

**TOWARDS PEER-TO-PEER ALTERNATIVES:  
AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL BAUWENS**

Sam Kinsley

Michel Bauwens is a founder of the *Foundation for Peer-to-Peer Alternatives* and works in collaboration with a global group of researchers in the exploration of peer production, governance and property. He is also the co-founder of the *Commons Strategies Group*, an external participant of the *Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences* and a fellow of the Primavera program at the University of Amsterdam. He has been nominated as one of the top 100 most inspiring people in the world, by the '(En)Rich List' of the Post-Carbon Institute, and chairs the Technology Working Group of the *Hangwa Forum* in China, which aims to propose resilient production infrastructures for the long term development of the Chinese economy. In his earlier business career, he was an analyst for the United States Information Agency, knowledge manager for British Petroleum (where he created one of the first virtual information centers), eBusiness Strategy Manager for Belgacom, as well as an internet entrepreneur in his home country of Belgium.

This interview explores the programme and possibilities of the peer-to-peer project for redesigning capitalist economics. In a wide-ranging discussion with Sam Kinsley, Michel Bauwens explores what demonstrates, for him, the superiority of a peer-to-peer production and distribution model, both historically and in terms of the recent context of Web 2.0. He argues that what is at stake in the emerging transformations of digital online networking and communications is an attempt to recreate an emancipatory potential. A significant challenge to this potential is the ways in which the attention economy captures and channels a certain modality of producer-consumer relations, which must be countered by alternatives. Bauwens forcefully argues that such alternatives are best met through the 'horizontal socialisation' of the peer-to-peer paradigm.

**Sam Kinsley (SK):** What is at stake for you in attempting to influence the emerging transformations of digital online networking and communications? For example, in relation to the semantic web or the internet of things.

**Michel Bauwens (MB):** What is at stake in peer-to-peer (P2P) is an attempt to recreate a believable and emancipatory potential. My feeling is that the current system is nearing the end of its useful life; it is actually quite dangerous for the survival of the biosphere and the planet and it is creating unbelievable social tensions. I do not think that the old alternatives are very believable anymore. For example, I am thinking here of socialism, which is a 19<sup>th</sup> century development; identity politics, which is from the 1960s; and maybe the first phase of the information society, when it was still mass media based.

Peer-to-peer is actually grounded in the social practices of working people, and specifically knowledge workers, which are the dominant group at least in the West. Peer-to-peer is our infrastructure, our mentality: it is what we need in order to work with each other. Because it is so much based on the latest advances in technology and organisation, it is very powerful and I use the term 'out-competing' to show that peer-to-peer based modes of value creation are actually very effective. I call them 'hyper productive' because they can create more value. They can do so by making people happier because it is based on internal, intrinsic motivation. It is more inclusive, more people get a chance to contribute and it is more distributive because more people can enjoy the results of the work. According to quite a few different criteria, then, I would say that peer-to-peer is something that is very effective and therefore a possible lever for social change. So that would be my first point in answer to your question.

I relate the transformation happening now to older transitions, perhaps the first transition from, let us say, the Roman slavery-based empire to the feudal, serf-based and local domain based mode, and also the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The first similarity is that within the old crisis-ridden dominant system, something new that is interesting is emerging both from the bottom and from the top at the same time. In other words, it is preferable for a slave to be a serf; it is actually progress in some fundamental way. It is also within the interests of a slave owner in a decaying Roman empire to work with serfs rather than with slaves, because there is less need for a repressive apparatus, which he cannot afford anymore because the tax base is crumbling and for many other different reasons. Soon

what you have is a mutual realignment of both the managerial class and the producing class towards this new possibility. Within that you have a possibility of a new social contract. So it is not necessarily something that I want to idealise; rather it creates new possibilities and a new struggle for a new social contract. It is a little bit like 'class struggle 2.0'. In the current era it is peer producers organised around a commons, creating value, interfacing with market players that capture the value of the commons. There is significant social tension around this.

To address this issue there is a range of different approaches, if you survey the field of peer-to-peer theory. I can give a few examples. One is Yochai Benkler. I would call Benkler a progressive liberal, a social liberal, and he is rooted in Kibbutzim. Indeed, he lived in a Kibbutz. Benkler is not a reactionary, or right wing, he is progressive, but he also does not see any alternative to the present system. Benkler sees peer-to-peer as an adjunct to the market (see Benkler, 2006). Another approach is the *Oekonux* group,<sup>1</sup> and they see peer production as a full mode of production, already sustainable and evolving naturally. This is what *Oekonux* call 'germ form theory' (Merten & Meretz, 2008): from a germ and up to something more important, to parity and then eventually phase transition. My feeling is that *Oekonux* abstract from any social struggle, they naturalise peer-to-peer. I do not think that is correct and also I think that peer production, as it is now, is a proto-mode of production, not a 'real' mode of production. This is because the commoners, the people, cannot socially reproduce within the commons. You have to work within the capitalist system in order to get a wage. You cannot peer-produce as such. So I would not call that a full mode of production under those conditions.

A third approach is that of Dmytri Kleiner, who calls himself, paradoxically, a 'venture communist'; he is a mutualist in the 19th century tradition. Kleiner reads political economy through 19th century authors, such as Ricardo and Marx. I disagree with his analysis, but I agree with his solution. Kleiner's (2010) analysis is that peer production is not a mode of production at all; it is a mode of distribution. I disagree. Value is being produced within peer production, it is not just a way to distribute software; lots of things are made in that fashion. I think Kleiner's solution, nevertheless, is quite correct – and it is also the solution I propose within the P2P foundation: that commoners, people, should create their own economic vehicles that may be marketed, but they should not be profit maximising entities.

So you can create co-ops, you can create a new type of economic vehicle, as for-benefit entities, that sustain the commoners, and the commons. The way Kleiner proposes to do that is by something that he calls the 'peer production license', which is a license that says if you work in the commons without contributing, you have to pay, but if you contribute to the commons, then you can use our commons for free. This creates a natural alliance of entrepreneurs around a particular commons that have as members those same people who produce for the commons. The alliance therefore sustains the lives of the commoners and their personal livelihoods. That has potential and I agree with that solution to create a counter-economy within the capitalist system.

I think, more broadly, that this internal counter-economy is the condition for success. We had feudalism because that model actually worked even within the Roman Empire, and it even made sense to be a capitalist within the feudal system. So, we need a workable transition. I think this is the critique of the traditional socialist system, which says: take power first and then make a change. You cannot really step outside of the system; you need a working alternative that people can see. It is a process of ethical transition. So, the particularity of the P2P Foundation approach, in the context of these different positions that I previously outlined, is that peer production can be both useful to capitalism and at the same time an alternative to it.

You have to look at it from the point of view of what is to the advantage or in the interests of the individual to sustain a commons. The fact that the commons interfaces with capital is not necessarily negative. It can be, but it is not necessarily *so*. We cannot make this a form of official divide because, actually, I would argue that there is no way to be totally independent of this system, it is just not possible. So it is always difference by a matter of degree. That is what I like about hacker culture, you hack the system to your advantage; there is always something you can do.

**SK:** What does that mean for our understanding of the forms of value that are being produced?

**MB:** Well, one phrase I regularly use is: 'the commons creates value and the market captures that value'. This is because the commons tends to produce use-value but not exchange-value, and therefore the exchange-value is derivative because the commons creates abundance and the market needs scarcity. It is around the commons

that market forces create rival goods, which can be services or packages or training, and they operate in a marketplace. So, there is the value conflict – between the social capital and the monetary capital – that is being created. The form it takes within capitalism is that the flow does not work very well, neither for the workers nor for capital too, and I will try to explain that.

If the workers, the people who actually produce for the commons, are not lucky enough to be hired by a capitalist firm, they are in a precarious circumstance. This creates situations such as, for example, Facebook, the company, is not giving any money to the people creating the value in Facebook, the social network. Similarly, Google does not give any money for peer production. This is the ultimate ‘wet dream’ of the capitalist, an infinite pool of free labour. However, it is also a problem for them, because the feedback loop within value creations is broken. This means that the capitalist, out of this huge value creation, can have only a marginal slice they can monetise. There is therefore a huge surplus of people, and value, not being monetised, and therefore not creating either market value or sustainability value for the peoples’ use. Adam Arvidsson and I wrote an essay three or four years ago about this called ‘The Crisis of Value and the Ethical Economy’ (Arvidsson & Bauwens, 2008). So, ultimately, I am arguing peer production disturbs capitalism.

Peer production does offer capitalism certain advantages, but in such a way that the system cannot cope with it. It cannot fundamentally cope with this emergence. This is, of course, why we need a change. This is the typical, Marxist, idea that the new social relations of production no longer fit with the underlying infrastructure and therefore something needs to happen to match them. It is very doubtful that this will happen within the current system. For me, in terms of value, the key issue is that only a fraction of the use-value can be monetized, and most of that value operates outside of the normative system of capital. It does create value but it does not create livelihoods for the people involved.

The problem becomes to de-monetise more aspects of value creation within a system that thrives on that monetisation. One way of interpreting the meltdown of 2008 is by pointing out the difference between the internal value of a corporation and its stock market value. I think it was a largely a factor of 1:5, more or less, so that 80% of the average stock value of a corporation is the assessment of its immaterial value. But what is immaterial value? It is the human corporation, it is the branding, it is the trust, it is the

social capital and it is the goodwill. In other words, it is socially produced value that is being estimated but in a very unsatisfactory way to the current system. Therefore the value fluctuates all the time because the system really cannot concretely say how much that value is or where it rests, and so it becomes a political issue. As a result, you have all these derivatives, and these are basically gambling mechanisms, that speculate on that value. I have worked within big corporations; accounting becomes very creative [laughs]. This is because it is not really based on anything tangible. So people start estimating value. And that becomes a political, versus a more apparently concrete reality-based, issue. I think that the financial crisis is very much linked with that inability of the current system to work with this type of value.

The question is then, and I do not know the answer: is it even possible to do that within the system? Are we going to find ways to estimate and monetise all that 'soft' value, or do we really need a radically new system? A system, based on a universal basic income, - as a guaranteed minimum income as a form of social welfare - which represents peoples' basic livelihood. This question is difficult because all of that value creation, already discussed, happens anyway. I think fundamentally that this universal basic income is not compatible with the system we have today. I do not see the universal basic income as a realistic option within the current commodity-based system. Just imagine, all the power would be with workers and, once you get a wage, just because you exist, why would you even work? Why would you settle for working for a less than desirable company in a mediocre job? In my mind it is very questionable whether this is a realistic proposal within the present system.

**SK:** So it is necessary to rethink the conceptualisation of labour as such?

**MB:** Yes. There has historically been a form of industrial morality of 'work then leisure'. Now you see, for example, what is called 'mass amateurisation', or 'Pro-Am', professional amateurs. These are people, estimated to be 58% of the population in the UK, that are creating stuff outside of any formal corporate environment. So what are they doing? Are they working? Or is it leisure? I think that all of these categories are from an industrial society. For instance, if you take open source software, the user is also a producer. You are both. Another example, another way to say it, is that if you engage in co-creation or co-design within your company, and then you open up

to people outside, what is a company? Where is the inside, where is the outside?

So, yes, I agree with your question. This new reality is creating a cognitive shock and a cultural shock and you can see this when you look at the crisis of 2008 and the total incapability to push through any reforms. There is a paradox: a certain number of structures have created crisis and now they are implementing these same structures even more as a so-called solution to the crisis. You really have the impression that the mainstream, dominant structure has no way out. The regulatory administration just does not seem to know what to do to reform the system. In parallel with that, there is the creation of a counter-economy, counter-culture, and the interface does not seem to work very well.

This is why, I feel, we are in this radical transition time. If you look at the Christians within the Roman Empire, they had such a different mindset. The Romans hated work, whereas for Christians work was a *positive* value. Or you look at the feudal system, based on these privileges and monopolies, and the emergence of capitalism: well, it was not just a minor change. It was a fundamental cultural revolution and, in the final analysis, incompatible with the feudal world. Or rather, the new culture has to be compatible with but also capable of changing the world completely, because we live in one world, but ultimately it needs deep social transformation to actually make the new emerge and bloom as it should. I think that this is what we are going through right now.

A related issue for me is the idea of 'Kondratieff cycles', whereby the capitalist system moves in cycles of fifty to seventy years. There is a high-growth 'up' phase, a low-growth 'down' phase with financialisation, and then a sudden systemic crisis and eight to fifteen years of de-leveraging and then eventually you have a new up-swing again. So the question becomes: do we still have a swing? Is it possible to imagine a new Kondratieff wave, based on green capitalism and a high degree of peer-to-peer integration? Or is it already too late for that? In other words, the biological crisis, the climate change crisis, 'peak' oil—is all of that already so overwhelming that actually the system can no longer grow? I wonder—and this is a hypothesis—that if you look at what is happening in Greece, what happened in the US, such as the loss of twenty to forty percent of living standards in a very short period, whether that is not a result of the current system no longer being able to make the social compromises where growth can actually be

shared. The benefits of the growth shared create a social contract, a form of legitimacy. I do not know if this is a short-term structural crisis like 1929 or if it is already telescoping to a deeper systemic crisis. So: a crisis not in capitalism, but a crisis of capital *itself*.

**SK:** Within this form of crisis, how can we situate the idea of the commodification of the human capacity for attention? One argument might be that one of the ways out of that crisis is that capital performs an increasingly biopolitical manoeuvre, like Foucault would suggest, such that it completely focuses on human capacities; and in many ways that is perhaps how large corporations like Google and Facebook will continue to find value within the current system.

**MB:** Yes, but I would make the point that we are always faced with dual logics. The logic of people producing documents, finding and sharing them over the network is not a logic of commodification. What is being commodified is the attention to those documents. We therefore have a paradox. Capitalism wants to commodify everything, and makes everything in its own image. But, for me, it can only do this at the margins with peer production. So it is doing it at the periphery, but at the same time, and if you look at it from the point of view of the peer producers, the commoners, we are creating different social options by expanding in numbers and degree at the same time.

Critics ask you to choose one or the other, and what I am trying to say is that it is not either or, but both. They are both happening at the same time, we are de-commodifying *and* we are commodifying. Anyway, why should you think that capitalism has already won? What kind of emancipatory attitude is that? I find it really interesting that, within the system we already have, communal dynamics are actually happening. My point of view is not to take an anti-capitalist view, but to take a *post*-capitalist view. In other words, how can we solidify the social practices that we like? Create livelihoods around this new logic that we believe in? I think that is what happened in the past as well, I do not think that the Christians fought the Roman Empire or fought Feudalism as such; they just created a world based on their new logic. It is only when the old system has become such a burden, as with the French Revolution, that you have an underlying system that has already changed and comes to the surface. Capitalism was not created after the French Revolution, it was already there before and it was a revolt of the people against the insane limitations that the old system was putting on them. Just to

give you one example, before the French Revolution around ten thousand farmers were executed and tortured because they used textile fabrics which were subject to royal monopolies. So all of these insane impediments to natural cooperation under capitalist conditions became intolerable to the majority of the people.

Today, the only way they can stop us file sharers is by actually sabotaging either the machinery (i.e. the software or infrastructure) or by putting us in jail because we want to share. I mean it is absurd. It is that absurdity which creates the crisis of legitimacy, which is the pre-condition for social transformation to occur. The people no longer believe in the mainstream system. They may not know what they want, but people in the French Revolution did not know what they want, and people in the Russian Revolution did not know what they want. The Bolsheviks were only something like 0.001% of the population originally. So, when people occupy Wall Street, they do not know what they want, but they know what they do *not* want. That is enough for social change to occur.

**SK:** Are there specific strategies that you put forward as a foundation within those forms of contestation?

**MB:** Well, to answer that question I can use the ideas of key prior approaches, and the first is that we still need mass mobilisation. I think that is why Occupy Wall Street is so interesting: because it is the first 'native' Twenty First Century mass movement. It is not a 19<sup>th</sup> century labour movement, and it is not 1960s identity politics, it is a native movement of the digital generation. So I see the emergence of the *Pirate Party* and the *Indignados* and *Occupy Wall Street* as the necessary precondition for social change. We need our own social movements that are organised in a new way, alternative to the classic labour movements and social movements, because we are in a different era and have different social conditions. This is starting to happen and this, I think, is the first precondition.

The second precondition, for me, is prefigurative politics, and this is where peer-to-peer comes in. This is where people who may not be political, already instantiate different social logics. It is the most 'natural' thing to do, and thereby shows that it can be done. It gives you an idea of how it might look in the future, if it were extended to the whole society. So I see a relationship between the prefiguration within peer production and the structure of the next society, if there is one. I want to provide a general sense of the structure of this: in peer production, the value is created in the commons, through

contributions, paid or unpaid. Then you have a for-benefit institution, which is usually a foundation or a non-profit, which manages the *infrastructure* of co-operation. *Finally*, you have an entrepreneurial coalition, which has to adapt to the commons, because it also depends on the commons. In other words, in this new system, the market is actually subsumed to the logic of the commons to a certain degree.

I think with *Occupy Wall Street* you have the same thing, the commons production of politics is in the square, the general assembly, then you have provisioning systems – they have a food working group, a health working group, a media working group, like the for-benefit institutions. Then, very interestingly, in New York, they created an *Occupy Wall Street* street vendor project,<sup>3</sup> which instead of just getting free food from the organic farms in Vermont, which they did, they also decided to actually subsidise the street vendors, so that they created an ethical economy around the commons. It is a dialogue, an internal dialogue, and so it is the civic sphere that determined the market. That is what I mean by prefigurative politics, even if it was not done consciously, the movement somewhat unconsciously took the templates of the open source movement and applied it to politics. In that way they prefigured, in my view, the new society.

The third kind of force is policy orientation. It is how do you defend the new reality against attacks, and create institutions and public policies that actually support it rather than destroy it. For example, now you have a campaign in the US senate to make crowd funding legal. You have people like Janelle Orsi, who is a lawyer in California who has something called the *Sustainable Economies Law Centre*,<sup>2</sup> which seeks to overturn all the legal impediments to cooperation and sharing. This may seem ridiculous, things like collecting rainwater, making marmalade in your home, having a garden in front of your home in a gated village, drying your clothes in the sun; those are illegal activities. This new reality doesn't face a gentle environment, it actually faces a hostile environment, and that requires policy.

That is why you can see that we are not there yet, we have the three strategies but they are not connected in any way. This is what a labour movement has, they have parties and unions, but they also have co-ops, prefigurative institutions, and they have policy. So they had hegemony around labour. We need hegemony around peer-to-

peer: it will be different, but we still need this integration of forces, and that is still very emergent.

**SK:** There is a key issue of mobilisation there, and I want to push you on a specific point, which is the idea that Eli Pariser (2011) has popularized as the ‘filter bubble’. This is the idea that in fact mobilisation becomes even harder because of the ways in which people are filtered by corporations themselves in the process of the distribution of knowledge. What would a peer-to-peer critique of that be?

**MB:** Well actually I think the filter bubble theory says that we filter ourselves; that we create types of affinity-based communities, so that we are no longer communicating across social strata.

**SK:** Yes, but those are then used by algorithms that perpetuate that, distil it.

**MB:** Yes, you are right. So that is a difficult question. I believe that people are diverse. I might be a peer-to-peer Buddhist vegan and through this diverse quality of my personality – this is an hypothetical example, I am not Buddhist, I am not vegan – but I would interact in different commons, I would interact with a peer-to-peer commons and there is indeed the danger that I look for people who agree with me and we look to form a social movement around this kind of shared value. But I am vegan and there are a lot of people in the vegan community who absolutely do not agree with me, and there will be a lot of people in the Buddhist community who would not agree with me. So I do not think that you can say that we are isolated in that way. We are engaged in different communities because of this diversity and we still encounter that difference and we still have to cope with it.

This was also the debate ten years ago. Yesterday’s movements could mobilise because we all worked together in big factories and we saw each other every day. What happens with a dispersed labour force? Look at *Occupy Wall Street*: that was in 2000 cities across the world. It was not as big everywhere, but I do not know any social movement before that was able to mobilise on a global scale in such a fast way, using unified communications. So, I do not necessarily agree with this pessimistic vision. I think we will come up with our own answers. I am not denying it is a real issue, but I think these issues find new answers.

**SK:** Do you think peer-to-peer is a methodology that provides the *coup-de-grace* for top-down, party-driven, politics?

**MB:** Well, I think peer-to-peer is to some extent a new paradigm; it is a way of viewing the world that is very different from what we used to, and by using these tools we socialise people within that new culture. This is what I always stress about peer-to-peer: it is not about technology, it is a form of socialisation. It is a 'horizontal socialisation'. That is the key thing; and everything else is detail. For example, yes, you have issues with Facebook, but nevertheless in Egypt they had a revolution, to a substantial degree, using Facebook. Why? You could socialise horizontally on Facebook even within the corporate system of control. So it is very similar to the print works: once you had the print logic and the ability to mass produce books and to read books by yourself, no matter what happened, the Catholic Church's hegemony of culture and ideology was over. The middle ages were over. That does not mean paradise is coming, but it does mean that a new structure and organisation was to be based on that new logic of print, and I think it is the same today.

Whatever is coming, domination or forms of equality, will have to take into account this undeniable fact of mass horizontal socialisation. Only those forms of power and dominance will be effective that are legitimate and strong enough to work within that new environment, as opposed to attempts to hold it back or go back to older ways. For example, in music and cinema, the reversion to old techniques of dominance by the MPAA (the Motion Picture Association of America) and the RIAA (the Recording Industry Association of America) respectively, is not working. However, Apple is more intelligent. Apple takes into account open applications, to the extent people can contribute applications to the iPhone, iPad etc. So this is a much more intelligent adaptation than that of the old media corporations.

**SK:** But it is still very strongly controlled.

**MB:** It is, and therefore much more dangerous than the old way, because they operate through seduction. People want their iPad; nobody forces them down this road. So Apple has this very skilful use of seduction. Power in the future will be very much about seduction. Not just for Apple but for everybody. Within capitalism we have corporations, in competition, so we have competing entities, but internally you have to cooperate within those competing entities. Now people are working around problems, they

are cooperating, but we have competing entrepreneurs, and the commons are also eventually competing with each other. So, for example, with open source website content management systems you have the Drupal platform, and the Joomla platform. They do not have any power to force you; it has to be done through seduction. Why would you use Drupal or Joomla? Nobody is holding a gun to your head.

**SK:** So, again, the issue of attention is raised: how you cultivate and maintain attention.

**MB:** Yes, so I think that is what people today are doing. Knowledge workers are engaging in building reputational capital, relationship capital; all these forms of attention are central to our personal and collective influence. You could argue that these two worlds are competing with each other. This is what I call asymmetric competition. We have the old world of mass media and then the *Occupy Wall Street* movement emerges. The first thing the mass media do is ignore it completely: it took two weeks for PBS, the public television in the United States, to mention *Occupy Wall Street*. They thought that if they do not talk about it, it will go away. The alternative world has horizontal forms of attention circulating, so they did not care that PBS was not mentioning them.

Of course the next step is that the mass media talk about it, but they ridicule it. The first coverage was that the people from the *Occupy* movement were using the toilets of the neighbouring businesses and they were making the facilities dirty, and the camp was full of homeless people. Those kinds of derogatory stories arose but did not work either. Then eventually what you see, and I think this is a great victory, is that the whole nature of the debate shifted from austerity to social justice and inequality.

The *Occupy* movement won. They won a battle. They did not win the war, but they won a very important battle, which was to reset the terms of the debate, and that is not merely a detail. The Right has traditionally done well at reframing the debate. So when you are talking about inheritance taxes it is 90% of people in favour, but if you frame it as a death tax, 90% of people are against. The Right was able to dominate because it had this reframing capability, so to see that *Occupy Wall Street* had this reframing capability in a progressive way is hugely significant. In my view it is a big success. Look at what is happening now in the Republican Party. They are trying to discredit Romney on the basis of his exploitation when he was

working for Bain Capital. The right wing is producing a documentary accusing Romney of being a heartless capitalist. It is amazing. That would not have happened without *Occupy Wall Street*. I think that those two worlds are still coexisting, they are competing with each other, but in my view, the mainstream world is diminishing in its influence, slowly but surely.

Within the new world you have players like Google and Facebook who are trying to use the new dynamics to their advantage. They are not the only ones; we have other people countering their influence as well. They are being challenged by free software, by alternative networks, by all kinds of people actively hacking technology to make it different, to make it more free and participatory and it is somewhat like an arms race. One side develops one particular way of working and then the other side reacts. This is an ongoing struggle and I think we should not assume that the P2P side will lose, because that is the best way to actually lose.

We have to be realistic and see reality as it is, but at the same time we have to have a narrative of victory. Can you imagine Ghandi saying 'we will never be victorious over the British Empire, it is too strong'? Or can you imagine Martin Luther King saying 'we will never get equal rights'? No. So that is my point of view. I am not saying this means we will succeed. However, if you are in a struggle then you have to believe that you can win in the first place. So this is not about being naive, it is a productive attitude: optimism works better. It is more productive to mobilise energies when people believe they can achieve something.

**SK:** So the peer-to-peer philosophy is something that always acts from within? It is a force for change that always needs to be within the system, it is not something that is set aside; it is always within?

**MB:** Yes, I do not see how you can be fully outside of the world. There is only one world. You are always operating within an existing reality. And so a counter-economy is always something relative, it is not absolutely different. That is why I think that the hacking attitude is a really good attitude. It asks, how can we change reality to our advantage by looking to where we have leverage? Twelve doors are closed and there is a big gang opposing our progress and we are frail, and we cannot change that, but the thirteenth door is open. So let us go through that thirteenth door and hack it for our use. It is a general attitude. I think people are doing that in every sphere of life, they are

changing to peer-to-peer commons oriented practices in many, many different fields.

What I would like to see is more mutual alignment. You have the anti-globalisation movement, you have a free software movement. Well, the anti-globalisation movement should be using free software. That is an alignment. That was not the case in the beginning, that is not a given. Or, an interesting social movement I discovered when I was in Rio de Janeiro, quite a substantial social movement there called 'out of axis', *Foro do Eixo*,<sup>4</sup> are musicians that are originally from the more peripheral states in Brazil who have created a network of mutualised infrastructure for music-the studios, the instruments-and they use an alternative currency for these exchanges. They have music festivals that bring in the money, the regular money. It has become a huge network, very successful, and they are fielding candidates in the local elections to create policies that are favourable to this new type of economy, where there is no copyright, everything is shared, infrastructures are mutualised, and it is working.

So, I look forward to movements of social forces that can actually create these new forms of livelihood that are substantially outside of the old capitalist logic. I think we can legitimately make a difference, like Manuel DeLanda (1998), and others suggest, between the market and capitalism. You can have market activity with a non-profit maximising utility: that is not capitalism. Yes, you are selling something, you are selling a service, but you are not accumulating capital. It is not the same thing. As long as we do not have infinite growth there is not a problem. The problem of capitalism, one of the problems, is infinite growth. As we enter an era with post-growth requirements, how can we have a system of infinite growth? That does not mean that a market is totally out of the question, we can have combinations, we can have a diverse economy with a commons logic with for-benefit institutions and with new market entities, which are not capitalist entities: that would be an alternative to the system we have today.

For me, essentially, it is not about one view of the future. What is essential is that we have a democracy of citizens which can decide on the future that they want. I think that is what *Occupy Wall Street* is. They are very diverse, so let us create a democracy, let us create a mechanism through which we can talk together, and this is far more important than saying we all agree on the alternative.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Oekonux* is a Germany-based international community focusing on free software as a political and social model

<sup>2</sup> The Sustainable Economies Law Centre, <http://www.theselc.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> The Street Vendor project is part of the Urban Justice Centre, New York, a non-profit organization that offers legal representation and advocacy to marginalized groups, see: <http://streetvendor.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> More information is available from 'Portal Foro do Eixo', <http://foradoeixo.org.br/>.

## References

Arvidsson, A. & Bauwens, M. (2008) 'The Crisis of Value and the Ethical Economy', *Journal of Futures Studies*, 12(4): 9-20.

Benkler, Y. (2006) *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

DeLanda, M. (1998) 'Markets and Antimarkets in the World Economy', non-pag., [http://www.alamut.com/subj/economics/de\\_landa/antiMarkets.html](http://www.alamut.com/subj/economics/de_landa/antiMarkets.html).

Kleiner, D (2010) *The Telekommunist Manifesto*. Network Notebooks 03, Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.

Merten, S. & Meretz, S. (2008) 'Germ Form Theory: Peer production in a historical perspective', non-pag., <http://www.oekonux.org/texts/GermFormTheory.html>.

Pariser, E. (2011) *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You*. London: Viking.