressive appearance and disappearance completes the *interactive impression*. Because a hypertext is never given in its totality, "each reader elaborates his or her own text as a function of the links that the reader activates and of the trajectory carried out through the different textual layers available on the machine" (Fontanille 2006: 47).²⁰ This means that the invention and development of hypertexts is in fact the invention and development of new practical scenes, and a perfect example of how the Internet shapes our relationships with each other.

This illusory nature of digital expression renders all the bonds between actants, roles, and actors susceptible to being undone or displaced at any moment and puts Internet structure and practice in a vulnerable and precarious position. At the same time, it also shows the Internet's power of illusion. Shaping this interactive impression means shaping what we can do or perceive, which is also linked to what we can discover and believe. From a cognitive perspective we often see the implementation of "out of sight, out of mind" strategies involving practices aimed at blocking cognitive apprehension (e.g., the censoring of online representations of the Tiananmen Square Massacre by the Chinese government). The counter strategy here is to create a space where the forbidden can be expressed, where the imperceptible can be made perceptible—so that content (signified) can move forward freely. This would permit a viral video or a popular tweet to participate in an "in sight, in mind" strategy aimed at facilitating cognitive apprehension.

Strategies for unraveling and manipulating the different layers of control in Internet practices are central to appreciating Internet Freedom struggle. A negotiation that takes place in order to establish Internet rules and regulations is in fact a negotiation of the modalities

¹⁸ My translation.

¹⁹ As the GNU project points out, "Software differs from material objects—such as chairs, sandwiches, and gasoline—in that it can be copied and changed much more easily" (2011a).

²⁰ For example: a sliding bar, an hour glass, or a spinning rainbow wheel.

emanating from these controls. Whichever side of the struggle you are on, the architecture and regulatory constraints of the Internet will always function, to some degree or another, as a variable control in the field of discourse. Therefore, from a transformational point of view, the Internet will operate as a collective, “third” actant that contributes to shaping the conditions of the process and the competence of a subject (i.e., the Internet user), and there will often be a dominant actant within this collective (e.g., an authoritarian government). For example, the modalities that condition the practices of a Facebook user, an Internet service provider like Google, and a blogger can be conditioned, respectively, by Facebook’s terms of service, the censorship laws of China, and the General Public License of WordPress (2012b) (see Table 3).

	/having-to/	/adhering-to/	/being-able to/
Using Facebook	Facebook’s terms of use	Agreeing to terms	Permission to use Facebook
Censorship/ Google	Censorship laws	Company agrees to comply	Company can now operate
Using WordPress Software	GPL license	Agreeing to terms	Permission to use WP software

Table 3. Modal Conditioning of Internet Use

A backwards reading of the presupposed modalities suggests that each modal condition had to be negotiated, like a critical zone. Therefore, from a positional point of view (i.e., of a discourse in action), we can anticipate that a primary objective would be to assume a strong enough position of control over the field of discourse in order to negotiate each modality in your favor and realize your intended expression. The “open” nature of the GPL license will favor this sort of empowerment much more so than Facebook and the Chinese Government.

This open, pro-freedom vision of the Internet has been present since the beginning, not just in terms of its potential for use, but also in its overall structure. The Internet and the World Wide Web have never been copyrighted or trademarked²¹ and the organizations “that maintain, update, and add to the technical standards necessary to keep the Internet running” (MacKinnon 2012: 19) are not governments and are not run by these governments.²² The digital commons has always been

²¹ “They are free and open to all. The Internet’s inherent value and power come from the fact that it is globally interoperable and de-centralized, so that everybody can add to the network and create products, services, and platforms on top of it without having to obtain permission or license, or some kind of access code, from anybody in particular” (MacKinnon 2012: 18).

²² For example, Apache, the open-source web server software runs more web servers than any other alternative.

part of these programming efforts, participating directly in establishing the layers of control of Internet use. With its expanding repertoire of "engineering inventions, software, and digital media content, created by people who have chosen to share their creations freely" (MacKinnon 2012: 17), the digital commons has emerged as a strong collective actant in the effort to increase Internet Freedom.²³ As MacKinnon explains,

when governments or corporations abuse their power, the commons can act as a counterweight and support network through which citizens can carve out the necessary spaces to speak and organize, and thus defend their rights and interests. (2012: 17)

This ability to "carve out" space for Internet expression and protection is a primary concern of the digital commons in a "sharing economy", and it orients the strategic horizon of all its practices. WordPress—and the community of bloggers who use and improve its software—is a small, but important part of the commons. It is an open source website design, management, and publishing software project ergonomically designed to promote and develop an Internet architecture free from external constraint,²⁴ thereby maximizing the potentialization of new *types* (new *praxemes*) of Internet experience.

In a given practice, the operator's syntagmatic choices (i.e., sequence of accommodation) express a relationship between the operator and the community of reference with which the practice is concerned and will often take into account the ethos of its participants (Fontanille 2010: 4). The epi-semiotic activity of a practice may project its effects beyond the practice itself onto the past and future of the operator, the becoming of the horizon, the general ambience of the practical scene (Fontanille 2010: 4), and the community in which the practice is in use. In order to achieve coherence and reach its objective efficiently, it will also have to use whatever tools are at hand, as well any set of schematizations and solutions are at its disposal (i.e., a sort of *bricolage*). This is where WordPress comes in.

On their website, WordPress presents their entire project and the "philosophy" that drives it through a descending integration (form of life to text), mapping out a mission with a set of "pro-freedom" instruc-

²³ MacKinnon explains that "a robust digital commons is vital to ensure that the power of citizens on the Internet is not ultimately overcome by the power of corporations and governments." (2012: 16).

²⁴ "Human rights groups, small news organizations, community media groups, and activists around the world are heavy users of open-source software. Many of the digital activists who helped bring down the governments of Egypt and Tunisia were heavy users of—and in some cases contributors to—open-source software." (MacKinnon 2012: 20).

tions to be deployed via ascending integration (text to strategy).

In their “bill of rights”, WordPress presents four “core freedoms” (2012a) which are based on the “four essential freedoms” initially declared by the GNU project (2011), as follows:²⁵

- The freedom to run the program, for any purpose (freedom 0).
- The freedom to study how the program works, and change it so it does your computing as you wish (freedom 1). [...]
- The freedom to redistribute copies so you can help your neighbor (freedom 2).
- The freedom to distribute copies of your modified versions to others (freedom 3). By doing this you can give the whole community a chance to benefit from your changes.

These four “freedoms” correspond to the types of Internet practices that WordPress and the GNU Project encourage: to run a program, to study it, to change it, to distribute copies of the original program, to distribute copies of the modified version, etc. These “freedom practices” are also strategically oriented. In “freedom 2”, for instance, they add, “so you can help your neighbor”. In “freedom 3”, they add, “by doing this you can give the whole community a chance to benefit from your changes”. The predicative act in these practices is therefore concerned with both the ascending integration of signs, texts, and objects (i.e., modifying and applying software) and the descending integration of strategies and forms of life (i.e., accommodating the strategic horizon).

As part of a given strategy, visualizing a goal and determining the optimal conditions for its realization can be achieved by simulating a “backward” reading from the intended final state back through a program of acquiring competence.²⁶ In fact, these “freedom practices” manifest two dimensions of transformational content that define the practices’ objectives and orient their horizons. In one dimension values are incarnated in objects sought and conquered by subjects “freedom practices” 0 and 1): you can obtain, study, modify, and run the software. This dimension provides a pre-schematization that enables programming and adjustment (i.e., an openness to alterity) and articulates the software’s *use value*. In the other dimension, values are proposed, guaranteed, exchanged, and put into circulation through the actantial roles of sender and receiver (“freedom practices” 2 and 3), articulating the software’s *exchange value*. For WordPress, software is a “shared” and “exchanged” resource, but instead of expecting a *monetary counter-gift*, they ask for “goodwill” in return (i.e., “help you neighbor”; “give the... community a chance to benefit”). Since practices 1 and 2 are themselves the results of a sharing, all these practices participate in a strate-

²⁵ The GNU Manifesto was written by Richard Stallman (2011a).

²⁶ This transformational point of view also includes imagining possible opposing strategies that might be encountered.

gy aimed at perpetuating "goodwill", a value that we would also expect to be expressed at the level of forms of life integrated into the scene.

If, by ascending integration, we were to bring these textualized "freedom practices" described on the WordPress website to the level of practical experience (i.e., actual use of the software) and look at them from a positional point of view (i.e., as discourses in action), we see that they are now concerned with their ability to take a dominant position of control of the field of Internet discourse. In this instance, we are no longer dealing with the actants of subject/object or sender/receiver, but instead our actantial structure consists of sources, targets, and controls which are asserting their presence in the field of practical discourse. The epi-semiotic instance will be a source when it intends a target (i.e., the intended formal instance, its objective and horizon), a target when receiving sensorial information from other sources (i.e., other actants in the scene or the horizon), and a control in so far as it manages the intentionality of the scene. These positions and movements will inform the entire structure of the practical scene (operator, act, object, horizon) as it seeks coherency. WordPress software will "enter" this scene as an object of value that increase the operator's control of the field.

Let's imagine 3 practices used strategically for a blogging website (see Table 4).

	Operator	Act	Objective	Strategic Horizon
Practice 1: Blogging website design	designer/ programmer	manipulates code	to make efficient blogging website software	accommodation of the administration, maintenance, and use of the blogging site
Practice 2: Blogging website administration & maintenance	site administrator	maintains code, manages permissions, filters spam, shapes site within parameters set forth by the code, etc.	to maintain optimal efficient use of site	accommodation of blogging practices
Practice 3: Blogging website use	site user / blogger	uses web site/ blogs	to communicate, share pictures, etc.	accommodation of other practices such as a debate or online activism.

Table 4. Blogging Practices

To each horizon, we can add "the promotion and perpetuation of freedom and sharing", but also "resistance to or circumvention of censorship", among other things. Each practice will find its own meaning as it progresses, but WordPress offers us a set of guidelines and tools

that provide the competence needed to shape the kind of control a blogger has over its unfolding. This control can also vary in relation to actantial positioning of its actors, which in turn participates in the formal support of different strategies. For example, the operators of these three practices can be assumed by one actor, or by two or three separate actors, depending on the strategy adopted. Using a different actor for each practice could be an advantageous strategy when each one is specialized in its practice, while having one actor assume all three roles will give more control to one individual. If all three practices are connected in a project such as online activism, their conjuncture may participate in a strategic path for acquiring the necessary competence to achieve their ultimate goal: one practice gives the operator of the next practice the competence it needs to meet its objectives, and so on.

For WordPress, the objective of designing open source software is precisely to accommodate other practices, other situations that will perpetuate this sort of freedom, and exclude those other scenes that do not perpetuate this “openness”. The WordPress Foundation’s overall goals are (1) “to democratize publishing through Open Source, GPL software”; (2) “to ensure free access, in perpetuity, to the software projects” that they support; (3) “to ensure that the source code for these projects will survive beyond the current contributor base” and “create a stable platform for web publishing for generations to come.”; and (4) “to gather broad community support to make sure we can continue to serve the public good through freely accessible software” (2012). These goals articulate a tensive structure that defines their project. In extent, we see a spatial & actorial expansion (“broad community”, “contributor base”, “democratic”) and a temporal extension (“in perpetuity”, “generations to come”, “survival”). To this we correlate the intensity expressed in expressions like “make sure”, “ensure”, “create”, “support”. In sum, WordPress is the collective operator of a strategy that manages the tension between its selection of axiological positions (intensity) and its tactical consideration long-term cultural conversion (extent). This tension gives rise to the ethical and practical values of universalization, community, and sharing that are inherent in Internet Freedom practices.

Fontanille proposes envisioning the construction of the ethical dimension of semiotic manifestations based on the variation of the force of the bonds between the instances of practice. These variations express the *ethos* of the scene (Fontanille 2008: 278).²⁷ As we mentioned above, the bond between operator and act is one of inherence. In Internet Freedom discourse, this relationship can be thematically formulated as *control*, *mastery*, *responsibility*, or *imputation*. But it also opens the door to *consent*, an acceptance of limited control in exchange for protection (a

²⁷ For Fontanille, *ethos* is the “regular, recognizable, and evaluative form of practices” (2008: 279).

core argument in MacKinnon's book). To this inherent relationship, Fontanille adds a *dialectic of imputation of responsibility* (2008: 259-260): an operator is said to be *engaged* in an act when he passes from virtualizing modalities (/wanting/ and /having-to/) to actualizing modalities (/being-able-to/ and /knowing-how-to/) that are inherent in the act. When this dialectic is reversed, the operator is said to be *disengaged*. When this dialectic has effects that go beyond the operator, its act, and its objective, and concerns an "Other", an "Ideal", or some generalized utility (Fontanille 2008: 236-238), it becomes an ethical question. For example, it would, be important to assess how the intervention of an "Other" or an "Ideal" modifies the bonds between the act and the actants, and how these modifications affect the value of the practical action (2008: 238-239). Because Internet practices are always intersected by the objectives of other practices, WordPress favors a highly engaged and responsible operator who is concerned with the ethical effects of its discourse.

From a praxic point of view, WordPress supports the operators by providing them with products of use and exchange (i.e., software) characterized by the practices they potentialize and the modal competence they offer. Above all, it enables users to manipulate the formal support of their expression by accommodating their *intentional morphology* and to follow the principle of *anticipation* which, according to Fontanille, consists of anticipating and programming all the phases of conversion of a product (i.e., open-source software) from the strangeness of the initial innovation to the final universal ambition, thus defining the "itinerary" of their strategic trajectories (2012: 5). From an ethical point of view, WordPress puts weight on the horizon by directing practices toward a sharing economy and a respect for the freedom of others. By welcoming people to participate in modifying and sharing software, the digital commons is in effect inviting us to assume more responsibility for our actions. As MacKinnon's states, "The future of freedom in the Internet age depends on whether people can be bothered to take responsibility for the future and act" (2012: 222). WordPress' philosophy applies a pressure to the practical bonds that unite the actants in the predicative scene. For example, if we don't maintain the force of *prudence* between the horizon and the objective, we may inhibit the free sharing of open source software. A more detailed study of tensions between bonds that emerge during the realization of practices could reveal more about how ethics take form in action, and ultimately reveal styles of strategic behavior (i.e., forms of life) integrated into the practice itself.

As we have seen here, the strategic horizon of Internet freedom practices favors a movement many directions (via integration). The very act of designing websites with digital commons software is pro-freedom. It promotes the freedom to shape the Internet as one pleases, obtain software freely and easily, and benefit from the others' creations

(= freedom of, within, and for). The actual practices and strategies that a digital commons based website can enable may also facilitate other acts of freedom, thus facilitating freedom *through* the Internet. Any combination of these practices may also be strategized to accommodate (or favor) online or offline activities. The nature or style of their conjuncture will form the expression of a certain form of life, “the typical forms extracted from the strategies of accommodation between the user’s trajectory and the constraints, the proposition and the obstacles” (Fontanille 2008: 32). A typology of “Internet” forms of life remains to be done, but we can already predict how they might emerge from the interaction of an operators’ *engagement* (e.g., rhythmic style) and the *valorization/devalorization* of the scene (e.g., modal, axiological, and pas-sional attitudes). The strategic use of software and hardware could reveal “strategic styles” that, when properly analyzed, could define the forms of life that correspond to the activities and practical values of “Internet surfers”, “hackers”, “gamers”, “shoppers”, and many others. In the case of Internet Freedom discourses, we can already identify the presence of some transposable forms of life in themes like “freedom”, “community”, “sharing economy”, “netizenship”, “open source”,²⁸ and ultimately “human rights”.

Proponents of Internet Freedom are explicitly aware of the Internet’s evolving nature as a space that is shaped and reshaped by rules, regulations, and interventions, through which an enormous part of the world interacts. The Internet’s illusory, inventive nature combined with its layers of filters and controls make it a very malleable material support for all kinds of projects, including the creation of new cultural “spaces” and movement between them. As a medium, the Internet is a place where many semiospheres manifest and inter-define themselves. As Yuri Lotman points out,

no semiosphere is immersed in an amorphous, ‘wild’ space, but is in contact with other semiospheres which have their own organization[...]there is a constant exchange, a search for a common language, a koine, and of creolized semiotic systems come into being. Even in order to wage war there has to be a common language. (1990)

In this light, the digital commons presents itself as project that participates in a common Internet language while also cultivating its own language, its own “digital sphere” where different semiospheres are permitted to interact more freely. It is a space in which freedom and responsibility are determining values in its dynamic as well as conditions of acceptance; one that welcomes the participation of any culture,

²⁸ See the Open Source Initiative website (2012) for a more information about the concept of “open source”.

as long as they adhere to their pro-freedom, pro-sharing stance. In many ways, the digital commons operates like a semiosphere that welcomes new and strange software with the intention of diffusing and universalizing them—but only on the condition that it remains open and free. If this minimal contract is not respected, then expression at any level of manifestation will be marginalized or excluded.

In order to understand the Internet's role in a Semiotics of Culture, we need to account for the conversion of cultural values into a given semiotic-object (i.e., Internet expression) and the way in which each semiotic-object accounts for a cultural phenomenon (Fontanille 2008: 43). The principle of integration between different planes of immanent expression serves this purpose, and this is precisely what WordPress and the digital commons are exploiting by concentrating on the conversion of material support into formal support, i.e., the interfaces of digital expression. With the hierarchy of semiotic experiences and the whole apparatus of semiotic analysis at our disposal, we can situate the Internet Freedom Struggle at different levels of pertinence and trace the trajectories of integration and semiotic translation that they may involve or incur. As we have merely suggested here, a micro-analysis of Internet practices can reveal how they produce values (aesthetic and ethical) through the process of accommodation and integration. At this scale, programming and adjustment will serve different purposes for the digital commons and "power abusers" (e.g., encouraging adjustment vs. limiting it). In a macro-analysis, practices contribute to the production of cultural forms and participate in cultural transformations (Fontanille 2008: 293). At this scale, we would see articulations of tradition and innovation, as well as the emergence of new spheres of cultural interaction and exchange (e.g., the "vision" or "mission" of the digital commons). Internet freedom discourse is clearly concerned with all of this. It is about the freedom to shape, control, and share the *formal support* of Internet expression, as well as to potentialize and maximize the *possibilities* of expression at all levels (e.g., the creation of new practical scenes, texts, objects, etc.). For the digital commons, this means taking charge of signification at the level of signs and figures, and building their way up to forms of life and ethics: freedom "from the ground up".

As we increase our dependence on the Internet in our daily lives, we also increase our participation in an international and intercultural space where "[d]igital platforms, services, and devices[...]mediate human relationships of all kinds, including the relationship between citizens and government" (MacKinnon 2012: 9). On the Internet, freedom from external and internal control is impossible, and few will disagree that the Internet needs some sort of governance: "instead it is a question of *how* the Internet should be governed" (2012: 198). Because freedom from consequences is also impossible, cutting out the "middlemen" demands more responsibility for our actions. The digital com-

mons is part of a larger effort to create what MacKinnon calls a “netizen-centric Internet” in which “netizens” are “its stewards, architects, and defenders”, engaged in “a form of citizenship for the Internet” (2012: 26). As contributors to the digital commons, netizens have “a responsibility to hold the abusers of digital power to account, along with their facilitators and collaborators” (MacKinnon 2012: 250). This also requires a keener awareness of the enunciative praxis that governs our practical discourses, for it all comes down to the products of usage that we recover from our experiences, how we apply them to the next situation, how we modify them for future use, and ultimately how all these choices will perpetuate Internet freedom for others.

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