Scanlators As Produsers

Fan Participatory Practices Online: Free And Affective Manga Produsage And Distribution

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Abstract

Web 2.0 and the new decentralized, many-to-many technosocial tools empower consumers and users to reproduce, and distribute content on their own and without permission, shifting the boundaries of participation. Alternative collaborative communities that produce and distribute information, knowledge and culture without seeking profit or operating hierarchically challenge and/or correct commercial entities. This thesis deals with such a variety of collaborative community: the scanlation community. It explores, describes and explains what differences there are in the practices and understandings of scanlators, with a special focus on their attitudes towards legal ownership and profit motives.

The main research question is: How do scanlators understand their cultural production, reproduction and distribution practices; with a special focus on which meanings do they ascribe to copyright infringement and the anti-profit motive? In particular, the study provides answers to the following questions: How do some become scanlators? What are the motives of the scanlators? How is scanlation organized? How is it managed? Which beliefs underpin it? Further impacts on and implications for the cultural industry of manga and the society at the level of politics, economy, and culture are taken into account and discussed. Bruns’ produsage based model of collaborative content production and usage is taken here as the main theoretical tool to analyze the participants, processes and principles of the scanlation community. Other concepts derived from fan studies and the political economy of media and communication complement the theoretical framework. Twenty qualitative interviews with individual contributors to the collaborative process of content creation in a variety of groups were conducted.

The analysis of the results of the research suggests that scanlators collaborate in competition and cooperation with their open, free, ad hoc and heterarchical alternative model of (unauthorized) manga translation, reproduction and distribution to correct the many shortcomings of the traditional model: it is free, faster and universally accessible; whereas the latter is expensive, slow, and geo-locked. Moreover, scanlators recognize author’s moral rights and do not a priori disregard copyrights, but criticize licensing and rights handling mechanisms together with economic and political censorship. Finally, although they do not want to be paid for their free affective labour, they are not adverse to commercial approaches to their produsage, if these take place on their own terms. This thesis serves as a contribution for the better understanding of communal produsage practices, by the produsers themselves.

KEY WORDS: scanlation; Web 2.0; participatory culture; fan cultures; produsage; copyright infringement; free labour; commercial approaches.
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1. Introduction

On the Web, self-publishing and sharing for free is the norm. If you belong to the modest amount of privileged consumers, users, perhaps fans, who own a computer and are connected with the rest of the networked world, chance is that you have been participating in the production and distribution of media culture in your everyday life, even involuntarily, for free. Maybe you have been publishing on your blog, Twitter, MySpace, or Facebook account; posting your news on Indymedia; (re)posting self-produced videos on YouTube; exchanging images that someone else took on Flickr; making available bootlegged recordings of music and ripped DVDs for others to use through peer-to-peer sharing; sharing software code developments with modders; publishing video games translations for game fans; and so on and so forth.

Chance also is, as industry associations like the RIIA and the MPAA anxiously go round and about to proclaim, that you have been breaking the law. Your crime? Infringing owners’ copyrights. Freely taking and building upon information, culture and knowledge resources which have been declared proprietary in the current political and economic context, and by the most recent legal changes that have expanded and extended the scope and length of copyright (for example, see Boyle 2001; Lessig 2002; Benkler 2006, 300).

Despite the fact that stealing is a crime and despite the availability of the original copy on the market, today various unofficial digital versions of commercial media products made, published and used by enthusiast fans abound around us in countless copies, transformed and/or re-distributed in the new technosocial networks. Increasingly, this is the way through which consumers access commercial media products for the first time (sometimes even the only one).

Therefore, the practices and understandings of those engaged in the production, reproduction and distribution of unofficial versions for free deserve as much consideration as their official counterparts. For the impact and implications of fan participatory practices online are not straightforward, but complex. First of all, as for example Brian Larkin (2004) explains in relation to the birth of Nollywood (the Nigerian movie industry), the unofficial practices of reproduction of amateurs often provide the blueprints upon which many media infrastructures related to the reproduction, dissemination and consumption of official media texts are build. The ‘legitimate industry’ seldom emerges spontaneously and is often structured upon the human resources, production tools and distribution channels of pirate media:

In many parts of the world, media piracy is not a pathology of the circulation of media forms but, rather, its prerequisite. It is the means by which media—usually foreign—are made available and it provides the
technological constraints governing how other nonpirate media are reproduced, disseminated, and consumed (ibid., 309).

Secondly, as Jeremy Douglass, William Huber and Lev Manovich warn,

cultures of unofficial versions are not a simple “copy and paste,” but instead have their own social dynamics, their own methods of production, and their own forms of creativity that […] go beyond the simple competition to release copies of commercial media files before they become officially available (2011, 195).

Hence, dismissing these participatory practices online as piracy fails to notice the massive amount of labour on which these productive activities depend; as well as the different lived experiences and various motives of those engaged with them.

1.1 Research problem

The broad problem this thesis addresses is fan uptaking of publishing (cf., Hartley 2007, 137). As mentioned above, with the arrival of the new technosocial tools and the following collapse of publishing costs, “control over the media is less completely in the hands of the professionals” (Shirky 2008, 59): boundaries of participations shift. Amateurs who voluntary connect in networks to produce, reproduce, distribute and market commercial media material on their own and for free make what media professionals do obsolete (Shirky 2008, 61); cause troubles to policymakers; and challenge traditional media business models based on the exclusive control over copies. New complex interactions between the cultural industries and their most loyal consumers materialize, as culture and commerce converge and businesses move to lock down and exploit fan cultures through technological control and legal changes (Lessig 2004, Jenkins 2006b, Deuze 2009).

In particular, this thesis deals with the unofficial and non-profit cultural production, reproduction and distribution practices of fan communities in online environments, their role in the commercial cultural industries and their impact on, and implications for society, especially in relation to intellectual property and commercial approaches, but also cultural life. In order to narrow down the topic, I decided to focus on the variations there are in the practices and understandings of a particular transnational subculture of fan consumers-producers: the community of scanlators, whose practices of translation, reproduction and distribution online have made Japanese comics accessible to fans worldwide, bypassing industry localizers and overseas distributors. Scanlation presents itself as an exemplary arena for the investigation of the ‘bad new things’ (e.g., digital piracy and free labour exploitation) revolving around what is called (depending on who you listen
User Generated Content, Peer to Peer production, social production, playbour, produsage, etcetera.

Manga, one of the most capitalistic media forms worldwide (Shoji 2010), due its growth in popularity overseas to fan-consumers and fan-producers’ culture of organized copyright infringement (Schodt 1983; Gravett 2004; Jenkins 2006b; Thompson 2007, 476). Japanese comics have been selected, scanned, translated, edited, proofread, published, released and marketed online, by fans and groups of fans in order to fill in the gap caused by the absence of official translations and overseas distribution for decades. This complex effort of glocalization and digitalization of Japanese popular culture from below is called scanlation. The Japanese copyright holders have traditionally tolerated this fan practice, as they have tolerated the doujinshi phenome

non (Kinsella 1998; Lessig 2004; Mehra 2002; Pink 2007; Douglass et al. 2010; Tamagawa 2012), since scanlators self-imposed ethics forced them to cease and desist the reproduction and distribution of licensed projects; but first and foremost because the Japanese were not interested in developing a viable overseas digital market.

The increased speed and ease of use provided by the new technosocial tools lowered the entry barriers for manga amateurs’ participation in the reproduction and circulation of manga. The number and kinds of scanlation groups have been skyrocketing since the invention of the Internet and the Web, and exploded with the boom of the manga fandom in 2002-2003. Nowadays an anonymous user searching online for “read online manga” would find over two millions results referring to scanlations of licensed and unlicensed manga. The old scanlation ethics seems all but dead. Licensors’ cease and desist letters are disregarded and the distribution of licensed manga continues. A multitude of freely available scans are downloaded in the millions.

Meanwhile, official products sales have been sagging since the recession hit the Japanese economy in 1995 (Thorn 2001; Thompson 2007; JETRO 2008; JEW 2011). Confronted with a sature domestic market, Japanese manga publishers must capitalize the new digital media and develop viable overseas markets through the global exploitation of intellectual property rights in order to survive (JEW 2011, 3). That’s is to say, “expand or die” (McChesney 2003, 33). Formerly disinterested in foreign markets, the manga industry is now tackling the challenge of how to address the commercially viable digitalization of manga outside of Japan. Unfortunately, what they plan to offer to the consumers is already being offered by scanlators, for free.

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1 Doujinshi are printed amateur manga self-published and distributed by amateurs in self-organized markets such as Komiketto. Many of the doujinshi sold in these self-organized comic market circles are unauthorized derivative works (Schodt 1996, 38; Kinsella 1996; Pink 2007; Tamagawa 2012, 124).
Surprisingly and ironically, instead of adopting their typical collaborationist logic, Japanese copyright holders, acting in concert with overseas manga publishing houses, are now using technological and legal control to protect their intellectual property from their most loyal consumers around the globe. For example, in 2010, Anime News Network, a famous platform for anime and manga news, reported the formation of an international manga industry anti-piracy coalition aimed at taking down 30 websites hosting and aggregating scanned and translated manga. At the same time, they are trying to transpose their brick-and-mortar retail business ideology on the Internet while exploring new ways to exploit the free productivity of fans.

Of course, manga publishers and distributors who are trying to go global and digital, facing the uncertainties of digitization, convergence, and increased audience ‘control’ over resources for cultural production and exchange, are challenged to change and develop new innovative strategies (Chan-Olmsted 2006) in order to monetize, own and control the new manga ecosystem. However, criminalizing without distinction one’s own most loyal and engaged customers for their “labor of love” (Donovan 2010, 11) while simultaneously trying to extract information and exploit them seems not only ridiculous, but suicidal.

This new contradictory antagonism in the power relationships between manga producers and manga consumers solicited my attention and motivated me to explore the variations in the practices and understandings of scanlators. Are they what they appear to be to the eyes of the producers? Bunches of pirates who ignore intellectual property and divert from principles of capitalist exchange?

1.2 Research questions and goals

Little is known about scanlation. This thesis aims to explore, describe and explain what variations there are in the practices and understandings of scanlators, with a special focus on their attitudes towards industry legal ownership and commercial approaches, through Bruns’ concept of produsage. The main research question is: How do scanlators understand their cultural production, reproduction, and distribution practices; with a special focus on which meanings do they ascribe to copyright infringement and the anti-profit motive? In particular, this work tries to answer the following subquestions: How do some become scanlators? What are the main motives of the scanlators? How is scanlation organized? How is it managed? Which beliefs underpin it? The different understandings and practices of the scanlators will be mapped, and an explanation of scanlation processes and principles impact on and implications for the cultural industry of manga and the society at the level of politics, economy, and culture will be attempted.
1.3 Theoretical perspectives

This research will interpret scanlators’ different practices and understandings from a hybrid approach that combines the perspectives of the critical political economy of media and communication, media and cultural studies- fan studies, and alternative media studies. The main goal of this thesis is to analyze the variations there are in being scanlators, their different practices and understandings, and discuss their impact on, and implications for society. In particular, Alex Bruns’ work on user-led productive spaces- his concept and theory of produsage, will be used and applied to the scanlation community, taken here as a specific instance of produsage in action. Other key concepts on which the analysis of scanlators’ productive activities and labour lived, worked and played in everyday media life (Deuze 2007, 242; 2009) will rely are: media convergence and participatory culture, fan cultures, and free labour. I will draw upon the analytical frameworks of those scholars who studied the blurring of the boundaries between producers and consumers, work and play, professionals and amateurs, and elaborate these concepts for the purpose of analyzing and interpreting the phenomenon of scanlation, which in my view, exists at the intersection of fan production and consumption, professionalism and amateurism, and in between work and play.

1.4 Research methods

This is a theoretical and empirical oriented thesis focused on manga fans uptaking of publishing within the dominant commercial cultural industry of Japanese comics. To answer the research questions, I will first present the literature I deem relevant for interpreting the antagonism between the industry of manga and the fans, taking in account (in this order) technological, cultural, social and political-economic conditions. Then, I will conduct a number of qualitative interviews with scanlators.

1.5 Relevance

Why do I think investigating scanlation matters? Roger Silverstone said that alternative media “have created new spaces for alternative voices that provide the focus both for specific community interests as well as for the contrary and the subversive” (1999, 103). It is my assumption that scanlation provides such a space.

Furthermore, scanlators have always been a somewhat marginalized social group, although it acted a quite important role in the promotion of Japanese popular culture outside of Japan. Their efforts have been so successful than today “manga is one of the most popular cultural forms around the world” (Douglass et al. 2011, 192), as well as one of the most commodified media on earth.
Moreover, although, nowadays, official translations of original Japanese comics are available on the market, fan unofficial translations are still one of the most important versions of manga, as it is often the primary point of access to Japanese popular cultural resources, online.

Nevertheless, scanlators’ different understandings and practices have never been studied in detail. What exactly the culture and political economy of scanlators are and what scanlation- as an alternative to the traditional industrial manga organization and production system- impact on and implications for society are, are questions that until now have been overlooked.

In addition, there’s little theoretical and empirical research exploring manga markets changing circumstances and their significance for the ways the manga industry tries to respond to and manage convergent and participatory cultures of fan producers and consumers.

Also, nobody has considered the sluggish technological transition of the manga industry to the digital brave new world and its frictions with the mechanisms deployed by fans to promote Japanese popular culture in the overseas markets. Manga studies, for example, have generally been limited to a content perspective; whereas issues related to the context of production, or to convergence or audience increased control over informational, knowledge and cultural resources have been widely ignored.

However, exploring scanlators’ attitudes and opinions on contemporary relevant and complex issues such as for instance digital piracy and free labour exploitation, can shed light on whether and how fans make sense of infringing copyrights and play/work for free promoting culture industries that treat them as intellectual property thieves and exploitable commodities.

On top of it, the broader relevance of the master thesis for society is to refer to the question of whether reconciling or not fans and producers in the converging cultural industries is possible and desirable.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

After this introductory chapter, the theoretical framework of the thesis is presented. The third chapter is dedicated to the methodology, while in the fourth chapter results are analyzed. Finally, in the fifth and last chapter findings are discussed and some concluding remarks are made.

2. Theoretical framework

This thesis wants to develop an understanding of fan participatory practices online. It examines the understandings of scanlators, people engaged in collaborative online production processes which involve the translation, reproduction and open distribution of commercial media products without
permission. In other words, this work analyzes the culture and political-economy of scanlation. Therefore, a hybrid approach combining the perspectives of media and cultural studies- fan studies, alternative media studies, and the critical political economy of media and communication will be adopted, and presented herein.

2.1 Web 2.0 and participatory culture

The main paradigm on which this thesis draws upon to understand media change coupled with consumers’ productive participation is Henry Jenkins’ convergence culture. The term convergence refers to “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (Jenkins 2006b, 2). The concept is useful to describe the dynamic relationship between old and new technologies, economic and nonmarket organizations, producers and consumers as culture and commerce collapse and more networked individuals and groups than ever have the potential to actively participate and collectively act in the social production and open distribution of media content, “across different media systems, competing media economies, and national borders” (Jenkins 2006b, 3) with all complex sorts of impacts on and implications for society.

According to Jenkins and Mark Deuze, in the new technosocial environment, media companies as commercial enterprises have to be examined in relation to their consumers, and “by the same token, consumers, audiences, fan communities, users, call them what you wish, can no longer be meaningfully understood without a better understanding of the economic and technological contexts within which they operate” (2008, 5). On the same lines, Yochai Benkler notes that

the actual practices of human interaction with information, knowledge, and culture and with production and consumption are the consequence of a feedback effect between social practices, economic organization, technological affordances, and formal constraints on behaviour through law and similar institutional forms (2006, 26).

Thus, starting from the changes in the social relations of cultural production which came with new technologies (Williams 1981, 112), this thesis will understand the interactions of scanlators taking in account the affordances of the new technosocial environment, the shortcomings of the present copyright regime, and the principles of capitalist exchange.

Technology alone doesn’t bring about social revolutions. As, for example, Martin-Barbero stresses, it is society that shapes the ways we use technology (1993, 139). In other words, technology without human agency remains technology. Media convergence, participatory culture
and collective intelligence happen within social actors’ brains and through their interactions with one another (Jenkins 2006, 3). Yet, anti-techno-determinism asides, it is undeniable that Internet and Web 2.0 have transformed our society: the new technosocial tools have had a very significant role in catalyzing the social practices of production and use of media culture. As Lawrence Lessig famously stated: “Code is law” (1999; 2006). That is to say, different technological architectures enable and constrain different liberties. In the actual material historical, technological, legal, economic and political conditions, Web 2.0, what Tim O’Reilly has called “the architecture of participation” (2004), enables users to produce content together (Ritzer & Jurgenson 2010, 19). The democratization of the material means of production and distribution that until recently were reserved for media professionals (or enthusiast tech-savvy amateurs) because of threshold barriers (e.g., the high capital investments required), has fundamentally heightened our expressive capabilities, generating new opportunities and risks for making and sharing content:

[human capacity] liberation from the constraints of physical capital leaves creative human beings much freer to engage in a wide range of information and cultural production practices than those they could afford to participate in when, in addition to creativity, experience, cultural awareness and time, one needed a few million dollars to engage in information production” (Benkler 2006, 52-53).

Social technologies that support many to many communications such as chats, wikis, blogs, MUDs, MMORPGs, and so forth, empower consumers and grease the constitution of collectives that can communicate and cooperate across time and space. As Benkler points out:

The networked environment makes possible a new modality of organizing production: radically decentralized, collaborative, and non proprietary; based on sharing resources and outputs among widely distributed, loosely connected individuals who cooperate with each other without relying on either market signals or managerial commands (2006, 60).

However, all the celebratory talk about participatory culture must be taken with a pinch of salt. For access is not participation. Access is not ownership. As in a power law distribution, the major part of what is published on the most popular sites on the Web alongside search engines (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia) is created by a really small percentage of highly motivated tech-savvy media users. That is to say, a few users do the majority of the work (for example, see Shirky 2009, 122-130). With the risk of sounding banal, the media audience is not a monolithic mass of participants. As Murdock and Golding observed about the political economy of cultural consumption, material inequalities – money, but also (leisure) “time, space, access to social networks and command of the cultural competencies required to interpret and deploy media materials in particular ways” (2005,

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9) – act as barriers to agency. The users who can - have those resources - and want – have enough motives to - participate, do it in various degree and for various reasons that may change over time.

Furthermore, by and large, the infrastructure of new media is still provided by the actors of the old industrial information model, sometimes following the same centralized forms and business logics; or as McChesney puts it, “It looks to be under the thumb of the usual corporate suspects” (2003, 36). The content produced and distributed by ‘old’ media professionals retains its importance and influence alongside the one ‘produced’ and distributed by amateurs in the ‘new’ media ecosystem. Also, users’ profile data and the content shared and/or generated by users on Web 2.0 platforms is usually owned and controlled by the commercial providers of those ‘free’ tools. Although the means of production are increasingly accessible then, the social structures and cultural participatory practices on these platforms are never completely free but conditioned. As Nico Carpentier and Benjamin De Cleen argue, “the participatory potential of media technologies remains dependent upon the way they are used. In practice, this means that Web 2.0 technologies can be used perfectly in a top-down nonparticipatory way” (2008, 7).

Nevertheless, it is clear that the material conditions of our lives have changed and that this change is structural. Nowadays, “the media are actually constitutive of everyday life” (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 69). They are so ubiquitous and pervasive (Williams 1981, 54) that as Deuze (2009; 2012) and Silverstone (1994; 2007) point out, we live in media life, in a mediapolis. Thus, if as Shirky notes, “any radical change in our ability to communicate with one another changes society” (2009, 106), we might say that Web 2.0 and the related technosocial tools changed our everyday-ness.

We are seeing the social and economic effects of this shift in our ‘new’ abilities right now, in our practical lived experience. We can be more free, more autonomous in our media cultural production-consumption (Lessig 2002, 9). Now that with ICTs “the effort required to start a group” has become “ridiculously easy” (Paquet 2002), it has also become easier to participate in non-market, non-proprietary information, knowledge and culture production and distribution within tight or loose networks of peers scattered across space and time. Moreover, this could be done without asking permission and/or relying on traditional industrial gatekeepers and editors. Therefore, “the power or the ability” of the traditional producers “to control us, our processes and our things along the production, distribution, and consumption circuit has shifted” (Mosco 1996, 25). Citizen journalism and open source software, for instance, are not only examples of decentralized forms of communication, but offer an alternative to journalism and commercial software itself, thus enriching and diversifying media culture. Power (and sometimes capital) accrue in the hands of the people who live in what Benkler calls “networked information economy” (2006). This, he suggests,
offer us a more attractive cultural production system in two ways: (1) it makes culture more transparent, and (2) it makes culture more malleable. Together, these means that we are seeing the emergence of a new folk culture—a practice that has been largely suppressed in the industrial era of cultural production—where many more of us participate actively in making cultural moves and finding meaning in the world around us. These practices make their practitioners better “readers” of their own culture and more self-reflective and critical of the culture they occupy, thereby enabling them to become more self-reflective participants in conversations within that culture. This allows individuals much greater freedom to participate in tugging and pulling at the cultural creations of others, “glomming on” on them, as Balkin puts it, and making the culture they occupy more their own than was possible with mass-media culture. In these senses, we can say that culture is becoming more democratic: self-reflective and participatory (2006, 15).

The cultural production system offered by the networked informational economy is superior because instead of being based on exclusion and competition, it is an essentially open, inclusive social system which welcomes agency and self-determination. It invites people to organize autonomously, to appropriate the technosocial tools and produce and distribute culture on their own terms.

2.2 Participatory fan cultures 2.0

Let’s put aside all the hype about participatory culture and stop to consider who is participating and under which conditions for, in spite of everything, we still live in a consumer culture. First of all, as already mentioned above, not anyone can access the tools of media production and distribution because of inequities. Secondly, not anyone care enough to participate in a committed way in the individual and/or collaborative production and sharing of media content. Some ‘just’ consume and use culture (pace Fiske).

However, some do have the personal motivation and tools to gather together with other like-minded people to take action, to get the things they care about done, to change their world (Shirky 2009). Examples of voluntary participatory engagement with commercial and popular culture in online environments are blogging, modding, moviemaking, fansubbing, filking, and so forth. The Web provides these caring people with new spaces for the communal expression of their capacities and mutual affections. As Jenkins writes in Convergence Culture:

these new communities are defined through voluntary, temporary, and tactical affiliations, reaffirmed through common intellectual enterprises and emotional investments. Members may shift from one group to another as their interests and needs change, and they may belong to more than one community at the same time. These communities, however, are held together through the mutual production and reciprocal exchange of knowledge (2006, 27; my italics).
The Web is populated by thousands of virtual communities (Rheingold 2000) and social networks anchored by the creation and sharing of information, knowledge and culture about a specific object of interest. Let me put it in another way. What do game modders have in common? Their love for games, codes. What do filmmakers share? Their passion for movies. What ties fansubbers? Their attachment to anime. These people are always already consumers and users participating in massive consumerist subcultures. As Jenkins points out, these people want to communicate and engage with the object of their affection with others within and beyond the community of interest (2006, 27). Like fans.

Fans are nothing new, they have been around for quite some time, long before the Internet and Web 2.0 came along, creating fanzines, organizing conventions, and participating in other highly productive activities (for instance, see Sandvoss 2011). I know what a fan is. You know it too. Like pornography, culture or diversity, fandom seems to be instantly recognizable but extremely difficult to define. The point I want to make is that, as more and more people get their hands on technosocial tools that ease the barriers to access and engagement with media production and distribution, more and more people start to do things with them. These things which once would have been considered fannish-like, and thus othered by society, are nowadays instead perceived as everyday practices of media usage (Sandvoss 2005, 101; Jenkins in Gray et al. 2007, 361; Postigo 2008, 71; Booth 2010, 20).

In this sense, it might be written that the category of fandom does not work anymore. Or better said, that it makes less sense to other fans as Potterheads, Trekkies, isolated geeks, nerds, obsessive fanatics, “psychologically defunct stalkers and killers” (Sandvoss 2005, 1-2; Ito et al. 2012; Jenson 1992), as it seems that fandom is something that we all do today, here and then. Besides, most of us are fans of something or someone to some extent in our everyday life (Gray et al. 2007; Booth 2010). For example, there are news fans (Gray 2007) and theory fans (McKee 2007).

Even though the empirical category fandom is quite of no use (Hills 2002), scholars have discriminated among labels and categories on the degree of interest, passion, level of engagement, media use, intensity and longevity of devotion for the object of fandom, sociability/connectivity, organization, productivity, or on knowledge and affection dimensions; ‘singling out’ the fluid, liquid status of fandom and its culture in fixed taxonomies of consumers, followers, fans, cultists, enthusiasts, petty producers, and even anti-fans and non-fans (for instance, see Hogget & Bishop 1986, 40; Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 141; Tulloch & Jenkins 1995; Brooker & Brooker 1996; Gray 2003). Perhaps the most famous is Abercrombie and Longhurst’s categorization, who after analyzing the literature on fans and enthusiasts have placed the “skilled audience” on a continuum
that goes from the consumer to the fan, the cultist, the enthusiast and then the petty producer, differentiating “along the dimensions of object of focus, extent and nature of media use and degree and nature of organization” (1998, 138). The authors suggested that we can distinguish the extremities of the continuum, the consumers and the petty producers, from what there is in the middle according to different degree of skills and the importance given to textual production. However, one could wonder how measurable differences in degree are. Furthermore, fans do not describe themselves as cultists, enthusiasts, petty producers, anti-fans or non-fans. Sometimes not even as fans.

Hills writes that the contradictions of fan cultures should be approached as “essential cultural negotiations that can only be closed down at the cost of ignoring fandom’s cultural dynamics” (Hills 2002, xiii). Fan communities are tied down to the dynamics of the socio-cultural context. Thus, writes Hills, fandom “is never a neutral ‘expression’ or a singular ‘referent’; its status and its performance shift across cultural sites” (2002, xii). In other words, it’s fluid, arbitrary, complex. Hills stresses that “it is an identity which is (dis-)claimed, and which performs cultural work” (2002, xi). Also David Buckigham and Julian Sefton-Green, for example, claim that “Pokémon is something you do, not just something you read or watch or ‘consume’” (2003, 379). Hence, it is important to address what fans do (Hills 2002, xii).

Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss and C. Lee Harrington (2007) distinguish three generations of fandom studies. The first wave, the “Fandom Is Beautiful” phase, draws on Michel de Certeau’s 1984 distinction between strategies of property and authority landowners, and powerful and disempowered tactics of nomads poachers. It constitutes of scholars’ political interventions in favor of subordinated fans’ political, subversive activities that resist hegemonic incorporation, questioning power, inequality and discrimination building community and networks in their everyday life consumption (ibid., 40). Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington criticize how the fans were “Othered by mainstream society” (ibid., 3) but also by fans scholars [see, for example, Fiske 1989a, 1989b, 1992] who helped construct the dichotomy “non-fan/fan” (ibid., 3-4) by accounting for fandom practices as “creative, thoughtful, and productive” instead of “pathological” (ibid., 3) excluding the fans who love to watch, read or listen without engaging in more productive activities such as counter hegemonic struggles with the powers that be.

The second wave of fan studies- “Fan Cultures and Social Hierarchy” (ibid., 5) saw a re-evaluation of the fan. The authors draw a link between narrowcasting and deregulation and the focus of market-led media industries on
the fan as a specialized yet dedicated consumer [...] Rather than ridiculed, fan audiences are now wooed and championed by cultural industries, at least as long as their activities do not divert from principles of capitalist exchange and recognize industries’ legal ownership of the object of fandom (ibid.).

This second generation of fan scholarship draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s 1979 work on distinction and social hierarchies of taste. What seems to matter is not the fan *per se* but the cultural status of the consumed fandom object. It’s the fan cultural taste in x which mirrors his social, cultural, and economic capital (ibid., 6).

The third wave- “Fandom and modernity” (ibid., 7) differs from the first two in its empirical focus. Previously fans scholars researched specific formations of fan communities and subcultures, for example at Trekkies conventions. Those were times when fandom was still somewhat underground, hidden away, ghettoized, virtually invisible from the mainstream. Nowadays, the Web has unveiled the visibility of fan cultural production and distribution (Jenkins 2006b, 131-133) so that, as already mentioned, it seems that “being a fan has become an ever more common mode of cultural consumption” (Gray et al. 2007, 7). The third generation of scholars is then apt to study fandom “as part of the fabric of our everyday lives” in order to “capture fundamental insights into modern life” (ibid., 9). Since “most of us are fans” - not only in the weekend but “everywhere and all the time” (see Jenkins’ afterword in Gray et al. 2007, 361), studying fans practices and understandings help us to understand and meet challenges far beyond the realm of popular culture because they tell us something about the way in which we relate to those around us, as well as the way we read the mediated texts that constitute an ever larger part of our horizon of experience (ibid., 10).

In line with this, studying scanlators participatory practices online could thus contribute to develop a more systematic understanding of how we develop emotional ties and socially interact with others; how we learn to live and collaborate within communities that care about something; what do motivate us to create, to work, to take action, to ‘just do it’; and so on and so forth. As Duncombe points out in relation to the underground culture of fanzines, “although the world of zines operates on the margins of society, its concerns are common to all: how to count as an individual, how to build a supportive community, how to have a meaningful life, how to create something that is yours” (1997, 15). It becomes then fundamental to understand their modus operandi, their social and cultural inner workings, norms and ethics, because these could be then applied to mobilize participation for the social good. In other words, it is about applying fan culture and political-economy to the larger political, economic and cultural processes in society.

For instance, as Liesbet van Zoonen puts it, “we can accept the mechanisms of fandom as a basis for rethinking engagement with politics” (2005, 17). Many scholars have investigated the
similarities between fan and political practices. Van Zoonen for example, questions if politics can be entertaining, fun, pleasurable (2005, 1) and draws connections between fans and politicians: “Both fans and citizens follow their objects intensely, promote them to outsiders, deliberate among each other, come to informed judgments, and propose alternatives” (ibid., 16; 63; 145). Furthermore, both perform, build communities and rest on “affective intelligence” (ibid., 53).

George E. Marcus, W. Russell Neuman and Michael Mackuen (2000) also argue that politics is about affect as much as intelligence. Gray, drawing on the work of Van Zoonen (2005) and Marcus et al. (2000) among others, points out in an attempt to analyze news fans that “the political is deeply affective” and “succeeds in part by offering emotional appeal” and that “it must matter to the individual and must be consumed emotively to some degree if it is to become meaningful to its viewers” and goes on, “Fantasy, and a desire for change, along with the emotional investment required to work towards it, is a prerequisite to any and all political movement” (2007, 80).

There’s a lot of democratic potential in the ‘playful’ but also conflicting world of fandom. According to Jenkins (2006b, 23; 238-239), as well as Benjamin (1998, 101) and Duncombe (1997, 15), the competences we learn playing with culture are so powerful because they may spill over other more serious realms of life, such as politics. In Van Zoonen’s words, the mechanism of fandom could be exemplary for politics (2005, 52-68). Along the same lines, Duncombe draws the following conclusions from his analysis of zines alternative culture:

Zines, with all their limitations and contradictions, offer up something very important to the people who create and enjoy them: a place to walk to. In the shadows of the dominant culture, zines and underground culture mark out a free space: a space within which to imagine and experiment with new and idealistic ways of thinking, communicating and being. Underground ideals such as an authentic and noninstrumental life provide – albeit in inchoate form – a challenge to modern society. An underground culture creates a space in which to experiment with novel forms of social production and organization. Practices such as nonalienated cultural production and the nonspatial community of “the network” are perhaps indicators of the directions in which a future society could go, or utopian ideals after which to strive. No forced march, participation in the zine underground is pleasurable. Asked why he publishes, Aftershock’s Eric Rudnick explains: “To change the world. It may not work but it sure is fun trying”.

Such impossible dreams are essential today, for the power of hegemonic ideology has never been its ability to make people love the system; rather, it is to deny them any alternative. Zines, in their content, form, and organization, constitute an alternative ideal of how human relations, creation, and consumption could be organized. Critically, their strength lies not in what they say they will do, but in what they actually are. They are politics by example. In religious parlance, they bear witness to a rejection of the old and a creation of the new. (1997, 195-196).
Considering thus the importance that media consumption and being a fan have for the development of the self/identity, or as Sandvoss suggested, if one thinks about the object of fandom as an extension of the self, and thus about fandom as self-reflection/narcissistic performance of the self (Sandvoss 2005; see also Thompson 1995, 223); one can understand how fundamental it is for individuals who invest so much in marginalized interests and activities stigmatized by highbrows (see Jenkins 1992b; Fiske 1992; Eng 2012), the fact that they can access and share through dialogue and handwork their passions within fan communities without shame. Simply put, “they are not “alone”” (Jenkins 1996b, 23; see also Atton 2002, 56). As Sandvoss writes, “online enunciative productivity as quotidian interaction between otherwise often dispersed audience members serves as social cement that forms communities and audiences with other media consumers” (2011, 60).

Fan participatory practices online and understandings can thus illustrate new forms of kinship, intimacy, belonging, community building. In other words, they can make us imagine alternative ways to organize social interactions and allocating resources within capitalism.

2.3 Political economies of participatory fan cultures 2.0

Since fans cultural production, distribution and consumption processes are evidently enacted under capitalism and legal constraints, it is important to explore the implications of the practices and understandings of participatory fan cultures online for politics and economy, in particular, for “the political economy of media ownership and control” (Jenkins 2006, 1-2; 112). That is to say, to examine the legal battles initiated by their vented ‘disregard’ for ownership and control of intellectual property in the contemporary prohibitionist corporate copyright regime, and the likely commodification of their affective free labour by the capitalistic cultural industries (Jenkins 2006b, 17).

As mentioned above, the affordances of the new technosocial environment have removed the two main roadblocks for grassroots publishing: the lack of capital and the lack of mainstream distribution. The power to control media production and distribution shifts. Media struggles are undertaken: “struggles over the ownership and control of both institutions and meanings; struggles over access and participation; struggles over representation; struggles which inform and affect our sense of each other, our sense of ourselves” (Silverstone 1999, 5). Of course, this raises issues of power, of who’s making money out of what (or whom) (McChesney 2003, 27), and the question if “cultural production is organised in a socially just manner” (Hesmondalgh 2002, 34).

The approach of the political economy of the media and communication, according to Vincent Mosco (1996), analyzes the shifting social/power relations of production, distribution, and consumption of communication resources. As Mosco pointed out, “the primary difficulty with this
definition is that it assumes we can recognise and distinguish among producers, distributors and consumers with relative ease. But this is not always so and particularly not in some of the more interesting cases” (1996, 26). As it is the case with the communication resources produced, distributed and consumed in their leisure time by communities of fans who are always already consumers and users, who get access to the means of production and distribution (with or without permission), and whose participations are more difficult to control.

The main characteristics of political economy, according to the account delivered by Mosco, are: “social change and history, the social totality, moral philosophy, and praxis” (ibid., 27; see also Murdock & Golding 2005). That is to say, an emphasis on the historical background of cultural industries and the fundamental material practices, social actions of its main agents. An attention to highlight both changes and continuities, without reducing economic, political and cultural contradictory dynamics but mapping “the concrete totality” (ibid., 33) of the field with a particular focus on questions of social good.

Mosco stresses what he calls “a major blindspot in communication research”: the “general tendency in communication studies to define its subject as the consumer and action as leisure activity, separated from the world of work and labor” (ibid., 96). In this study I address my subjects as fans and consumers, users and produsers, and analyze their play/free affective labour processes, with a special focus on their attitudes towards industry legal ownership and the profit motive.

As Raymond Williams wrote in 1981 about social and cultural production and reproduction relations, there are

three major areas of tension, conflict and struggle, within which the fact of asymmetry is always a major element. These areas are (i) the organization of licensing, censorship and other similar forms of control, and the struggle against these; (ii) the organization of the market, both in its aspect as a trading area whose purposes, in expansion an profit, may often be in conflict with otherwise dominant political and cultural authorities, and its aspect as a mechanism for commodities in this especially sensitive field, where inherent calculations of profit and scale may impose tensions with other conceptions of art and, at a different level, impose its own new forms of commercial controls; and (iii) the uneven and changing relations between a received and always to some extent recuperated ‘popular’ (largely oral) culture and the new forms of standardized and increasingly centralized production and reproduction (pp. 99-100).

I think these political struggles are central to participatory fan cultures’ everyday practices of cultural production and consumption. As previously mentioned reviewing fandom scholarship, fan cultures struggle over access, ownership, control, participation in the production and distribution processes, and representation. Radical politics and resistance is not only to be found in the texts produced which even if revolutionary can be disseminated without any problems by the corporate mainstream media (Benjamin 1998, 94-96), but also in the processes and principles underpinning
their production, distribution and consumption. Walter Benjamin, for instance, made a similar point about social change and politically progressive culture in 1934 while thinking of Brecht’s epic theatrical apparatus. In *The Author as Producer* he wrote that the “political tendency” of a work is to be found in the position of the producer and his/her medium *within* the relations of production—not only in the attitude of his/her work but in the engineering of a new progressive technical apparatus that revolutionizes the process of production. In his words: “Before I ask: what is a work’s position *vis-à-vis* the production relations of its time, I should like to ask: what is its position *within* them?” (1998, 87). For Benjamin, “A writer who does not teach other writers teaches nobody”, what is important is

that a writer’s production must have the character of a model: it must be able to instruct other writers in their production and, secondly, it must be able to place an improved apparatus at their disposal. This apparatus will be the better, the more consumers it brings in contact with the production process—in short, the more readers or spectators it turns into collaborators (1998, 98).

Instead of being “a supplier of the production apparatus” the writer has to become “an engineer who sees his task in adapting that apparatus to the ends of the proletarian revolution” (1998, 102). Stephen Duncombe makes the same point while analyzing “underground zines and the politics of alternative culture”:

The medium of the zines is not just a message to be received, but a model of participatory cultural production and organization to be acted upon. The message you get from zines is that you should not just be getting messages, you should be producing them as well. This is not to say that the content of zines—whether it be anticapitalist polemics or individual expression—is not important. But what is unique, and uniquely valuable, about the politics of zines and underground culture is their emphasis on the practice of doing it yourself. It’s a simple idea, but in a society where consuming what others have produced for you—whether it be culture or politics—is the norm, the implications are far-reaching and radical, for doing it yourself is the first premiss of participatory democracy (1997, 129).

Thus, if the content of fan cultural production has often more to do with mass media and popular culture and standard consumer commodities than with the political, this doesn’t exclude that its production processes and principles could be radically political. Lawrence Eng for example, argues that *otaku*³ can be seen “as “reluctant insiders” whose resistance movement is based not on rejection but appropriation (2012, 100). This appropriation may sometime challenge the shortcomings of the dominant capitalistic media industrial production and distribution system, inviting frustrated people, divided by class, gender, etc., but united by a common interest, to act (cf. Mosco 1996, 238-241; Williams 1993, 74). As Mosco points out,

³ Japanese term which refers to people with fanatic interests.
The political economy of the mass media itself has contributed to the formation of social movements organized around media production and policy. Alternative media movements worldwide have challenged dominant media forms, technologies, images, and messages. These include labor-intensive literacy campaigns, street theater, alternative newspapers, video, and film production, cartooning, public access cable programming, alternative computer networks, video piracy, computer hacking, and others. They differ in how they challenge established forms of media (1996, 240).

Although oppositional to some extent, especially in regards to their relations with legal ownership and capitalist principles for example, alternative movements coexist with the dominant power structure of the commercialized media. As Atton claims following Hebdige’s subcultural theory (1979), “the notion of a subculture as classically taken as a movement that is at once in opposition to aspects of a dominant culture, is oppressed or marginalised by it and yet is related to it structurally and historically” (2004, xi-xii). Alternative practices often survive because the dominant order tolerate them, until they have developed to the point to which they have to choose between incorporation or opposition (Williams 1981, 190). For example, as already mentioned, fan participations are usually welcomed by cultural industries “as long as their activities do not divert from principles of capitalist exchange and recognize industries’ legal ownership of the object of fandom (Gray et al. 2007, 5).

Hegemony is not static but a dynamic matter of class negotiations. Fan cultural production within capitalism is not always subversive and is not always doomed under capitalism, also, it is not not always subversive and is not not always subdued under capitalism. As Alan McKee semi-seriously points out in his analysis of cultural theory fans, “we should not treat any fans in this way” meaning using the rhetoric: “fans’ media uses and fan products are made and circulated within capitalism; therefore they are not really resisting that system. The end.” (2007, 94). If academics, or theory fans (McKee 2007), can publish critiques of capitalism within capitalism, then also fans can create critically within capitalism.

2.3.1 Fan participations and copyright infringement

Jenkins writes: “Everyone’s talking about consumers as active participants—we simply can’t agree about the terms of our participation” (Gray 2007, 361). These terms ought to be negotiated, as in the case of instances of misappropriation. Fans usually take for free and without permission copies of mass-produced media texts, which form the basis for their social interactions, as raw materials for their own cultural production and usage (Jenkins 1996b, 24-25; see also Fiske 1992, 42). In other words, they infringe copyrights. Fans’ illegal borrowings aren’t of course a singularity. Alternative, independent, rebellious media are known for breaking rules “although rarely all of them in every respect” (Downing 2001, xi; Atton 2002). However, one doesn’t have to delve into radical media,
extreme activism or guerrilla actions present in today society to find unruly examples of alternative, oppositional cultural production challenging (directly or indirectly) some of the core aspects of the traditional mass media industrial production system. One can just look into the everyday practices of consumers, users and fans playing and working without permission with commercial texts legally owned by the industry.

Duncombe suggests that these instances of appropriation (e.g., remixing) are done “to reforge the link between us and the world we buy” (1997, 107). These people redefine amateurs’ productivity and shift the artificial boundaries oddly and aberrantly imposed by the commercial media industry and professional standards in the 20th century to exclude folk culture from the production of culture (Leadbeater & Miller 2004, 12; Jenkins 2006b, 135; Hartley 2007, 138; Lessig 2008, 29). For people have always been engaged with storytelling, cultural production and distribution, until media conglomerates bought all the stories they could tell and locked them down under legal, economic and professional constraints teaching people to sit back and enjoy the show as spectators, instead to set up their own (Jenkins 2006b).

The fact that there is a huge amount of gobbledygook created by nonprofessionals, or as Chris Anderson puts it “the Long Tail is indeed full of crap” (2007, 116), does not mean that amateurs go hand in hand with low quality, that self-published necessarily equals bad and that “Web 2.0’s narcissistic, self-congratulatory, self-generated content” is killing culture (Keen 2007, 34). Besides the fact that “Crap is in the eye of the beholder” (Anderson 2009, 194), what is produced and distributed by non-professionals is “often crafted with production values as high as any in the official culture” (Fiske 1992, 39). Leadbeater and Miller even coined the term Pro-Ams to indicate these “innovative, committed and networked amateurs working to professional standards” (2004, 9).

In addition, it could be argued that fandom motivated many media creators, advertisers, journalists, video game developers, etc., to work in the media industries more than monetary considerations (Toynbee 2000; Deuze 2007; Sandvoss 2011, 57-58). H. F. Moorhouse for example, who studied the enthusiast activities of consumption of hot rodding, describes professionals as “all those who make a living from the enthusiasm” (1991, 22) where enthusiasm indicates “a field of interest in people’s lives” (ibid., 21).

However, as Sandvoss points out, “fans’ heightened identification with producers not only leads to seeming complicity with the production practices and ideologies of media, but also facilitates spaces of reflection, rejection and resistance” (2011, 57). There are two main differences between fans and producers. Fans can reject the principles of capitalist exchange and ignore copyrights, whereas professionals need to respect legal ownership and follow sales figures. So,
while amateurs can produce what they desire and break the law; professionals need to produce what is likely will sell the most within legal constraints (Thompson 2010, 385; Anderson 2007; Benkler 2006, 55; Williams 1981, 103-107). Amateurs can “publish, then filter” (Shirky 2009; Anderson 2007, 117; Benkler 2002, 390-396), but professionals must first select according to the diktat of the legal market. Nevertheless, today, Pro-Ams play/work for free during their recreational time alongside poorly paid and increasingly precarious professionals media workers who are learning to – not without skepticism– adopt a collaborationist logic to approach this new breed of convergence culture co-creators who makes what they do for a living seems obsolete (Deuze 2007; Olsson 2011; see also Broddason 1994, 227; Singer 2003).

One might say that these practices of producing, reproducing, and distributing without permission according to one’s own standards expose the shortcomings of the contemporary cultural, political and economic system. They are critiques of consumer culture if you want, “demands upon consumer culture” (Duncombe 1997, 108). These corrective practices, at the micro-level, could constitute a sort of grassroots organization for the transformation of the processes and principles of cultural production and distribution. What popular culture consumers, users, fans decided to do using the new technosocial tools of the Web 2.0 (and the old photocopiers) goes far beyond what was expected by the Corporation and the State. E-zines, fansubbing, filkings, mash-ups, fanfiction, what copyright holders often call piracy: all these highly visible online forms of unofficial and free participatory fan cultures challenge industry’s legal ownership and the profit motive by playing/working according to their own rules.

Copyright law is a fundamental reward system for precarious artists/media/content producers and is the basis of the business model of the cultural industries. Copyright holders didn’t willingly allow consumers, users, fans to take their commodity resources to produce and exchange information, knowledge and culture for free; to organize a culture of copyright infringement or an “anarcho-communist” gift economy (Barbrook 1999). However, as Richard Barbrook points out,

For most of its users, the Net is somewhere to work, play, love, learn and discuss with other people. Unrestricted by physical distance, they collaborate with each other without the direct mediation of money or politics. Unconcerned about copyright, they give and receive information without thought of payment. In the absence of states or markets to mediate social bonds, network communities are instead formed through the mutual obligations created by gifts of time and ideas (1999, no page).

As Chris Atton argues, “anti-copyright and ‘open distribution’” are “forms of distribution peculiar to the alternative press” (2002, 4; 42-45). As mentioned above, fans of commercial and popular culture cannot create their own sense out of nothing but are constrained to make their meanings from pre-existing resources which are of course copyrighted- due to the cultural industries necessity
of making money out of copies and maintaining control over them, and thus the need of faking the scarcity of these informational resources (Fiske 1989, 4; Lessig 2002, 58).

The problem is that with the continuous extending of copyright law by policy makers influenced by businesses (for example, see Freedman 2008) the amount of material which is not subject to copyright is quite limited. As Lessig puts it, he has killed forests explaining “how those rights are unjustly framed, or too expansive, or outdated” (2008, 144). But, as he adds, “the law is just one part of the problem. A bigger part is us”: that is to say, our ethics and norms about how free can culture be (2008, 274). As infringing copyrights becomes a sort of practice for a whole generation, one is compelled to look into it. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels have written in 1846 in The German Ideology that “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” (p., 92). What happens then when the ruling class loses some control over the means of material and mental production - and distribution - to the former adoring audience? Young people who were previously cut out from adult fan places (see Hellekson & Busse 2006, 13) are now taking advantage of the new technosocial tools to get and exchange information, knowledge and culture; and they are getting used to do it through anti-copyright and open distribution technologies. Being media ubiquitous in our everyday life, they are not only shaped by our uses but are shaping too the way we approach information, knowledge and culture in life, work, play. If Google, Wikipedia, YouTube, and so forth, shape the way we search, organize and archive information, knowledge and culture, then also MegaUpload and ThePirateBay do. In this sense, one could think about the mainstream practice of infringing copyrights as a slow proletarian revolution which little by little bring the traditional intellectual property system and copyright regime to the collapse.

Both Lessig than Jenkins urge about the need to make “some basic distinctions: between commercial competition and amateur appropriation, between for-profit use and the barter economy of the Web, between creative repurposing and piracy” in order to reach a balance (2006b, 167). Hector Postigo, who has studied the attitudes of modders and fans towards intellectual property, found that

Fan forums and modder comments show that there is a level of community legitimization for appropriation. In the cases presented, fan/modder communities generated robust discussions about copyright, its limits, its perceived unfairness, and as a result, a sense of loss over content never released or properly produced. Instances of referencing the digital rights movement, the FSM, and their status as fans to justify appropriation show that fan and modder communities became adherents to internal legitimizing narratives that helped them ignore the legally authorized claims of content owners (2008, 70).

Studing fan practices and understandings in relation to copyright law is thus fundamental for policymakers. As Rebecca Tushnet puts it,
Despite the absence of cases, fan practices do offer lessons for copyright law. In particular, fan practices provide insights into moral rights, a category of author’s rights that is well recognized in Europe but has been far less successful in the United States. Various types of moral rights allow and author (or an author’s heirs) to control the attribution of a work, to withdraw it from circulation, or to protect it from mutilation or distortion by unwanted adaptations or alterations. Moral-rights theory posits a deep and unique connection between author and text such that an insult to the text is an assault on the author. Moral rights thus seem inherently in conflict with fans’ willingness to take liberties with source texts. Yet not all moral-rights claims are inconsistent with fan interpretive practices. Although protection against distortion conflicts with much fan creative activity, moral claims to attribution are widely recognized in fandom, and attribution rights are far less disruptive to ordinary interpretive practices than other kinds of moral rights. At the same time, fan practices demonstrate that attribution can come from context, while the law has tended to assume that only explicit credit suffices to give authors proper acknowledgement (2007, 61-62).

Furthermore, fan practices on the Web note the need for the improvement of the concept of fair use (ibid., 62). Besides Lessig, a few scholars have examined the legality of printed amateur manga, and fan translation of anime, manga and videogames, while trying to develop copyright law in a way that can take in account the nature of fan creative works which is necessarily always interwoven with the original, in order to weight copyright owners’ interests with public access. Most of these scholarly attempts try to extend the scope of fair use, which, as it is now, wouldn’t include fan-translations into fair use (Muscar 2006: 244-247).

Nathaniel T. Noda for example, argues that “fan-based activities” should be included as fair use to which a complementary-competitory dichotomy should be introduced (2008) and develops concepts of interpretive rights, creative teleology, and canonicity to better take in account fan-based activities in copyright law (2010). In favor of public access is also Joshua M. Daniels (2008) who argues how the disrespectful localization of originals anime works by foreign companies damages the author’s moral rights and results in market failures, since publishers’ releases are considered inferiors to the originals by the fans, and he proposes to extend fair use by “recognizing a right of public access to foreign works in their original form where there is no other practicable legal means of obtaining that access”. Same views are hold by Sean Kirkpatrick (2003) who argues that fansubbing should be protected by fair use. Also Sean Leonard, who examines historically and legally the anime expansion in America, argues that this was promoted by the unlawful distribution of anime by fansubbers’ proselytization of commons, and proposes to balance fan grassroots activities with the interests of copyright holders (2005). Salil Mehra (2002) suggests that the printed amateur manga markets and the official markets benefit each other. Jaime E. Muscar argues that the transformative use test should be modified to include the creative distribution of, if not manga, at least video game fan translations (2006). Behind all these works there is the assumption that fan
cultural translations promote the industries. However, if this is the case in the present historical conditions is not certain.

As the presence of disclaimers stating credits and ownership illustrate, fans are aware of the illegality of their practices (Tushnet 2007, 64-65). For what and for whom have these disclaimers been made? The fans? The copyright owners? The authors? According to Tushnet,

disclaimers were never intended to inform other fans; it was always fairly easy to tell an authorized Star Trek novel from an unauthorized fan creation. Rather, disclaimers were directed at an imagined audience, the copyright owners/original creators-disclaimers often included the request “Please don’t sue” (2007, 65).

The question then is not for who are the disclaimers, but why, if aware of the outlaw character of their practices, they ‘disregard’ intellectual property and proceed in producing illegal unauthorized derivative works for free.

2.3.2 Fan participations and the profit motive

There is a capital rule in fandom that goes “thou shalt not make money.” Already in 1992, Jenkins pointed out in Textual Poachers how fans’ resistance toward making a profit out of their fandom object is less a form of critical political-economic resistance to the accumulation of capital and more a product of their willingness to engage in “cultural production and distribution that reflect the mutuality of the fan community” (1992, 163). According to Sandvoss, “by making their object of fandom into extensions of themselves, fans give their consumption an inherently private and personal nature that removes their object of consumption from the logic of capitalist exchange” (2005, 116). On the same line, Atton writes that “alternative publications are at bottom more interested in the free flow of ideas than in profit” (2002, 12). Duncombe instead argues that

the oft-repeated statement that zines are produced for love, not money, is really a stand-in for another argument: about the type of work that is done for money versus the type of work that is done for love. For at the heart of the zine ethic is a definition of creation and work that is truly fulfilling: work in which you have complete control over what you are creating, how you are doing it, and whom you are doing it for, that is, authentic work (1997, 95).

In other words, it’s a critique of alienated labor (or modern slavery). Fan labours of love aren’t goods to be sold out. Not commodities but “artifacts shared with friends and potential friends” (Jenkins 1992, 163). However, as Sandvoss points out, “fans’ textual productivity […] even if pursued without commercial motives or professional aspirations, constitutes as a form of labour” (2011, 52). Moreover, as Tiziana Terranova suggests, on the Net the commodity may be subordinated “to the quality of labour behind it. In this sense the commodity does not disappear as
such; it rather becomes increasingly ephemeral, its duration becomes compressed, *it becomes more of a process than a finished product*” (2004, 90, emphasis mine). As she explains,

the Internet foregrounds the extraction of value out of continuous, updateable work and is extremely labour-intensive. It is not enough to produce a good web site; you need to update it continuously to maintain interest in it and fight off obsolescence. Furthermore, you need updateable equipment (the general intellect is always an assemblage of humans and their machines), which in its turn is propelled by the intense collective labour of programmers, designers and workers. It is as if the acceleration of production has increased to the point where commodities, literally turn into translucent objects. Commodities do not so much disappear as become more transparent, showing throughout their reliance on the labour which produces and sustains them. It is the labour of the designers and programmers that shows through a successful web site and it is the spectacle of that labour changing its product that keeps the users coming back. The commodity, then, is only as good as the labour that goes into it. As a consequence, the sustainability of the Internet as a medium *depends on massive amounts of labour* […]” (2004, 90).

Most of this labour power is voluntarily given away for free as in user-led online environments such as Wikipedia, Facebook or The Sims. In fandom money is invested without expecting returns; hosting and software, as well as labour, are provided and shared for free. There’s no profit (or there shouldn’t be). The currency of fandom economy is attention, acknowledgement, prestige, by peers from peers: *it’s base and goal is the mutual recognition and enrichment of people* based on “the possessing and exchange of knowledge” (Jenkins 2006, 125); that is to say, knowledge labour (see also Lévy 1995, 29; Anderson 2009, 189).

The refusal of getting paid for what they do is presumably, not only a way to evade the risk of being sued for making a profit out of ‘products’ created by means of copyright infringement, since the raw materials upon which their productive activities are based aren’t their own and are taken without permission, but also a way to maintain freedom from commercialization, autonomy, self-governance: they can be let alone to publish what they want and be free of professional constraints such as respecting intellectual property law (Tushnet 2007, 67). *Nota bene:* creative autonomy and peers acknowledgement are two values hold in high esteem by professionals too.

Notwithstanding these commonalities, publishers’ and fans’ interests aren’t quite the same. We still live in a capitalist society. And capitalists want to maintain their control over fan play and labour and own and control the value created by consumers’, users’, fans’ free labour in community spaces. Hence, they try to capitalize on fan participatory practices turning fans’ online playgrounds in factories. As Terranova writes:

> The volunteers for America Online, the NetSlaves, and the amateur Web designers are not working only because capital wants them to; they are acting out a desire for affective and cultural production that is
nonetheless real just because it is socially shaped. The cultural, technical, and creative work that supports the digital economy has been made possible by the development of capital beyond the early industrial and Fordist modes of production and therefore is particularly abundant in those areas where post-Fordism has been at work for a few decades. In the overdeveloped countries, the end of the factory has spelled out the obsolescence of the old working class, but it has also produced generations of workers who have been repeatedly addressed as active consumers of meaningful commodities. Free labor is the moment where this knowledgeable consumption of culture is translated into productive activities that are pleasurably embraced and at the same time often shamelessly exploited (2000, 36-37).

As Mosco says, “audiences are not passive, but neither are producers dumb” (1996, 260). Or else, as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer apocalyptically suggested, the rational (mass) culture industry would never allow its status quo to be challenged (1944). Indeed, corporations that target commercial popular culture niche markets expect their audiences to be productive and to participate in helping them selling their goods. Targeted as niche markets, fans “initially unexpected consumption practices, far from challenging the interest of […] producers, and the power relationships through which capital circulates, are rapidly recuperated within discourse and loyal consumption” (Hills 2002, 36). Fans’ nonprofit productivity and cultural labour, if valuable and monetizable, would probably be at some point incorporated and exploited by commercial parties (Sandvoss 2011, 53-54; Terranova, 2004, 80).

Certainly, there are corporate cultural signs that indicates the rise of a (depending on who you listen to) post-Industrial, post-Fordist, postmodern society (Harvey 1989). For instance, corporations have started to organize the production horizontally, let go of some control (or simply have more difficult in maintaining it), decentralize, and reach out to creative knowledge workers. Nevertheless, these trends coexist with, transform (Ritzer & Jurgeson 2010) or push to its extremes (Fuchs 2011), the ‘old-style’ industrial production system and its underpinning logic of capitalist accumulation, and don’t represent any breakpoint with it (Jameson 1984, 1991; Fuchs 2008, 118).

Professional consumers who “produce for their own consumption” (Toffler 1980, 273) work for free in their leisure time, improving, customizing and personalizing commercial goods (Bruns 2008, 11-12) within the traditional manufacturing system thereby generating surplus value which is exploitable by capitalists (Ritzer 1993; Ritzer & Jurgeson 2010; Fuchs 2011b, 298). Hence, networked prosumers productivity, skills and innovations, continue to be harnessed, crowdsourced, co-opted and exploited for competitive advantages (for example, see Von Hippel 1988, 2005; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2000; Porter 2000; Herz 2002; Howe 2006; Tapscott&Williams 2006; Fuchs 2011).

Moreover, fandom intensifies commodification (Jenkins 2006b, 62-63) and its own self-commodification. Fandom consumption and participation in the production of their commodified
object of fandom, for example by chatting and communicating with others on corporate nurtured web sites, help selling out themselves, their knowledge, immaterial labour (see Lazzarato 1996; Hardt & Negri 2004), to the exploitation of corporations (see also Terranova 2000). Customer relationship management; monitoring fan cultures’ practices for cost-free feedback on niche market trends and values; managing and supporting online communities by offering free hosting and software, are all examples of users’ free labour co-optation, of surveillance of fans’ expressions in online spaces to reduce demand unpredictability (see Burkart & McCourt 2006; McCourt & Burkart 2007; Sandvoss 2011, 53-54). In the Japanese book and magazine publishing business for instance, customer-based approach, market research and audience monitoring are considered essential since print-runts are determined by their market potential (JBPA 2010-2011).

One has to keep in mind that in the media the audience is the commodity. As Mosco points out, “commodification demands the use of measurement procedures to produce commodities and monitoring techniques to keep track of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption” (1996, 150). So, today the core business practice on Web 2.0 is not content but the mining of metadata. The most accessed Web 2.0 platforms out there, like Facebook, YouTube and Google, invite users to participate for free in the creation of content hosted on their free platforms so that they can measure and monitor who they are, where they come from, what they do with that content, when, for how long, and where they go, enriching their databases with user profile data which are then marketed to third parties and/or sold to advertisers. Eyeballs, creativity, content, communications, communities, and so forth, are turned into commodities. Since users collectively collaborate in this process (consciously or not), they are basically selling themselves out.

As Ivan Illich has pointed out using his concept of “convivial tools”, the tools offered by the industry will never be emancipatory:

Tools are intrinsic to social relationships. An individual relates himself in action to his society through the use of tools that he actively masters, or by which he is passively acted upon. To the degree that he masters his tools, he can invest the world with his meaning; to the degree that he is mastered by his tools, the shape of the tool determines his own self-image. Convivial tools are those which give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his or her vision. Industrial tools deny this possibility to those who use them and they allow their designers to determine the meaning and expectations of others. Most tools today cannot be used in a convivial fashion (Illich 1973, 20, emphasis mine).

All these brazen corporate endeavors define, own and control fans’ experiences and knowledge labour, threatening their freedom, privacy and property as they give away their valuable profiles data and creations for free in exchange of some use value. As O’Reilly said, people don’t think
“that they are donating to YouTube. They’re actually thinking, ‘Wow! I’m getting a free service from YouTube.’” (Lessig 2008, 224). Awkwardly, while amateurs’ remix videos are considered illegal by law, the same law “grants YouTube an immunity for indirectly profiting from” those works (Lessig 2008, 256).

What is left of the social contract between the consumers and the producers when the firsts seems to do all the ‘work’ while the few constituting the power elite own and control all the surplus value created by that ‘playing’? In other words, does it still make sense to speak of a moral economy that regulate the expectations between the producers and the consumers (Jenkins 1992b; Jenkins 2006; Joshua & Jenkins 2009) when the latter steal intellectual property to create content while the former retain all the revenues generated by that content?

It is useful to note that, as Williams wrote elsewhere, “dominant groups do not always (indeed historically do not often) command the whole signifying system of a people; typically they are dominant within rather than over and above it” (1981, 218). From Gramsci’s point of view, one can exercise hegemony to the degree that the dominator’s interest makes the interests of the dominated (Martin-Barbero 1993, 74, 99, 231). Michel Bauwens remarks in The social web and its social contracts: Some notes on social antagonism in netarchical capitalism that

the fact that user communities, both in a sharing or commons context, seem to have no beef with their proprietary partners, is not that they are alienated, but on the contrary, that they have a correct interpretation of their vital interests in the preservation of sharing and the commons as a fundamental social advances with clear immediate personal and collective benefits [...] The political stress on exploitation is counterproductive because it requires to convince the vast majority of happy sharers and peer producers, that their joy in sharing is misplaced and alienated; it is in fact often a call to introduce monetary and capitalist practices (revenue sharing) in the sharing and peer production process (no year, no page).

Indeed, the process of commodification seems to be more interesting to investigate than the commodity per se (Terranova 2004, 90; Mosco 1996, 150-153). In fan cultures, this process is subtle. It takes place during leisure time. It looks like play. It’s not work. Isn’t it? Of course, “free affective and cultural labour” and employed, waged labour are different (Terranova 2004, 88). Nevertheless, if fan free labour is not work, it is clearly “not not work” as well. As Julian Kücklich (2005) conceives it, it might be playbour. As far as I understood, since Kücklich doesn’t provide a clear definition, playbour is Terranova’s free affective labour masked as play: not-for-profit, voluntary, ordered, “productive leisure” that creates social capital and is commodified by the industry. Labour easily perceived as fun. Labour which is not considered a part of ‘real life’. Labour which is done off-the-clock and which has its own rules. Precarious labour. Kücklich’s point of
departure is modders’ role within the digital game industry. Modders freely brand the original product and innovate it, extend its shelf-life, build customer loyalty, and provide the industry with a talent pool. All this is done for fun in their leisure time. Kücklich use the term “playbour” to indicate “the exploitative relationship between modders and the games industry” which benefits from this ideological conception of work as participatory play (ibid., no page). Why do modders accept this exploitative relationship, this precarious form of labour? To explain this, Kücklich draws a connection between the Deleuzian society of control in which individuals self-discipline themselves, and the act of surrendering to the rules of a game in order to have fun. According to Huizinga, the author of *Homo Ludens* (1949/2000) besides being fun, play can be sum up as follows:

> a free activity standing quite consciously outside of “ordinary life as being “not serious”, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means” (p. 13).

In brief, following Kücklich’s reasoning, modders’ conception of labour as play, something which by (Huizinga’s) definition is incompatible with work time and isn’t supposed to be productive, prevents them to organize and claim their share of revenues. Moreover, he also points out that “The modding community is divided in respect to whether collaborating with the games industry constitutes a form of “selling out” and, as a result, they lack the necessary political organization to improve their status” (2005, no page). Writing about modders as a dispersed multitude, Kücklich notes that their potential for political mobilization is also undermined by the fact that “it seems as if modders are scarcely aware of the position of power” their social capital “puts them into” (ibid.). Additionally, “different motivations and ideological positions with the modding community further add to their inability to realise their potential as political actors” (ibid.). Silverstone draws on Huizinga’s argument that play want the suspension of reality to describe how we play “with and around” media (1999, 63). He argues that folk culture has always been playful:

> It has taken the serious and often oppressive regulation of the conduct of everyday life, the regulation by state, religion and community, and turned it on its head: carnival, bacchanalia, charivari. The lords of misrule held sway over the cracks in the dominant, offering the oppressed and the routinized the momentary licence of public play and display. At such times and in such spaces, both physically and symbolically expressed and marked by thresholds within experience, individuals and groups could suspend the regularities of the daily, take pleasure and, in some transcendent way, play with the categories and concepts of the world over which they otherwise had no influence (1999, 62).
Since these playful spaces are extremely valuable, the scary bit is then, how play is more and more commodified by the industry, or free affective labour sold to the masses as play. Although Kücklich doesn’t really provide a clear definition of playbour, explain why he doesn’t discuss leisure, or investigate the history of how play became intertwined with work, or how play came to be commonly understood as incompatible with work, I think his contribution to the literature lies in highlighting how fan free affective labour, time and spaces may be successfully commodified by the capitalistic industry under the ideology of play; especially on the parameters of Web 2.0 and participatory culture.

Along the same line, Joice Goggin examines the “slippery categories of play and work” (2011, 366) and their historical construction and deconstruction as antithetical looking at Kant’s and Schiller’s notions and analyzing examples from modding, grinding and farming. Drawing on the respective works on play and immaterial labour by Steven Connor (2005) and Maurizio Lazzarato (1996), she points out that there’s the fear that play may be co-opted as work in context such as management, the leisure industries and fan cultures. Lazzarato, for instance, “has argued that post-Fordist production processes depend on immaterial labour and the ‘extraordinary extent to which’ forms of playfulness such as ‘creativity, communication, emotion, cooperation, and values’ are currently being ‘put to work’” (Lazzarato, 1996, 146 quoted in Goggin 2011, 361). For Goggin, and I agree with her, the extent to which we experience boredom, play and work depends on context (the home, as sweatshop, a prison), attitude (playing gratuitously no matter how ‘addicted’ one might be to the game vs. being paid to play for a 14 hour shift) and agency (can the ‘player’ turn off the computer and walk away? Is the player/worker earning a small wage? Is the ‘player’ a prisoner?) (2011, 366).

What does this mean? Maybe that, as Silverstone pointed out, although we know about boundaries and differences, we know as well “that the boundaries separate as well as connect: they are barriers as well as bridges” and, as he offered, “we move across them […] with increasing ease, as a matter of course” (1999, 71). This leads me back to where I started: Web 2.0, media convergence, participatory culture and the blurring of established categories of technology, culture and industry. The increased free and participatory aspect of media culture doesn’t only require a new perspective on media role in and implications for our lived experience, but it is also making old key categories with which we use to define life obsolete (Deuze 2009, 467). As Zygmunt Bauman has suggested, we live in a liquid life, in which “categories of existence established and enabled by early, first, or solid modernity are disintegrating, overlapping, and remixing” (Deuze 2007, 43 paraphrasing Bauman 2005). In the context of convergence culture (Jenkins 2006b), where “the majority of people make media when they use media” (Deuze 2009, 476), some of them at professional levels,
the never clear-cut boundaries between production and consumption processes, among work, life and play, pros and amateurs shift. The convergence of media blurs

- the lines between economics (work) and culture (meaning);
- between production and consumption;
- between the competition and cooperation (‘coopetition’) implied in creativity, commerce, content and connectivity;
- between making media and using media; and between active or passive spectatorship of mediated culture (Deuze 2009, 475-476; see also Deuze 2007, 74-80).

However, as we have seen, not anyone become a productive creative user just because of media convergence and participatory culture. Moreover, the free labour of the ones who do, even when based on illegal acts such as copyright infringement, often ends up being exploited by the capitalistic media production industrial system (for example, see Terranova 2000, 35). How can we thus describe the ‘new’ communities of consumers-producers who create value in online environments, often illegally and for free? Who are they? Producers? Prosumers? ProAms? Commons-based peer producers? Playbourers?

### 2.4 From consumers and users to produsers

In the networked information economy or informational society, the outcomes of the breakdown of the boundaries between producers and consumers, work and play, need to be addressed without applying “analytical frameworks established during the industrial age which by now are increasingly outdated” but with “new user-led information-age paradigms” (Bruns 2007). As 19th century copyright laws and business models are not right for the new conditions afforded by the technosocial system of the 21st century (Lessig 2004; Benkler 2006, 122; Anderson 2007), the consumer-led creative industries “don’t present themselves for analysis in a way that fits with accepted understandings of manufacturing industry” (Hartley 2008, 23). As Terranova (2004, 75) and Mosco (1996, 26) argue, the fixed distinction among production, distribution and consumption can (and ought to) be questioned, for

> The primary difficulty with this definition is that it assumes we can recognize and distinguish among producers, distributors, and consumers with relative ease. But this is not always so and particularly not in some of the more interesting cases (Mosco 1996, 26).

Axel Bruns suggests that “to describe the creative, collaborative, and ad hoc engagement with content for which user-led spaces supported by social software and Web 2.0 such as the Wikipedia act as examples, the term ‘production’ is no longer accurate” (2008, 1):

> In the context of online user-led content creation environments ranging from open source through to massively multiplayer online roleplaying games (MMPORGs), the very idea of content production may
need to be challenged: the description of a new hybrid form of simultaneous production and usage, or *produsage*, may provide a more workable model (Bruns 2007, no page).

However, as Bruns writes, produsage is absolutely not the only way to frame online environments: “it is perfectly possible to remain simply a user of Wikipedia or a content producer within Flickr” (2007b, no page). Needless to say, Bruns draws on Toffler’s prosumers, Benkler’s commons-based peer production, Bauwens’ peer-to-peer production, Leadbeater & Miller’s Pro-Ams, Rushkoff’s open source democracy, and Jenkins’ participatory culture; but he proposes to go “beyond production”, to call these ‘not not producers’, these participants in user-led content creation, with a combination of the terms users and producers - *produsers* - since these people are both users *as well as* producers. In addition, he suggests using the concept of *produsage* to describe their modes of simultaneous usage and production. Produsage, according to Bruns, is “the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement” (2006, 2; 2008, 21). The term

highlights that within the communities which engage in the collaborative creation and extension of information and knowledge […] the role of ‘consumer’ and even that of ‘end user’ have long disappeared, and the distinctions between producers and users of content have faded into comparative insignificance. In many of the spaces we encounter here, users are always already necessarily also producers of the shared knowledge base, regardless of whether they are aware of this role-they have become a new, hybrid, *produser* (Bruns 2008, 2).

The produser necessary is at the same time a user of another’s content and a producer. She is producing whilst using. Bruns illustrates this as shown in figure1 below (2008, 21):

![Figure 1: The Produser](image)

Bruns points out that the forms that produsage can assume might vary according to where, online, it takes place, what the object of production is, and the type of community working on it. For instance,

These range from widely distributed, loose and *ad hoc* networks of participants (such as the blogosphere) to more centralized sites of collaborative work (such as the *Wikipedia*); while some such environments exist as virtually ungoverned spaces (like *Indymedia*), some have developed hierarchical or at least
heterarchical structures (as have many open source software development projects), and others both exhibit emergent self-organising tendencies as well as operate under some degree of corporate governance (as is the case for example in multiplayer online games) (2007, 1).

In particular, the model of produsage, as Bruns explains in an interview with Henry Jenkins (2008b) and at length in his book *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage* (2008), is defined by the networked technosocial environment which affords:

1. “Probabilistic, not directed problem-solving”: since more people can participate in the production and are able to see the whole, they can self-select themselves and contribute to solve problems and to develop content (ibid., 19).
2. “Equipotentiality, not hierarchy”: by default, everyone has identical opportunities to contribute. The quality of the contributions then determinate the status of the contributors within the community (ibid.).
3. “Granular, not composite tasks”: the less effort a task requires, the easier it is to contribute for individuals, small teams or random participants (ibid., 20).
4. “Shared, not owned content”: The content is openly shared in an information commons (ibid.).

On these preconditions of probabilistic problem-solving, equipotential contributions, granular tasks and shared content, are built the following four key principles of produsage:

1. “Open participation, communal evaluation”: participation is open to everyone, and since everybody is able to see the whole, content contributions are also evaluated communally (Bruns 2008, 24-25).
2. “Fluid heterarchy, ad hoc meritocracy”: produsage is not anti-hierarchical, nor anarchic. There are leaders but they are in constant flux since the quality of their contributions and their merits within the community build their status (ibid., 25-26).
3. “Unfinished artefacts, continuing process”: the produsage process is continuous and doesn’t produce products but unfinished cultural artefacts (ibid., 27-28).
4. “Common property, individual rewards”: the content created within produsage processes is held communally and individuals are rewarded by the merits they gain for being able to contribute to the creation of the information commons (ibid., 28-30).

These principles apply to various domains of produsage, for example, knowledge management, citizen journalism, open source software, and MMORPGs (Bruns 2006, 3; 2008, 23-30). The produsage ‘value chain’ looks nothing like the traditional one (see fig. 2 below, from Bruns 2007):
As it is illustrated in Bruns’ produsage model, traditional producers and products have still a say in produsage environments, for instance when the latter are arranged by the companies or when produsers extend commercial IP inputs. Cultures of produsage don’t exist in a vacuum but collide with the existing commercial approaches. There’s a lot of commercial potential in produsage environments. As Bruns notes,

...some traditional production organizations have refashioned themselves to participate in the produsage process: they have shifted from a focus of their commercial activity on production to new models which work with the artifacts emerging from the produsage community and provide ancillary commercial services surrounding them, or which provide services into the community of produsers itself (2007).

Bruns divides these commercial approaches as presented below:

- “feeding the hive”: contributing to the produsage community (2008, 31);
- “helping the hive”: helping the produsage community by providing ad-hoc services (ibid., 31-32);
- “harboring the hive”: hosting the produsage community (ibid., 32);
- “harnessing the hive”: using the artefacts of the produsage community (ibid.);
- “harvesting the hive”: adding services to the artefacts prodused by the community (ibid., 32-33);
- “hijacking the hive”: locking in and exploiting the produsage communities (ibid., 33).
Bruns is not blind to the issues raised by produsage in respect, for instance, to legal ownership and commercial control, but questions produsage impact on and implications for change in economy, IP, culture (education) and politics (citizenship); in short, for society (2006, 4-9; 2007).

The first issue regards monetization. How can these models of produsage be monetized and exploited commercially when the prodused artefacts are illegal and are shared for free? Moreover, should produsers get paid? Should they be legally protected? And how? The second issue regards the sustainability/longevity of the structures of the community. Much of the productive activity in produsage environments is driven by enthusiasts who contribute according to their interests and needs. Therefore, one could wonder what happens when their enthusiasm vanishes (Bruns 2008, 337). Produsage projects can be short of resources, so which are the dynamics that maintain the current volunteers interested into the produsage project and successfully turn consumers and users into produsers? The third issue regards the costs related to the widespread culture of disregarding legal ownership. The fourth issue regards liability: Who should be held responsible for the artefacts prodused? Finally there’s the issue of incompleteness of the prodused artefacts and all related matters of safety, quality, and reliability (Bruns 2006b).

Produsage has also educational and political implications. It can potentially expand vernacular creativity (Burgess 2005), in the sense that it can foster produsers capacities “to be creative, collaborative, critical, combinatory, and communicative” (Bruns 2008, 341). This implies the need “to publicize the best practices of these online communities, to expand access and participation to groups that are otherwise being left behind, and to promote forms of media literacy education that help all children to develop the skills needed to become full participants in their culture” (Jenkins 2006b, 248). As Hartley writes, “The propagation of creative wisdom” should create a ““creative citizen’ who is source as well as destination, producer as well as consumer, writer as well as reader, teacher as well as learner” (2007, 143). In order to produse democracy, to turn participatory culture into participatory politics, produsers ought to be educated to autonomously identify political and economic problems, explore alternatives, share interests and affections with others, build communities, debate, and deliberate. There’s a democratic potential in there which could be harnessed:

Where at present many developed democratic nations still operate on a late-industrial political model, dividing participants into politicians and pundits as producers of democracy, journalists, media minders and spin doctors as distributors of democracy, and ‘average’ citizens as consumers of or audiences for democracy, scarcely interested to use their ‘remote control’ by voting in national elections every few years, a shift towards produsage may revive democratic processes by leveling the roles and turning citizens into active produsers of democracy once again (Bruns 2007; see also Bruns 2007b).
It is quite obvious that produsage can benefit cultural life, as well as politics and economy. How produsage communities should be dealt with, and approached, however, is a question that is decided by participants’ practices and understandings. I turn now to illustrate how I researched these practices and understandings.

3. Methodology

3.1 Choice of method: qualitative interviews

This MA thesis is built upon qualitative work which was performed in order to analyze the social phenomenon of scanlation. Since the research aimed at understanding the patterns of this particular phenomenon from the perspectives of the people who participate in it, qualitative methods have been deemed the most relevant for obtaining rich and detailed information about their opinions and experiences. Although participant observation could seem a valuable method for collecting evidence on the field, it wasn’t feasible in this case for the settings of scanlation are everywhere online in threads and (usually) locked forums that are inaccessible to non-staff members and therefore, off-limits. Focus groups were excluded because they inhibit single individuals and aren’t optimal for collecting information about sensitive topics such as copyright infringement. Besides presenting important ethical problems (see Trost 2005, 24-27), they would also have been impossible to carry out in the frames of the thesis. For all these reasons, qualitative interviews have been chosen as the proper research method to qualitatively explore the practices and understandings of scanlators.

3.2 Sampling: contacting the interviewees

Nine women and eleven men, from 17 to 38 years, were interviewed between April and July 2012. The majority were born during the 80s, are educated and live in Italy. The number of the interviews to conduct - 15 - was suggested by the supervisor. In the end, 20 persons were interviewed. (One interview resulted to be useless).

Selection of the interviewees was done in the following way. First of all, since my mother tongue is Italian, I decided to conduct the interviews with Italian-speakers, therefore excluding potential interviewees speaking other languages. Then, I looked for any existing list of Italian scanlation groups, but since it wasn’t possible to find a single complete and trustworthy list or directory of Italian scanlation teams, this strategy was soon abandoned. To identify and recruit respondents thus, I decided to ‘use’ personal connections to get in. From this point onwards I thus combined snowball and purposive sampling techniques. My contacts addressed me to some of the
most popular scanlation teams in Italy and to potential informants who would have agreed to participate in the interviews. However, I was first contacted via email by a scanlator who was first informed by one of my acquaintances.

The informants have been thus referred to me by way of snowball sampling, and then strategically selected according to gender, age, years of experience, and position covered within the group (i.e., founder, admin, etc.) in order to have some variety in the material. In praxis, I was interested in having an equal amount of: 1) women and men, and variations in age – scanlators born in the 70s; 80s; and 90s; 2) scanlators active since 2002-2003 and scanlators active since 2008-2009; 3) founders, admins, raw providers, editors, translators, cleaner, typesetters, and quality checkers. However, by no means I tried to get a statistically representative sample. According to Trost, in the case of qualitative studies it is not interesting nor necessary to have a statistical representative sample. On the contrary, he writes, a representative sample can bring us too many ‘normal’ people, whereas in general, the qualitative researcher is interested in the heterogeneity within the homogeneity (2005, 117).

Although I was able to find all interviewees within three months, it wasn’t easy to find people willing to be interviewed, even when the informants where first contacted by their friends, and then approached by me through a personal message in which I presented myself and explained in very broad terms what the MA thesis was about, what I expected from them, how much time it would have taken; and in which I also guaranteed their anonymity and confidentiality, and that no harm to the community was intended. A few didn’t answer at all. Some replied that they did not trust me, weren’t interested, or they didn’t have time. Many avoided the interview by telling me to ask someone else because they personally didn’t know anything about the topic. Others accepted but then never showed up for the actual interview. The ones that replied positively showed puzzlement and curiosity toward the choice of topic for the thesis, and circulated my personal message among their acquaintances.

3.3 Materials collection

Since all the informants were located out of my physical reach, data gathering was done through computer mediated communication (CMC) interviews with the help of a flexible interview guide which was designed taking in account the theoretical framework and featured the themes I was interested in covering: practices, motives, experience, organizational processes, community structures, beliefs (see appendix).

I decided to let the informants choose the date and time for the interview which suited them the most. In retrospect, this is a thing I wouldn’t repeat since some of the informants kept
postponing both. Most of the interviews were conducted in the late evening. Since the informants are used to work on scans during the night, the late hour didn’t pose them any problem; but it was a little inconvenient and exhausting for me.

There was no necessity to think too much about the setting of the interviews, since they were conducted through CMC. The interviewees chose the place which satisfied them the most (and after 22:00 there’s actually not so much choice). Needless to say, interviewing people from their home presents both advantages and disadvantages. On the one side, they were surely more at ease and confident since they were in their space. On the other side, maybe they felt too much comfortable. For example, some of the interviewees, especially the ones interviewed through Internet Relay Chat and Instant Messaging, felt the compelling need to leave their keyboards for some time to go to grab a cup of tea, some ice cream, or to go to the toilet or even dinner (!). Also, from time to time, the scanlator who was interviewed through video call appeared to be distracted by all the paraphernalia laying in the room.

I tried as far as possible to conduct video call interviews through Skype, but only one informant accepted to be video called. (I interviewed then from the sofa in my living room, in jeans and T-shirt.) The others accepted to be interviewed but via the semi-anonymous chats of Skype, MSN, Gmail or the IRC channel of the group (which required the downloading and installing of apposite software). A scanlator accepted to be interviewed by email. As Lofland writes, “there is no adequate substitute for face-to-face association in comprehending other people” (1971, 3). However, in the practical (time, space, etc.) frame of the thesis and confronted with the reticence of the respondents to participate in face-to-face interviews, it wasn’t possible to avoid conducting chat interviews. As already stated thus, interviews were conducted through a synchronous video call, instant messaging, and an asynchronous email. This was the more logical thing to do given the circumstances, also because scanlators communication is CMC. These are people who live in media, who like and daily use Usenet newsgroups, email, and chats to communicate.

Of course, using CMC to conduct qualitative interviews has its pro and contra (for example, see Mann & Stewart 2000, 17-38). The advantages are self-evident. First, I cut costs and saved time. Secondly, using CMC I was able to access informants who live in different geographical areas. Thirdly, the anonymity granted by chats allowed me to access informants who were reluctant to talk about their illegal doings via face-to-face interaction. Last but not least, transcripts were immediate and exacts- with all typos; I just had to copy and paste the interview texts in a file.

The contra of using CMC are a bit less obvious. Besides technical problems such as slow Internet connection, a computer that felt the need to reboot in the mid of an interview, and a router
that burned in the mid of another; the biggest hindrances I faced during the interviews performed without video were due to the lack of eye-contact with the informants.

First, all non verbal cues were lost. However, on the other side, also potentially influencing gestures such as nodding by the interviewer and other “ascriptive categories” such as age, gender, ethnicity (for example, see Lofland et al. 2006, 23; Mann & Stewart 2000, 126) were if not cut out, at least undermined. Of course, my informants knew I was a university student, a woman, and because of the choice of topic, they correctly presumed I was a fan of manga. This last characteristic, being a fan too and knowing about scanlation (but not knowing it), - being an insider - enabled me to establish a bond with the informants with relative easiness. During all interviews I tried to be neutral, but not too much since 1) I tried to put the interviewees at ease; 2) I believe that poker faces can be equally disturbing; 3) by showing some knowledge of the manga scene I was able to gain their trust.

Second, silence became even more unintelligible and it was extremely difficult to avoid interrupting the train of thoughts of the interviewees. Is the interviewee silent because he finished to express himself? Is he not typing because he is thinking to add something else? Is he silent because he left the computer?

Third, sarcasm and irony became harder to detect, even with the help of what Mann and Stewart call “electronic paralanguage”, that is to say, “repetitions, abbreviations and verbal descriptions of feelings and sounds which help to convey the mood of the communication and make social and emotional connections” (2000, 134-136); for example, smileys, Japanese emoticons, and so forth.

In general, I found the chats interviews to be really bothersome for the need to type down the questions and to wait for the answers to be typed down. Not to mention that, this way, the interviews passed the hour and became exhausting. One can consider, however, the fact that scanlators are used to communicate among themselves using IRC and IM and that instant communication is better than asynchronous methods such as e-mail interviews, which are more formal and also require a careful standardization of the questions. I followed up the email interview with more questions.

Also, it must be said that written language is obviously different from the spoken one and thus abbreviations, emoticons and diverse formulations came into the picture. I felt compelled to use smileys sometimes after my questions for enhancing the connection, or when the interviewee was typing, just to show that I was there, listening.

The questions were adjusted from interview to interview according to the information gathered from time to time (and to the specific role and longevity of the respondents in their
groups). Also the way the interviewees answered the questions influenced the way I decided to proceed with the interview at hand by adapting the questions, the wording or the order. For example, some of the interviewees required me to reformulate a question while other didn’t. In addition, when the interviewee wasn’t verbal enough, I stick closely to the interview guide and asked for a lot of probes, whereas in the other case I let the interviewee talk more or less freely. The interview guide was therefore used as “a list of things to be sure to ask about when talking to the person interviewed” (Lofland 1971, 84), and not followed verbatim.

To begin with, I presented myself and reminded the interviewees about the purpose of the MA thesis, what was expected from them and how much time it would have taken while also guaranteeing once again anonymity and confidentiality. Afterward, the respondents were first asked to introduce themselves, how did they start to scanlate and what do they do in their team. More focused questions on their day-to-day activities followed. For instance, I asked the interviewee to tell me if tonight she was scanlating, and if so, to tell me what she has been doing, from when she started till the end. Then, questions aimed at getting an understanding of their organizations and power structures were asked. Questions about their attitudes toward copyright infringement and profit motives followed. I ended the interviews with questions related to scanlating experiences, conditions for continuity and expectations for the future.

‘Sensitive’ topics were asked toward the end of the interview when they hadn’t been already spontaneously mentioned by the interviewees. I paid attention to avoid abstract questions and ask instead concrete things which were reasonable for the respondents to answer. For example, questions about their activities, their everyday life, questions about behaviours, what do they do, and not questions about feelings. According to Trost is possible to know about feelings and experiences by asking concrete questions about actions, behaviours and activities (2005, 35). I tried as much as possible to refer the questions to their group, for example “What’s the politics of your team regarding licensed series?”; and to avoid to ask why (“Why do you infringe copyrights?”) and put the respondents on the defensive, and to use instead “Please, tell me more” when for example they introduced the topic by themselves or “What made you …”, or “When was the first time that …”, and other similar formulations when they did not (which happened quite rarely although I thought it would have been quite a sensitive issue to talk about for the interviewees) (cf. Trost 2005, 83-84). In order to introduce the copyright infringement issue for instance, I said “Some groups continue to scanlate even if the series get licensed, other don’t. What do you do?” I let the interviewees speak as freely as possible, bringing them back to track and asking a lot of examples to probe their answers. Many of the interviews extended beyond the hour. I usually concluded an interview by inviting the interviewee to add anything he or she might have been willing to add.
Frequently the interviewees inquired further about my background and my interest in the area under study. In three cases they asked a copy of the thesis and I committed the mistake of accepting their requests without thinking about possible delays in writing.

The author had at her disposal the transcripts of the IRC, IM, and email interviews, and the recording of the video call interview. The transcripts and the recording were organized in different files. Each interview was stored in chronological order with the following accompanying information (which was filled in after conducting all the interviews):

- Nickname of the interviewee
- Sex
- Age
- Education/Occupation
- Role(s) covered
- Years of experience as scanlator
- Name of the team(s) and web address(es)
- Most popular projects and favourite genres of the team(s)
- Media used for the interview
- Date of the interview
- Start and ending time of the interview
- How the interviewee was contacted
- Others

3.4 Materials analysis and interpretation

As Trost puts it, data collection, analysis and interpretation aren’t necessarily sequential (2005, 125). While one collects and organizes the qualitative material one is already analyzing and interpreting it. The stories told by the scanlators were analyzed by re-reading them with highlighters in the hand, and re-listening to them taking notes of the most interesting information disclosed. I read and listened to all of the interviews once after each of them was conducted (usually one-three days after); first just listening and reading, and then highlighting and taking notes of things that seemed important. This was really useful for it enabled me to formulate new and better questions and probes, and to realize errors committed not to be repeated in the next interview.

After the first eight interviews I had already at disposal a seemingly unmanageable pile of post-its with the first attempts to identify recurring themes, existing patterns, and emergent ideas for analysis. When completing all interviews, I went through the interviews and the post-its once again looking for a proper coding system for pulling all together in a way that seemed to made sense in relation to the theoretical framework: What’s the theme? What’s the pattern? Struggling for finding
a logical structure and order of presentation, the material was then finally properly categorized when I started the writing process.

The qualitative materials were interpreted with the help of the theoretical framework presented above. Scanlation is understood as a particular kind of produsage, and scanlators as produsers, thus trying to adapt and develop Bruns’ produsage model to the reality of the specific case under study. For this reason, the empirical data are categorized following as far as possible the overall structure provided by the four key principles of Bruns’ produsage model but they are balanced with the descriptions of the interviewees. I decided not to use quotes since the interviews were conducted in Italian and I am not a professional translator.

3.5 Trustworthiness

As Trost writes, reliability and validity concepts originate from quantitative studies. Consequently, to try to measure reliability and validity in a quantitative way by qualitative studies is somehow ridiculous. Material collection, analysis and interpretation though, must be obviously conducted in a credible way even when one uses qualitative methodology (2005, 113). The point of this study was to contribute to develop a better understanding of fan participatory practices online by exploring and explaining the phenomenon of scanlation through the meanings which scanlators ascribe to their practices. For example, I was interested in knowing what infringing copyright means for my interviewees and not what it means for the industry. If the data are accurate, i.e., if what they told me was what they really do and think, then the study is valid. Of course, they could have been lying, but I don’t really think they did. They would have wasted their time. Regarding reliability, as “the Greek philosopher Heraclitus once observed … you can never step into the same river twice. Such is the case with field research, as the scenes or settings studied seldom remain static” (Lofland et al. 2006, 54). Interviews, as it is obvious from the account provided above, weren’t standardized. Questions formulation for instance, as well as the order in which they were asked, differed. The time and place of the online interviews also were different. In addition, no effort was made to gather a statistical representative sample.

Obviously, no methods is 100% valid and reliable, but a research could be trustworthy if its pitfalls and problems are acknowledged and if the researcher explains how problems have been dealt with. A part from what has already been written until here, it might be added that I have never been trained as an interviewer, although I have conducted some journalistic interviews which however cannot be compared with qualitative interviewing for social research.

There is a last remark I want to make before proceeding to illustrate my results. I am both a fan and a researcher of the studied subject. I have been reading manga and scanlations for years.
The methodological and ethical issues at hand here are self-evident. However, as Hills has noticed, “we should perhaps really be asking not “what does it mean when an academic studying fans is also a fan?” but rather “what does it mean when an academic studying the media audience is also part of a media audience?” (Hills 2007, 34); and thus, let go “of an infantile fantasy of omnipotence in which scholars are imagined as the bearers of pure, anti-ideological thought” (ibid., 46-47).

4. Results

4.1 The emergence of scanlation

Although some untranslated manga were imported for the U.S. market already in the early seventies, interest in Japanese comics was prompted by anime (or “Japanimation”, see Eng 2012b, 159) such as Tezuka’s Astro Boy (1963). Anime and manga fandom sparked with the help of the VCRs (Schodt 1983, 155; 1996, 312). “By 1980, the only real “story manga” available in English and distributed in the United States was Barefoot Gen” (Schodt 1996, 309), a tale of the horrors of Hiroshima bombing.

Due to the inexistence of a legal industrial manga publishing and distribution system, impatient fans started to translate and share manga on their own, often offering content which no publisher would have ever taken the risk of publishing. As there were no manga commercially available in English until the 80s (Schodt 1996, 309) fans had Japanese speaking friends to translate imported manga from Japan (Schodt 1983, 156).

Thus, relying on their strong community and pre-existent fandom networks, fans in North America (and then the ones in Europe) started to fix their manga themselves, for example, through the Amateur Press Association, which operated through postal mail, scripts which were supposed to be read alongside the original text started circulating. Fans unofficial versions thus preceded the official translations of the industry (cf. Larkin 2004).

Subsidiaries of Japanese publishing houses such as Shogakukan’s and Shueisha’s Viz were established in the second half of the 80s when Japanese manga began to be marketed outside of Japan (Ono 2004, 23). By 1987 came the first serious commercial translations of manga (Thompson 2007, xii). However, the failures of the commercial manga publishing system- time lags between the Japanese and translated releases caused by the troublesome rights handling system (Brienza 2009); dropped publications (Schodt 1996, 324-325); Americanized translations, and politic and economic censorship (Thompson 2007, 479); let the fans unsatisfied and frustrated.

During the early nineties, using cheaper home printing, scanning sets, and the Internet, fans self-organized to scan, translate and publish Japanese manga magazines and books:
Many popular titles in the nineties were being translated and distributed by DIY scanlation groups constituted of manga fans. These groups were doing their own translations and scans and trading them over IRC, then later on the web. They didn’t flop the pages because it was easier not to, and reading it in the original format was a badge of honor. “Ak of Troy” is the founder of the scanlation site called Toriyama’s world: “I had no skills with image editing or web design... I just used MS Paint and a Geocities site. I put up about 10 chapters of Kinnikuman (Ultimated Muscle) and got a few hits and some nice emails. When I started doing current series like Naruto and Hikaru No Go, the site exploded!” In five years, the front page of Toriyama’s word.com has received 20 million hits (Thompson 2007).

Instead of merely posting a script, the fans started to substitute the original Japanese text in the balloons with the translated one using graphic painting/editing programs, for example, MS Paint. For simplicity, they avoided translating SFX (i.e., onomatopoeias or sounds effects) and flopping the pages. Thus, the artwork remained quite loyal to the original artwork. Fanscans – as scanlations were called at that time – consisted of primarily low quality reproductions of unlicensed manga. Fans didn’t want to compete with the emerging industry and self-policing themselves: when a fanscanned manga was eventually licensed, the translation was dropped and the distribution ceased. Fanscans were shared among fans mainly in public Usenet newsgroups (e.g., rec.arts.manga), underground FTP sites, and through Internet Relay Chat channels. Some set up bots on IRC channels which functioned as manga archives, for example, the Lurker Network at #lurk on IRCHighway.

In the meantime, peer networks of pioneering fans engaged in shadow cultural economies promoting and educating newcomers to the ‘authentic’ manga and anime culture through fanzines, conventions, scans, clubs, etc., distributed out of legitimated networks and media channels, consolidated. Growing up, many of these fans started to occupy professional positions within the young manga publishing industry (Vanhee 2006).

According to InsideScanlation⁴, at some point, fanscans became known as scan(s)lations, from the contraction of the words scans and translation, and began to indicate the digital scans of original printed comics, scanned, reproduced, translated, published and distributed by fans for fans. After being circulated via email, and in Usenet newsgroup and FTP servers for years, scanlations, with the help of new free web hosting services such as GeoCities and Angelfire, or free forum communities such as ForumFree, started to be distributed on scanlators’ own webpages (sometimes with pop-up ads) and/or forums, as direct download files or as a set of images readable through online readers. Circulation through IRC channels was (and still is) popular. As more projects came alive, scanlation sites started to be linked together in webrings and categorized in directories like for example, the Noated anime and manga community. Databases listing hundreds and hundreds of

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⁴ See http://www.insidescanlation.com/, a fan-made website about scanlation.
scanlators’ websites, IRC channels and projects which also functioned (and functions) as search engine, news source, and forums, have been created (e.g., Manga Jouhou, Baka Updates Manga, and DailyManga).

Nowadays scanlations are downloaded from Japanese p2p networks such as WinMX and Winny. MediaFire, RapidShare, and the now defunct MegaUpload are examples of download providers which were and are used by scanlation teams to store and distribute manga scans. Scanlations are also shared through file-sharing p2p protocols, archived on aggregator websites (as the industry calls them) or online readers (as the users call them) such as MangaFox, MangaDownload, MangaTraders, MangaToshokan, MangaHelpers, MangaShare, MangaReader, etc., and sold on eBay. OneManga was, until July 2010 (when it shut down due to legal threats) the largest and most active of these sites, distributing the work of thousands of scanlation groups for free downloading and online reading. The site was rated no. 300 in the U.S. in terms of number of visitors; while in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore it was in the top 20 sites (Douglass et al. 2011, 201).

The groups which started the scanlation phenomenon, for example, Mangascans- the first to complete a series; MangaProject; SnoopyCool; Band of the Hawks- the first to use BitTorrent for distributing their work; Mangascreener- the firsts to scanlate *Naruto* and make titles available in HTML, readable in a browser as a slideshow; Toriyama’s World- which began scanlating in 2001 and became soon a million hits sit, have mostly abandoned scanlation.

However, with the help of the new technologies (e.g., increased bandwidth, better graphic editing software, p2p file sharing protocols), more and different people engaged themselves in the production, reproduction and distribution of translated manga. We all know what happens when a subculture goes mainstream. The increased access to fandom previously walled gardens could have meant the liquefying of fannish traditional norms as more and more people entered fans cultures without having to go through all the previous socialization steps and build all the necessary connections.

Looking online for manga, new fans discovered the mature scanlation community and started their own groups, unlinked with the older ones, but exploiting a decade of accumulated information and knowledge passed over in manuals and ‘how to scanlate’ guides. Two of the main necessary and historically monopolized resources to produce scanlations are now freely accessible in the commons: raw scans and translations. On MangaHelpers, for instance, individuals began to upload translations for others to use as if they were tradable commodities. In no time, new small groups began to prevail over the old large ones and started to scanlate licensed manga more often
and to a larger degree that the older groups ever did, thus challenging the manga industry entering the digital era.

### 4.2 The scanlating process

According to the descriptions given by my interviewees, the process of scanlating a chapter varies, for instance, according to the type of group, the content used, the target audience, and its online setting. However, a general pattern emerged which involves five-six steps which can be performed independently - but in sequence - by a varying number of members, from one till a maximum of five-six, over hours, weeks, or months (see fig. 3).

![Figure 3: The modules of the scanlating process](image)

First of all, scanlators must select a new project. Someone who is interested in translating a certain manga looks for scanlators interested in doing the same thing. Then, together, they discuss the feasibility of the project. That is to say, if they have the necessary material resources. Also, they have to check if the manga is not already announced/licensed/published (but this depends on the ethics of the team).

The first module of the scanlating process involves finding, selecting and providing the raws, i.e., a copy of the original artwork to scan. This could be provided for example, by legally buying a manga magazine, or a book, or by downloading an uploaded scan made by someone in Japan, China or Korea. Alternatively, raws can also be taken (with or without permission – depending on the policy of the team) from other scanlations groups, English, French, Spanish, and so forth; or from resources sites like MangaUpdates. Scanlators use various techniques to scan,
depending on their material resources. There are raw providers who cut the pages of the manga, for example, and others who detach the pages by dissolving the glue that hold them together with an iron or by placing the manga in a microwave with a glass of water.

Once it is scanned and saved on the computer in JPEG, TIFF, PNG, PSD or other formats, the raw is cleaned from imperfections. For instance, the pages are leveled/straightened, double pages are combined, SFX are redone, damaged images are redrawn, and all text is erased, to make space for the translation. A variety of graphic programs could be used, but the most popular at the moment is Photoshop (which is obviously downloaded for free from the Web). Of course, the cleaning and editing process is less laborious if instead of Japanese raws the team uses the scanlation of another team.

The images below illustrate the process of cleaning the Japanese raws with Photoshop. Figure 4 shows the Japanese raw as it was scanned; while figure 5 shows the final outcome once the grays and blacks have been leveled and the Japanese text erased from the balloons.

Figures 6 and 7 illustrate instead an example of redraw. Figure 6 is a scanned raw of a frame which spans over two pages. In the middle of the scan is visible a white vertical line where the pages were
bound together. The cleaner redraw what there was under the white line using Photoshop tools. Figure 7 presents the result of the redraw. Redrawing isn’t an easy process and can take many hours.

Figure 6: Scanned Japanese raw of a double page  
Figure 7: Same raw after the redraw of the damaged parts

Usually simultaneously to the cleaning of the raws, the translator reads the original text (if possible, or a translation made in Chinese, English, etc.) and translates it to the preferred language. The translation is written down on a text editor program, for instance TextPad. The translator has to decide how to adapt the discourses, if to maintain the honorifics or not, or how to translate jokes, or how to explain cultural references. Translators from Japanese are the scarcest resources in the whole process and they usually work alone, while the others steps can be performed by one or more individuals. My interviewees translate from English, French, Spanish, Japanese and often they translate from more than one language at the same time. Many said that they use American translations (scanlations or official copies) as base for the translation, while they try to do the editing using Japanese raws.

Once the raw text is cleaned and the translator has completed the translation, the translated text is typesetted/lettered on the empty balloons. In this step, the scanlator has to take decisions about the font type and size, for instance. Groups have usually various practical manuals and guidelines about how to clean and edit a page, which fonts to use, and so forth. In many groups the cleaning and typesetting are done by a single individual, an editor. Figures 8 and 9 below show the transition from the Japanese original, the scanned raw, to the “final product” of the scanlating process: the same image, cleaned, redraw, translated and edited.
Additional pages featuring the credits of the team, comments, appeals, and so forth are integrated into the scan. Proofread for errors, typos and so forth, once the scan is approved by a quality checker or a supervisor, it is compressed in ZIP or RAR files.

When the date, place and mode of release are set, the scanlation is published. It could be uploaded on the group site and/or forum, through FTP, to be read online or as a direct download, or shared in IRC or through BitTorrent. For more visibility, the scanlation could also be uploaded to aggregator websites/online viewers such as MangaFox, or uploaded to warez sites (which risk to be closed down by the police) such as DownloadZone or MangaUpload. Groups have also started to use Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to announce their releases.

Resources are shared in commons, by using all the already mentioned free services and many others: Dropbox, Messenger, Skype, Mediafire, SendSpace, or even email. Of course, as soon as new, free, user-friendly technology pops out, it is adopted- if needed.

One trend that has emerged many times from the accounts delivered by my interviewees is that, over time, the community has migrated from uploading their archives in IRC channels to offer convenient downloads from free file hosting sites. Some of the interviewees belonging to groups that were there ‘since the beginning’ of scanlation recalled moving from IRC to hosting sites.
because it was objectively better not only for the users but also for them in term of space, bandwidth and gratuity, although they regret abandoning MIRC as more and more hosting sites (such as MegaUpload) are being closed down for criminal copyright infringement.

It is already obvious at this point that, although all information, knowledge and culture in scanlators’ techno-social environments is there, free to be shared with and used by all the group members, not anyone can participate in the scanlating process. The tasks, although modular, aren’t all “fine-grained” (Benkler 2002, 378-379) but require a lot of individual motivation, time, and effort. As Murdock and Golding pointed out about the political economy of cultural consumption, material inequalities – money, but also (leisure) “time, space, access to social networks and command of the cultural competencies required to interpret and deploy media materials in particular ways” (2005, 79) – act as barriers to activity/agency.

4.3 Open participation, communal evaluation

All the groups to which my subjects belong use to insert in their scanlations an open invitation to the readers to become scanlators. The message conveyed is that users shouldn’t be just reading scanlations, but also producing them (cf. Duncombe 1997, 129). This because the sustainability of scanlation communities is directly related to the mass of participants, that is to say, the ability of scanlators to turn more and more readers into collaborators (cf., Benjamin 1998, 98). As mentioned by Bruns (2008) the success of produsage projects depends greatly on produsers’ capacity to draw in skilled and enthusiast participants who contribute in maintaining them alive with massive amounts of free affective labour (cf., Terranova 2004). According to my interviewees, all groups have the problem of finding, and retaining, new, enthusiast and capable volunteers. The idea with the appeals is that as users read the scanlation, they will come across the request for help, their interest will be triggered for various motives and they will volunteer. As simple as that.

However, if they will be included in the group is not certain. My subjects reported variations in the measure their group are open to new participants. The types of groups can be found on a linear continuum that range from a) teams that practice an open participation policy and welcome all enthusiasts, accepting anyone who applies, indifferently of skill and competence levels, allocating them where these want to contribute, without examining them a priori; to b) teams that instead welcome new comers with a minimum level of expertise and that before ‘employing’ them will filter them by performing real and proper tests to assess their skills and competences.

Nota bene: the second type of policy is becoming more and more popular. Some of the members of groups that now practice a less open participation policy remembered that at their debut their groups used to accept volunteers without filtering them. Most members of groups belonging
nowadays to groups similar to type b, for example, said that at the beginning they used to take in whoever asked, regardless of what he or she was able to do, while now they select newcomers because they need serious and capable persons who can really help out on the long term, and not people who come in for having some fun and then disappear. This, because they prefer stability over a temporary and impermanent state of interactions.

Members of more open groups usually ridiculed some of the entry requirements set by the less open groups, for example, age limits, multiple years of experience in the field, proven ability with Photoshop and other graphic programs, 3-5-8 years of Japanese studies, prohibitions to engage with others groups, and so forth. Some of these subjects have abandoned their previous groups and joined others, or started their own, because they didn’t approve the manner the policy of the group had evolved in a way that too closely tried to mirror the standards of the industry professionals. As Sandvoss writes, fans’ identification with producers and compliance with their production practices and ideologies favour “spaces of reflection, rejection and resistance” (2011, 57).

The degree a group is open to new participants depends on how its processes are organized, the way it is structured, and on which principles underpins it. The less granular the tasks (for instance, not everyone can translate from Japanese!) and the more hierarchical the structures within a group are, the less open to new participants it is, despite their equal potential to make contributions: hierarchies create inequity. It must be considered however, that in general, according to my subjects, scanlation groups start out with inclusivity as a rule- since no contributors means sure death. Furthermore, they let the new contributors auto-determinate themselves to perform the task they themselves deem they are more appropriate to undertake, thus not aberrantly allocating resources a priori (cf., von Hippel 2005) but acting in a probabilistic manner (cf., Bruns 2008, 19).

Over time, some groups become larger in size with many projects under their belts to be followed simultaneously. These groups tend to become more exclusive and to set some minimum standards in order to remain effective and/or efficient since they don’t have time to loose in patiently training newcomers.

Newbies’ contributions are tracked and evaluated from day one onwards by supervisors and quality checkers in particular, but also by the rest of the staff, and of course, by the audience. Scanlators that repetitively fail to meet peers’ standards are gradually distanced by the community (cf., Bruns 2008, 25). One of the subject of a group that uses to perform entry tests, said that the lowest moment of all her experience as scanlator was when her performance in the entry tests for the editor and translator positions was harshly evaluated. Nevertheless, most of the interviewees reported that they welcome peers’ reviews. Others’ opinions about their works are sought after and
valued. In particular, one of the interviewee reflected about how team work can positively influence one’s own development by the mere fact of sharing each others’ know-how.

According to my subjects, two main evaluative standards can be identified: quality and speed. Scanlation groups can be thus divided in two categories which reflects the variations of the ways in which they communally value quality and speed: 1) groups that value quality over speed; and 2) groups that value speed over quality. Quality groups have usually more niche tastes (i.e., seinen, yaoi, josei, hentai). Thus, they look more often for unlicensed and less known manga than speed groups which instead seldom scanlate anything else than the last mainstream shounen. Quality groups value the source and quality of the raw materials (i.e., they prefer to scan from manga books and translate from Japanese), whereas speed and deadlines are less important than for speed groups whose goal, instead, is to compete with other groups and be the firsts to release the last shounen chapters.

The situation however, is not so clear, since variations within quality groups and speed groups have also been identified. For example, one of the interviewee, member of a group that in general value quality over speed, reflected that for less know manga the process of scanlating is oriented towards quality, whereas when they are working on hits such as One Piece, Bleach and Naruto, the procedures must necessarily be more fast, since these manga are read by a wider audience and thus are also translated by many more groups. In this case, speed becomes more important and thus these particular titles are trusted to the most experienced members, who translate, edit and proofread the new chapter in a few hours.

It must be also considered that many groups start out by scanlating the most popular series because they entered the fandom through them and these are the only titles they know. Over time though, some of these groups begin to pick up different, more niche projects.

Of course, size matters. Big groups with a lot of participants are better off in terms of resources and may thus be more flexible than smaller groups with limited staff resources or one solo projects. On the other side, as the group size increases, the more complex it becomes to organize the work flow without resorting to bureaucracy.

Since in general scanlators can contribute according to their interests and abilities, and move in and out of groups and collaborate with others groups (nota bene, some teams instead don’t allow their staffers to collaborate with ‘the competition’), it is not rare for individuals to perform multiple activities in the same group and/or in different groups. It also happens that projects are carried out in joints/co-operation with one or more scanlation groups which, as a result, openly share their resources. For example, one team could work on the translation while the other edits. Around
twenty teams that think on the same lines have reunited in “The agreement” which consists, as the name says, in a number of terms upon which the various scanlation groups have agreed. This initiative aims to 1) rationalize the free distribution of manga online by avoiding that there are, for example, fifteen scanlations forums/sites translating the same manga competing with each other and “wasting resources” (nota bene: Naruto, Bleach and One Piece are the exception to the rule since they act as attract-audience); 2) promote cooperation among groups by, for instance, facilitating the pooling together of resources such as staffs, raws, information, and knowledge of the various teams in order to facilitate the completion of more HQ scanlations of whole series.

Many of my subjects presented themselves as being, for instance, editors and translators. One scanlator who acts as one of the two leaders of a group, said that although his personal avatar identifies him as group administrator, he does practically everything: he coordinates the team, looks for manga news, translates, provides raws, edits chapters, recruits new members, and checks the quality of the translations and the chapters before he publishes them. Another scanlator who started out as solo, doing his own thing and publishing on download sites and forums, began to edit and translate in two scanlation groups, one of which he helped to found, and to simultaneously cover the position of moderator of forum’s discussions in one, and of administrator of forum’s graphic in the other. Moreover, he recalled been contributing to translate a pair of manga on one forum, and edit another pair of manga on the other group’s site, where he also edits and translates some parodies. He pointed out that when he doesn’t have time to do all, other staffs help him out, granting him the time to do what he can do better and his more passionate about. Many other interviewees reported similar stories. My subjects recalled being usually so enthusiasts about what they are doing that it is very rare that they cannot stand up to their tasks. Almost all of them mentioned that they work on series that they enjoy. Paraphrasing Duncombe, no forced participation in scanlation is pleasurable (1997, 195-196). If they happen to be hindered by “real life” because, as one interviewee said, few of them are under 21 and thus lack time during workdays because of study, work and family, they just let the other members of their groups know, and those will then discuss together to find a working solution and then re-organize themselves. Besides, as it has been reported by many of the interviewees, it seems that in general, in every group there is an hard core of staffs who are always available, and all around it, like satellites, people that come and go depending on their availability.

See L’accordo at http://accordo.forumcommunity.net/.
4.4 Fluid heterarchy, ad hoc meritocracy

Although a scanlation group is usually started by an individual or two, the so-called founder(s), who detain some amount of authority over the community because they initiated the project; the raw providers, cleaners, translators, typesetters, editors and quality checkers generally work independently or with a discrete autonomy. As an interviewee puts it, there’s no despot. Another said that although there are supervisors, they are all on the same level.

Problems and solutions are generally discussed within the team, consensus is sought and answers are not usually imposed from the top, even though those at the top may have the big picture (e.g., they know how many series are being scanlated and who is working on what) and give the OK (e.g., to start a new project). An interviewee made this example: if there are two series which aren’t going anywhere because the teams working on them are without editor, it is possible that the admins won’t allow to start scanlate a new series until those other two aren’t finished. Of course, decisions about the politics of distribution of the group, for example, aren’t taken by the last arrived.

The fact that there is a founder(s) and many team leaders who de facto have some degree of authority and coordinate the others doesn’t mean that these groups are structured in rigid hierarchical lines. As an interviewee put it, there is a decentralization of power. Power in scanlation groups is vertically and horizontally distributed and it flows to scanlators who make valid contributions. As we have seen above, what a valid contribution to the community is differs for quality and speed groups. Those participants whose performance is steadily improving become sort of opinion leaders within the community. They gain status. Of course, esteem by peers and like-minded people is more welcomed than acknowledgement from strangers.

As it emerged from the accounts provided by my subjects, scanlation is based on what Bruns called a “fluid heterarchy” of “ad hoc meritocracy” (2008, 25-26). This echoes one of the principles of hacker ethics by Steven Levy, the author of Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution (1984), who says that hackers shouldn’t be judged by their age, sex and so forth, but by their hacking. In the same manner, scanlators are open to and respect participants who can do their job.

Considering the fact that scanlation groups are organized in heterarchical, not hierarchical lines, and that many responsibilities aren’t taken by a few but by many, it could be written that scanlation offers a more equal apparatus than the one offered by the cultural industries (cf., Benjamin 1998, 98).

However, my subjects reported variations in the way groups are structured. There are groups which are less heterarchical than others. For instance, one of the interviewees recalled that he abandoned his former group and decided to start his own because he didn’t like the way the first
group was uselessly multi-structured like a professional corporation with a central core of people who commanded and controlled all their efforts. In his opinion, the leaders of that group didn’t have any right to impose choices on him since they were on the same level. He reflected that groups act like this, that is to say, try to imitate the professionals and their standards recreating a professional work environment, because this allows them to self-congratulate themselves, and puts them in the spotlight. He said that some of the scanlators who had been working as they were pros were hired by publishing houses. Probably, those scanlators were like Leadbeater and Miller’s (2004) Pro-Ams who identify themselves with producers’ production practices and who craft works which bear the same production values and logic of the producers (cf., Sandvoss 2011, 57). My subject remembered that if in that group power was too centralized, in his own group there was the opposite problem. The group was self-managed, not anarchic, but each member could speak up her mind and contribute according to her abilities and interests as she desired. Anyone could have done anything at any time. No one was there to told others what to do. This created dispersion. They ended up in situations where no one was doing anything, and projects were laying around forgotten. Nevertheless, if the work flow wasn’t constant, the quality of what they pulled off was good. Also, he recalled, for a while they even thought to be anonymous, but it wouldn’t have worked out because they were just a few and they already knew each other. He remarked that anonymity takes away personality. It allows. For example, if you propose something as Pinco Pallino, nobody wants to do it. However, if you propose the same thing anonymously, chance is that you will find someone willing to do it.

According to my subjects, there are 1) groups who are build around a leader or a central core of persons that die when these go away; 2) groups which remain alive even if the ones who took the decisions or bear more responsibility abandon the project. One of the interviewee who is also a group leader, reflected that it’s hard to oblige people to do the job for you. You can’t force them to do it if they don’t want to, when they are not interested in the project, or they don’t have time, energy, motivation and so forth. They could just disappear on you, since it is something they do in their leisure time. How could one oblige others to do something in their free time then? His solution is simple: never force anyone to do anything they wouldn’t otherwise already be willing to do. However, if they commit to it, he will hold them to their word. This echoes Lessig’s claim that “People contribute to the common good as a by product of doing what they would otherwise want to do” (2008, 155, 173). Scanlators auto-determinate how much they want to contribute.

The members who prove with their work and commitment to be of merit rise in status within the community of peers, and usually increase their amount of contributions too. For example, some of my interviewees became team project leaders due to the continuous quantity and quality of their
contributions. Some recalled that they started out doing one or two things (usually editing and/or translating), and then they gradually began to help out with other tasks, until they became founder/admin/editor/translator/quality checker and so forth. Being active within the group pay off in terms of social and cultural status. In brief, they get respect based on what they can pull off. People who cannot finish their work by an agreed deadline, and constantly complain about scanlating, get less and less work and if this continues, the supervisor/leader of the team progressively stops giving them work until they take initiative, that is to say, they go ask if there is something for them to do. Most of the interviewees recalled how time consuming it is to scanlate (e.g., 5-6 hours per evening), and noted that you don’t really know how time consuming it is until you actually get your hands on it and that’s the reason for the chronic shortage of stable staff in scanlators’ work environments. People may even disappear after applying to join. Most leave the group and leave the job unfinished.

4.5 Unfinished artefacts, continuing process

Bruns writes that the process of produsage must necessarily remain continually unfinished, and infinitely continuing”, and that “produsage does not work towards the completion of products (for distribution to end users or consumers); instead it is engaged in an iterative, evolutionary process aimed at the gradual improvement of the community’s shared content (2008, 27). If scanlation is produsage in action then, I should be able to say that scanlations are unfinished artefacts and that the scanlating process is continuous. I have some doubts about this. My data don’t fully support this conclusion. From one side, scanlators’ official mission is the sharing of scanlations with users, that is to say, the distribution of translated manga to fans. On the other side, none of my interviewees thought that scanlations are (commercial) finished products. Moreover, none of them thought that scanlations could ever be perfect. None thought that scanlations could even compete with the publishing houses’ printed manga, even if some suggested that their translations are an improvement if compared to the debauchery perpetrated by some official translators.

Jeremy Douglass, William Huber and Lev Manovich have analyzed one million manga pages of 883 series available as downloadable “scanlations” from OneManga.com in the fall of 2009 looking at the differences among the extra pages created and added by the scanlators, and the scanlated story pages, as well as the differences among originals, scanlations and official translations. They found that scanlations are not just “copy and paste” (2011, 195):

To generalize, the visual characteristics of scanlation pages clearly reflect the traces of their production - which in the case of credits pages is almost always free-form creation of digital images in general purpose layer-based image editing software such Photoshop, often with heavy use of fonts (as opposed to line art)
or extensive use of photo layers, gradients, filters, and effects plugins. By contrast, almost all story pages in scanlated versions reflect more conservative and well-defined multi-step editing workflows of scanlation, a process intended to translate page scans through minimal alternation of the original printed artwork (ibid., 215).

Variations are also due to different choices in scanning equipment, settings and software, fonts-style and size, and quality or colors used (see Douglass et al. 2011, 205-213). Comparing official and unofficial translations, the authors illustrated how publishers in general adopt a domesticating aesthetic, for instance by redrawing “the written/graphic elements indicating sounds and emotions, replacing them with English equivalents” (2011, 218), while scanlators take a foreignizing approach, “following a policy of minimal intervention” (ibid., 219). Besides the fact that this is obviously due to the fact that publishers target the local market at its widest, while fans don’t; the latter usually adore the originals, and hate Americanization, and other similar “attacks” to their fandom object (e.g., onigiri turned into hamburgers).

Furthermore, fans may avoid changing the original text because it is just easier not to do so, and not only because reading the original is a badge of honour. Redrawing a single SFX can take hours. Not to mention how difficult translating Japanese onomatopoeia is. However, despite these minimal interventions, scanlations don’t always contain every pages of the manga, but almost always contain extra pages like credits pages, appeals, and comments.

My interviewees didn’t even think of comparing their digital scanlations with the printed manga, as instead Douglass, Huber and Manovich did. They pointed out that a scanlation is different from the original and that the official translation must always be preferred over the scanlation, since they are made by pros working on the original materials. They also reported that it is quite common for teams to abandon series because of lack of time, real life matters, lack of staff, loss of interest, cease and desist letters, and so forth.

One of the interviewee said that a scan is always potentially imperfect. He reflected that with usage we become over time better at evaluating media outputs; for instance, at identifying mistakes which previously we wouldn’t have noted. He illustrated his argument with the instance of what happened with the 51th volume of One Piece as edited by Star Comics, whose translation was so terrible that the publishing house, faced with consumers criticism, decided to make public amend and to offer to substitute the volume for free.6 Fans have always been particularly apt to discriminating, selecting and criticizing industrial media output (Fiske 1992, 48; Jenkins 1996b, 86). As Fiske pointed out, “industrial texts with their contradictions, inadequacies and superficialities” are received by the fans as “open to reworking, rewriting, completing and to

participation in a way that a completed art object is not” (1992, 47). Bad and mediocre output is more promptly identified and easily fixed in scanlation flexible environments than in the commercial ones. As recalled by many of my interviewees, it is not rare for groups to re-scanlate their old scanlations; and other groups’ low quality and/or foreign scanlations. All of them were aware that due to the digital nature of scanlations, once posted online, they are out of control. Scanlations can then be potentially copied, reproduced, retranslated and redistributed over and over again. So, the scanlation as it is found on a forum or on a site in a determinate moment is just a temporary artefact. In this sense, I may paraphrase Bruns and write that the scanlation community taken as a whole, is engaged in cooperation and competition in the continuous process of improvement of their self-organized networks of reproduction and distribution of translated manga.

4.6 Common property, individual rewards

Bruns writes that “the communal produsage of content in an information commons necessarily builds on the assumption that content created in this process will continue to be available to all future participants just as it was available to those participants who have already made contributions” (2008, 28). This fundamental assumption was found also among my informants. All of my subjects reported that they do what they do because they want to read manga and they want other people to read manga too. The raison d’être of scanlators is to distribute more manga. Put them into the commons. Share them.

The only study about scanlation that I was able to find and that I’m aware of, was focused on the motives and ethics of scanlation and its relationship with the industry. Hye-Kyung Lee, a lecturer in Cultural and Creative Industries at the King’s College London, examined manga news websites, forums, scanlations’ webpages, conducted nine email interviews with English speaking scanlators, and interviewed “six individuals working in the manga publishing industry in the UK, the US or Japan, and two comics journalists based in the US” (2009, 1012). She explored “the culture of English scanlation” (ibid.) when the relationships between the scanlation groups and the manga industry were still quite peaceful, that is to say, before the DCA coalition was formed and legal action was taken against scanlators’ aggregators websites; and even before the manga industry began to provide a global legal digital alternative to scanlations. Her findings, in accordance to what Dirk Deppey discovered interviewing five amateur manga translators in 2005, show that although “motives for scanlation range widely, … scanlators tend to have in common … a strong missionary zeal for promoting manga” (ibid., 1015).

The content produced by scanlators is intended to be shared by default. However, as it emerged from the reports of my interviewees, not all the groups have the same sharing policy
regarding content, staff, raws, translations and so forth. Each group as its own rules about what can be shared, where, when and how. For example, there are groups that don’t allow their staff to work with ‘the competition’. There are groups that instead collaborate in joints with others groups by sharing information, knowledge, staff, etcetera. There are groups that ask the user to register in their forum or to contribute to the forum discussions with a certain amount of posts in order to get a password for the download of the scanlation. All groups set some conditions for the sharing of scanlations in order to prevent the abuse of their free affective labour.

As outlined by Bruns, produsers are motivated by a shared purpose, which is “embodied in the first place in the content gathered in the information commons itself”, therefore, produsers protect their commons from exploitation by individuals and groups within or beyond the community (2008, 29). For instance, groups that don’t want that their works continue to be distributed after the manga has been announced, licensed, or published, require others to take down their scanlations. Of course, all of my interviewees pointed out that this seldom works out on the Internet and that it is hard to make other people behave the way you want them to behave if they don’t already want to behave that way. One general rule emerged from the accounts provided by my informants, which can be summarized as follows: “If you share our content, credit us”.

Re-uploading a scanlation made by another team without crediting the ‘legitimate’ authors is the worse. Lee wrote that this defining characteristic is paradoxical if we compare the “strong sense of ownership over their work” with “their free use of copyrighted materials” (Lee 2009, 1018). I don’t think it’s paradoxical. Sharing and acknowledgment don’t exclude themselves. First of all, sharing manga in the commons means making manga universally available and accessible. Of course, this means that anyone can freely use them according to their needs (cf., Bauwens). Secondly, if one understands fans’ prodused artefacts as an extension, a narcissistic performance of the self, as suggested by, for example, Sandvoss (2005), the reason they feel so strongly about them becomes obvious. It’s their labour, they authored it. It something they made on their own, they are proud of it, and they want to be acknowledged for it, they want to take credit. That is why aggregator websites such as MangaFox, MangaReader and so forth, are distrusted not only buy publishers but by scanlators too, and for basically the same reasons. First of all, aggregators take away content from scanlators’ sites and forums, and place it in a detached context where its authors are not directly rewarded but indirectly exploited (since these platforms are owned by people who make money by selling space for ads). Also, the low resolution and the heavy advertising of aggregators sites distort the content. Finally, as the content migrates from scanlators’ sites, forums, blogs and so forth, to the online viewers, so does the audience.
Let’s take a closer look to which may be the reasons for scanlating. Needless to say, there are variations in scanlators’ motivations. A number of patterns emerged in my study. Most of my subjects joked that they started scanlating because they couldn’t sleep. They reported that they began because of their love for manga. Looking online for a particular comics, they stumbled upon a request for help, within the pages of a scanlation or within discussion forums. Hence, most of my subjects started out \textit{consuming} and \textit{using} scanlations. By leeching to the Internet Relay Chat channels, by first ‘merely’ downloading, or online viewing and reading the scans posted by others, commenting in blogs and thanking, they had their first encounter with scanlation as consumers and users. (Reasons reported for reading scans also varied but were mostly critics towards the shortcomings of the commercial offer, for instance, the absence of the original translated copies on the local market or the difficulty in accessing it; the time lag between the Japanese releases and the official translations; the butchered quality of the translation, graphic and material used; censorship, the lack of fidelity towards the original Japanese; and the high prices of the manga.) According to Bruns,

even those members of the networked population who choose for the moment to remain users, simply utilizing the ‘products’ of the produsage process as substitutes for industrial products, are always already potential produsers themselves—recent developments have made it ever more easy, and in some cases even inevitable, for such users to become produsers (for example as their patterns of usage become direct inputs to the continuing processes of produsage) (2008, 22).

If I apply this to the scanlation community, I may write that users, who access the web pages and participate in the forums or reply to scanlators’ blogs in order to get their hands on the scanlated chapters, are also always already contributing to iterate the scanlating process since scanlators lust after download numbers and users’ thanks as rewards for their efforts. Without an adoring audience the forums and websites of scanlators will be dead in no time, as pointed out by one of the interviewee who also said that many users can result in a small percentage of new staff, and that in the end, a thank you from the users is the only satisfaction they ask for their efforts. The development and maintenance of an audience is thus one of the main tasks of scanlation: it provides a pool for fishing new staff and at the same time it keeps the staff motivated. This supports Bruns’ statement that “in produsage projects, the object of the communal effort is almost always as much the development of social structures to support and sustain the shared projects as it is the development of that projects itself” (2008, 23). Of course, none of my interviewees said that they started scanlating because they desired an audience or they sought attention, an ego-boost. What is it then that made them turn into scanlators? Six themes emerged from the material collected.
1. Many recalled that they started because they were interested in reading a manga which wasn’t yet available in translation.
2. Some were following a scanlation which was suddenly dropped and thus decided to start scanlating in order to continue the series.
3. One interviewee said that he was brought in by friends.
4. Some said that they just felt the need to give back to the community after reading so much.
5. A few said that they wanted to prove themselves, for example, putting their Japanese competences and graphic skills at work and/or improve them.
6. One subject said that he started for padding his resume to increase his chances to get into the industry later.

There’s a big absentee here: the profit motive. My sample of scanlators didn’t feature anyone belonging to groups which scanlate for money, but I don’t see it as a problem. Those people scanlate for one single motive: profit, which isn’t interesting at all. As my interviewees pointed out, those are neither ‘serious’ scanlators nor fans but (usually) 15-16 years old who don’t know how to translate, how to edit, and how to clean a scan, but who discovered that they can make a bit of money by uploading scanlated chapters of *Naruto* or other successful series on file hosting services.

Motives for continuing scanlation varied too. All of my interviewees reported that they continue because they love it, they are enjoying what they do. But this doesn’t tell us anything other than they will stop it the minute that they don’t find it pleasurable anymore. Reflecting on the reasons they love it or what would they miss the most if they had to stop, five categories of individual rewards were described. Since they sounded similar to Maslow’s sets of goals (1943), I have classified them accordingly. Scanlation rewards individuals with:

1. More manga, more information on manga, more knowledge on manga.
2. Less uncertainty/safety, that is to say, “a place to walk to” (Duncombe 1997, 195-196). A free space where reality can be suspended like in play (cf. Huizinga 1949/2000, 13) and where alternatives to the capitalistic industrial profit and hierarchical oriented ways of organizing the social relations of production, distribution and consumption of communication resources can be put in practice (see, for example, Duncombe 1997, 195-196; Mosco 1996; Benkler 2006).
3. The *community*, that is to say, social capital. Many subjects reported that the social relationships with the persons – friends – whom they work and spend time with chatting, with whom they share interests, are their main source of joy. Most of them described their
communities as families and said they are happy to feel that they belong to it, that they are an active part of it.

4. Personal merits, recognition, credit, that is to say, *respect* for themselves and what they have accomplished. Getting one’s own name on the credit page of a scanlation they contributed to create (see fig. 10 below); or having a personal avatar or page on the website, forum, or blog of the group, boosts one’s esteem. Moreover, seeing that one’s own work is downloaded and thus really appreciated by the audience augments one’s own confidence. As Herz points out, downloading is more meaningful than conversation: “People are using what they’ve made, not just agreeing with it. Use, not imitation, is the sincerest form of flattery” (2002, 11).

5. *Self-actualization.* One of the subject summarized this as the feeling of being satisfied that you’ve completed something with a bunch of people you like. In other words, the feeling of being useful and capable. Of having some influence. For some this means the satisfaction of starting and finishing a project; of doing something creative and fun; of learning new things, for example, new ways to use Photoshop; new features and shortcuts; or the difference between translation and adaptation; but also new ways of communicating and organizing. One of the interviewees, who is a group leader, reflected that while knowing some things with Photoshop is great, it probably won’t translate to anything to him in real life. However, communication and organization is something that is required in any working environment where you have to work with other people, online or in real life. And as someone who has to manage other people, he has had to learn how to talk to them since not everyone works the same way. Some people are self-starters, some have no initiative, some are lazy, and so forth. So, he has learned that many different people have many different ways about them. This subject, as well as others did, implied that the things they learn in scanlation spaces could be useful in ‘real life’; precisely as it has been noted by many scholars (for example, see Duncombe 1997, 15; Toynbee 2000, 162; Van Zoonen 2005, 52-68; Jenkins 2006b).

Scanlators thus, participate in the free spaces of the scanlation produsage community because this provides them with opportunities that guarantee, besides more information and knowledge about their object of fandom, *real* participation, love, respect, and self-fulfilling activities. Thus, in scanlators’ environments, as Duncombe observed in regards to underground culture, people learn “how to count as an individual, how to build a supportive community, how to have a meaningful life, how to create something that is yours” (1997, 15).
Also various motives for ceasing scanlating have being mentioned by my informants. They can be categorized as follows:

1. Incompatibilities with the group mates; usually due to burdensome work conditions too similar to the one of the professional industry.
2. Lack of time.
3. Loss of interest.

All my subjects said that the second they don’t enjoy scanlating anymore, they will stop and move on to something else.

### 4.7 Attitudes towards copyright infringement

Scanlators’ attempt to correct the shortcomings of the industrial manga industry is an imperfect one since their produsage, their collaborative process of manga translation and distribution, is based on the illicit appropriation of copyrighted content. A solution that avoids the problem but don’t solve it. As many fans’ participatory and productive activities, scanlators’ produsage is based on the illegal appropriation of industrially produced and legally owned texts (cf., Jenkins 1996b, 24-25; Fiske 1989, 4; 1992; Lessig 2002, 58). It follows that scanlators produser communities, as allowed by the affordances of the technosocial environment, actively participate in what Benkler calls “the widespread, global culture of ignoring exclusive rights” (2006, 456).
As Japan is one of the contracting states of the Berne Convention since 1899, it is obliged to assure the international protection of copyrighted works. According to the Convention, copyright holders embrace, among others, the following exclusive rights of authorization till 50 years after their death: the right to translate, to make adaptations and arrangements, and to make reproductions. Authors’ moral rights, that is to say, “the right to claim authorship of the work and the right to object to any mutilation or deformation or other modification of, or other derogatory action in relation to, the work which would be prejudicial to the author’s honor or reputation”, are also protected by law. However, the law lacks “a generalized fair use provision” (Mehra 2002, 23; Copyright Law, Arts. 30-49). This because rights holders are lobbying against such a limitation on copyrights (JBPA 2010-2011). Nevertheless, scanlators’ modes of appropriation, production and distribution wouldn’t fit in the fair use doctrine exception and would fail the four factors test as scanlators don’t reproduce fragments of copyrighted work for criticism, or educational purposes. They copy the whole artwork, not just a snippet, providing a direct market substitute for the digital translated official version of the original artwork which was published in Japan. Even if they add their own translation, scanlators’ work is merely derivative, and cannot be considered transformative. Moreover, some groups even make profits from it, without giving anything back to the legitimate authors. Finally, nowadays many groups scanlate highly popular and licensed titles.

The unavailability and/or inaccessibility of translated titles; the high prices; the time lag between the releases of the Japanese original and the official translation; the butchered quality of the official translations; don’t justify scanlators’ actions in legal terms. Nor does the fact that they don’t make scanlation for profit; that with their unauthorized reproduction they may help promote and develop the fanbase of readers (which however don’t equal buyers) (see Schodt 1996, 335); and that they may help the industry to locate popular titles to be licensed.

It could be said that scanlators mine capitalism, since they constitute an attack to informational and cultural imports and exports; or that they are shifting the sources of control and power within the networked information economy. One of the interviewees reported that he had a long mail conversation with a Japanese author who made him a long argument about why he shouldn’t scanlate. My subject said that it made him reflect on the meaning of scanlation, his motives for scanlating, and if it made sense to continue. The author wrote that the problem is that

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their work, although intended as an homage, is diffused through the internet which is accessible from anywhere and that so, if in Italy the manga isn’t officially published, this may not be the case for Korea, for example. Hence, to make available a pirate version which could be re-translated and re-uploaded in another language risks to influence the sales. Because of the economic conditions, the Japanese publishing houses are really attentive to evaluate if it is worth to sell the right of translations to foreign publishing houses, thing that they also consider by taking in account the existence of pirate versions. So, scanlators’ work, instead of theoretically favoring a publication, risks instead of killing it on its birth. This applies above all to works which already have a low circulation in Japan.

Of course, it can be questioned if one ought to access and participate in cultural production only by asking permission to copy, translate and distribute to the top four Japanese manga publishing companies which control the usage rights for the copyright holders— the authors (JETRO 2008, 4; JBPA 2010-2011).

Lessig has discussed this at length in Free Culture (2004), opposing free culture with permission culture “a culture in which creators get to create only with the permission of the powerful, or of creators from the past” (p. xiv; see also Benkler 2006, 23). However, as the Stanford professor points out, advocating free culture is not advocating to get stuff for free: “a free culture is not a culture without property; it is not a culture in which artists don’t get paid” (Lessig 2004, xvi).

There are some who wrote that “scanlations sit in a legal gray area” (see, for example, Deppey 2005; Douglass et al. 2011, 201). This because at their beginning, scanlators used to scanlate mostly unlicensed series, and to drop and cease the distribution when a title was announced, licensed, or published. So far as scanlators complied with the cease and desist letters of the industry and self-policied themselves, the industry tolerated them.

However, recent trends in the political economy of Japanese popular culture (e.g., market saturation and falling sales) have resulted in a dramatic change in the previously tolerant attitude of Japanese manga publishers toward scanlators’ practices, in particular towards aggregator sites. First, Japanese started to crack down on piracy in the domestic market. For example, the 14th of July 2010, a 14-year old from Nagoya, Japan, was arrested for having uploaded on YouTube some unedited photos of the pages of One Piece before they were officially published in four occasions. On April 4, 2011, a 25-year old Japanese was arrested for using Share, a file sharing software, to

upload “about 28,000 files from 300 different animated and comic titles” without authorization. Other 35 people had already been arrested in the previous months for similar crimes. On September 6, 2011, 122 mangaka and seven major Japanese publishers issued a joint complaint to more than one hundred shops which made unauthorized scanned digital copies of their manga. Recently, pressed with the need to go digital and to expand overseas in order to avoid death, the capitalistic Japanese manga industry and its legal authorities, backed by the governments, have started to act in concert to protect and exploit their intellectual property all around the world. For instance, on June 8, 2010, Anime News Network (ANN) reported the formation of a “Multi-National Manga Anti-Piracy Coalition of Japanese and US publishers” which aims to fight the “rampant and growing problem of internet piracy plaguing the manga industry”: scanlation aggregator websites:

According to the coalition, the problem has reached a point where “scanlation aggregator” sites now host thousands of pirated titles, earning ad revenue and/or membership dues at creators’ expense while simultaneously undermining foreign licensing opportunities and unlawfully cannibalizing legitimate sales. Worse still, this pirated material is already making its way to smartphones and other wireless devices, like the iPhone and iPad, through apps that exist solely to link to and republish the content of scanlation sites.

The spokesperson of the group, which consists of the members of the DCA, said that to protect the intellectual property rights of our creators and the overall health of our industry, we are left with no other alternative but to take aggressive action. It is our sincere hope that offending sites will take it upon themselves to immediately cease their activities. Where this is not the case, however, we will seek injunctive relief and statutory damages. We will also report offending sites to federal authorities, including the anti-piracy units of the Justice Department, local law enforcement agencies and FBI.

The press release stated that the coalition was targeting 30 websites. Needless to say, the cracking down became the hot issue of the chat rooms and forum threads. Because of the DCA, on June 11, 2010, MangaHelpers, one the most popular resource sites decided to close down its scanlations and translation activities. (In 2009, it had already removed Kodansha’s titles after receiving its cease

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15 See, for example, the discussion in the Anime News Network at http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2010-06-08/u.s-japanese-publishers-unite-against-manga-scan-sites.
and desist letters.\textsuperscript{16} The defunct MangaHelpers evolved in the legal platform OpenManga, an attempt to push scanlators and artists together. OpenManga however shut down not long after. After MangaHelpers, MangaFox too removed hundreds of scanlations of licensed manga. However, users soon uploaded them back. In July, OneManga, once one of the Google’s top 1000 websites, closed down its scanlations production. These are a few instances of how the manga industry is exercising legal control over the Internet.

However, it remains to be seen how effective these measures will be in the long run, since they are not backed by the public. Some pointed out that people who don’t care about supporting the industry will just go find scanlations in other places. Many though, seemed to be happy about the industry going after scanlation aggregator sites. Are scanlators just “ignoring” intellectual property? Are they really “unconcerned about copyright” (Barbrook 1999, np)? Or are they putting up a struggle over industrial legal ownership and control? I focus here on scanlators’ ethics and norms about industrial legal ownership and control of manga culture. Where do scanlators draw the boundaries to their own access and participation?

All of my subjects showed to have some copyright knowledge, and to be aware of the illegality of their actions. A few reported having received cease and desist letters by publishing houses. None of them described themselves as being anti-copyright. They vouched for free culture, but they respected the right of the author to make a living out of her property (cf., Lessig 2004, xvi). Furthermore, most made a distinction between publishers’ and author’s rights. They said they respect the right of the author to be acknowledged for her work, to have her work protected, and to make a living out of it. Thus they showed to support author’s moral rights: “to control the attribution of a work, to withdraw it from circulation, or to protect it from mutilation or distortion by unwanted adaptations or alterations” (cf. Tushnet 2007, 61-62). As produsers, my subjects too expressed the wish to be able to be credited for their work; to control its circulation - even if they understood that, on the internet, this is next to impossible; and to protect it by manipulations by others. For example, there are groups that ask other scanlation groups the permission for retranslating their scanlations into another language: they don’t take the work done by others teams without authorization because they don’t want their own work to be taken that way. There are other groups instead that don’t care about asking permission. There are some that have rules that say it’s acceptable to scanlate other teams’ projects if those are inactive for a number of months, or if they announce they had dropped the series. However, as an interviewee put it, these rules are punctually broken.

It may be true that “protection against distortion conflicts with much fan creative activity” (ibid.), but many of my subjects legitimized their theft using the same argument. Many said that theirs is a way to correct the undesired distortions perpetrated on the original text by the official translators. Most claimed they don’t accept that the publishers ought to be the only ones to control the circulation of the works when their slow licensing, insulting reproduction, and not universal distribution systems leave their demands for fast, qualitative, not censored, and easily accessible content unsatisfied. Put in another manner, my subjects contested reproduction and distribution monopolies.

Their self-polishing ethics and norms in regards to announced, licensed, or published manga show that they are aware of the necessity of respecting copyrights for sustaining the business model of the industry (cf., Azuma 2001, 62 on the conservative aspect of otaku culture). Needless to say, their ethics and norms about what is acceptable to scanlate varied. For instance, there are groups which claim to cease scanlating when the title is published. Others state they stop scanlating when the title is licensed by a publishing house. Others again say they drop a project when a publishing house announces their intention of licensing and publishing the title. Of course, there are more differences since some groups wait for the acquisition announcement/licensing/publication of the manga in their mother tongue, while other are already satisfied with the English version.

Reasons my subjects brought up for ceasing the scanlation of a project were: a sense of correctness in the regards of the publishers and the authors, and the belief that acting this way, they might avoid legal problems. Nevertheless, their policies usually present exceptions. As some interviewees explained, it’s difficult to let go of what they love; it hurts to see one’s own work being “wasted”, “throw away” when a publishing house finally starts to publish the manga they had been scanlating for years, soon catching up with them. So, it happens that for some particularly adored manga they make exceptions. An instance of justification for doing spoiler chapters is that they are unsatisfied by the rapport quality/price of the official translation which features print, adaptation and editing mistakes. Nevertheless, as they added, if the publishing house would ask them directly to cease and desist, they would renounce to the project. Most of the subjects reported that One Piece, Bleach and Naruto are always the exception to the rule, since these commercial hits attract users, i.e., attention to their sites and forums. According to the informants, these manga give “bragging rights”. But it’s not just about scanlating “famous stuff to be famous” and keep alive their community; it seems that also staffers’ availability increases for these popular series. All these examples of exceptions obviously point out to the limitations of community self-policing, self-regulating mechanisms.
As a nostalgic interviewee reflected, these ‘unwritten rules’ worked back in the day, when there used to be standards and the community used to be a community. Scanlators knew each other, they respected each other. Nowadays instead you have some people getting into the world of scanlation without respect towards the community, and the licensing companies. Problem is, he pointed out, that what’s happening with Naruto/Bleach/One Piece is pretty much spread to other series. Nowadays, if a series gets licensed, nobody even notices or cares. Why?

According to my subjects, this is possibly due to two main reasons: first, apathy; second, they know there’s no potential legal ramifications towards them. For example, when Viz asked the group MangaStream to cease distributing their Weekly Shounen Jump series, MangaStream complied, but also wrote a letter of complaint. They pointed out three major problems: (1) while Viz may have succeeded in shutting down the biggest group, there are plenty of other groups around ready to fill in the void; 2) Viz doesn’t offer a better or faster alternative than MangaStream or those other groups because it is something like three weeks behind the scanlation community on every Weekly Shounen Jump series; moreover, the argument goes like this: “You guys license it for America, but I’m not in America, I’m in Italy (or insert other country here) and we don’t get your volumes”; 3) once the scanlation gets to the aggregator sites it’s game over for Viz, for even if these sites make thousands of dollars every day from taking scanlations and hosting them there, their servers are hosted in another country and thus won’t get shut down. As argued by some of my subjects, Viz who is owned by Shueisha and Shogakukan, two of the biggest manga publishing companies in Japan (together with Kodansha), could catch up with scanlation sites tomorrow if they wanted to. However, intellectual property and bureaucratic paths of license acquisition are big obstacles to distribution and will keep them from catching up. As all of my scanlators pointed out, the distribution in the world of an increased variety of manga will be the result of scanlation, not of the publishing houses that cannot publish everything due to the organization of licensing, censorship and the market.

Almost all my subjects agree upon the fact that there are two things that will always go in favor of the scanlators. (Besides the fact that they can avoid the licensing step). First, scanlators don’t spin the text or try to Americanize it as Viz and TokyoPop have been known to do. For example, as an interviewee illustrated this, GTO prequel Shonan Jun’ai Gumi was serialized in Japan in the same magazine GTO was, i.e., targeted towards kids; but when TokyoPop licensed it, they labeled it 18+, adults only, and completely fluffed up the dialogue. Pretty contradicting steps if one considers that if you are going to label it 18+, there should be no need to tone down the text and have it sound abnormal: “Teenage thugs don’t call each other “dumb butts””. Second, scanlators

17 See http://mangastream.com/content/jump.
can publish what they want, not only what sells. According to most subjects, companies should license more different series (not only hits) and bring them to their audience faster without waiting years for deciding if a series like Naruto would be worth licensing. As an interviewee said, they should take example from the French companies that are doing great. For example, 20th Century Boys is one of the most popular seinen series over the last 10 years or so in Japan. It sold millions of copies in Japan and get greenlighted for two movies. It was completely published in French before Viz even got their first volume out. By the time Viz got their first volume out, the whole series had been completely scanlated for over a year and a half. Three interviewees reflected that trying to suppress piracy as reaction to a cultural and social problem doesn’t work, not if you don’t solve the problem at its source. So, they suggested, instead of fighting piracy, copyright law should be re-regulated and those who put online material which is otherwise not available (hence no damage to the author is caused), shouldn’t be prosecuted. They pointed out that there is an excessive enrichment behind. One said that it is legitimated that the author has the right to receive a compensation for the exploitation of her work, but that piracy is related not to a problem caused by the author but by the publishing houses and distributors that make money with high prices and dumbing down the art, and do stupid things like cutting pages to cut the printing costs. There are two different logics operating here, the one of the market and the one of the art (cf., Williams 1981, 99-100).

One of the subjects commented that as iTunes is a good thing for music, something like that for manga will be good too, but that at the moment digitized manga are still too expensive. He argued, like many others, that there should be a balance between price and quality and that you absolutely cannot ask the consumer to pay the same price of a printed manga for a PDF. A few claimed that scanlation may help increase sales because of sampling effects.

Almost all reflected that until there is the opportunity and the way to do it, the free distribution of manga won’t be stopped. They argued that at the moment, they offer something more than the market. A day may come when the market finds solutions to its problems and substitutes scanlators, making them redundant. That day the game will be over. These days however there is a place for scanlators, and it’s the cultural niche.

4.8 Attitudes towards the profit motive

As I presented above, none of my subjects claimed profit as a motivation for doing scanlation and they generally deprecated “non-serious people” who “don’t truly love manga” and “just do whatever is the most popular”; who engage in “commercial piracy operations” making money out
of scanlations, for example, by selling scanlations on eBay, asking for donations, selling ads space on their sites, and uploading scanlations to hosting sites such as MegaUpload and EasyShare.

My subjects reported they have never made a dime off of scanlations and don’t plan on starting. One of the interviewees, for example, reflected that it is hilarious that some groups demand that they get a certain amount of money per month to provide their costs, when they spend little to no money on anything because they are hosted on a cheap forum, they buy no volumes, they don’t host a IRC bot or a DDL site… But they absolutely need 90 dollars a month to keep running. Why is scanlation essentially anti-profit? And where do my informants draw the boundaries for the commercial exploitation of their free labour? If the motivations professed for scanlating were various, the degree of consensus among my subjects about the importance of leaving money out of the picture is startling. It seems that scanlation is work done for love by fans for fans. It’s free like in free beer, and in free of doing what I want, and so it must stay. The following patterns emerged.

First of all, all of my subjects argued that scanlation is an hobby, not a job. Many said that if they were paid they wouldn’t have as much fun. And that’s maybe also because of that that they don’t ask for money, for not having then someone who can tell them to do for work what they do for love. Hence, second, it’s a way to preserve autonomy. An interviewee, who worked for some years in a publishing house adapting manga said that when she stayed all day for work on the comics, she couldn’t bring herself to do the same thing during leisure time. She also said that besides being paid, there is another substantial difference between scanlators and pros, which is autonomy: autonomy of organization and autonomy of choice. She reflected that on the job one must respect the deadlines and is obliged to optimize, for instance by using a limited number of fonts to reduce risks of making mistakes. Finally, a few of the interviewees pointed out that since they don’t own the rights and ergo what they are doing is already illegal, if they would also make money they would be even more prosecutable as criminal offenders. In other words, they don’t want to increase the chance to be sued.

For these reasons, my subjects, more than resisting commercial and profit motives (cf., Jenkins 1992, 163) operate a distinction between cultural production and distribution work done for money under the capitalistic logic of exchange, and cultural production and distribution work done for love during leisure time, as Duncombe argues in relation to fanzines (1997, 95). My subjects are waving the flag for work which is self-fulfilling, work in which you have autonomy over what to do, how to do it and for whom you are doing it for. Scanlations are not products but artifacts produced for love, autonomously, for themselves, for the fans and potential fans. They are not producing for money and they don’t expect the community to mutually return their gifts. Scanlators decided to play the game without money for being free. As it emerged previously, their individual
rewards comes from peers acknowledgement and the feeling of self-fulfillment that comes from learning and be satisfied of what you are accomplishing (cf., Lévy 1995, 29; Anderson 2009, 189).

Publishers and pros instead work under the logic of capitalism and it is reasonable to expect them to want to capitalize fan productive free labour, and control their valuable activities (for example, see Terranova 2000, 36-37; Hills 2002, 36; Sandvoss 2011, 5-54). Of course, my happy subjects didn’t claim to be alienated workers, harnessed produser communities, playbourers, and so forth. Although self-organized, most of them make use of infrastructures provided by the corporate world, such as ForumFree, the platform which enable users to create with a few clicks their own forums and blogs for free, but in exchange of their data and their attention, since the owners of these free services make money by selling advertising space. As we have seen, my subjects don’t ask for their monetary share because, in the first place, they don’t want to be paid; secondly, they think that it is fair that the owner of the free hosting services make some money out of it if they got to use it for free. O’Reilly made the same point speaking about YouTube users who don’t think that they are donating to the company, but that they are getting a service for free (quoted in Lessig 2008, 224). However, as Bauwens noted about the antagonism between participation and exploitation, it really is a sort of win-win situation: the fans get free hosting while the industry get cost-free feedback on niche market trends and values. Furthermore, as some of my subjects understood, they are aware of the necessity of the manga industry to make profits and they wish they could help it by offering themselves up as a talent pool, and by pointing out deserving titles.

Some of them hope that the publishing houses monitor the response their produsage have within the manga fandom community in order to influence companies licensing acquisitions. That is to say, they want to have a say in the manga industry decisions. They want to participate in decision-making. Most of my interviewees also said that scanlation is useful for promoting manga among new generations and sampling the manga before making a purchasing decision (cf., for instance, examples brought by Jenkins 2006c; Leonard 2005a, 2005b; on fandom contribution to popularize anime; and Macias 2006 for manga).

Speaking about their personal experiences, my interviewees reported that it is not rare that through scanlation they discover new authors and end up purchasing everything published. But they also specified that they buy the manga they scanlated (if it is eventually published in Italian) only if it is worth the money. Three scanlators said that manga volumes are collectible objects and therefore must be produced with the highest quality standards. They were all skeptics about assuming that there is a direct correlation between scanlations and falling sales. In fact, measuring the effect of scanlation on the manga industry in term of sales is quite impossible and unrealistic, since one cannot test what would have happened in the market without scanlation. Some say it’s
killing the industry, while others points out, for example, that the most scanlated series out there- *Naruto*, is also the one that sell the most.

My subjects gave instances of how the value created within their produser communities might be exploited in praxis by the corporations. A few of my interviewees have reported that their groups have been contacted by the publishing houses for various reasons. First of all, one of the interviewees recalled that a young publishing house that acquired the rights of a series that her group had been scanlating for years contacted them and offered to buy their translations. They didn’t accept for it would have been against the ethics of the group to do so. Furthermore, their translation was a re-translation of an English scanlation. Secondly, others said that some of their staff members have been recruited to work in the industry as translators from Japanese, and as editors. For example, an interviewee recalled that one of his best translators was what he defined a pro-level translator (what probably Leadbeater and Miller (2004) would call a Pro-Am) who was translating the series *Beck* for his team; he would always post his translations publicly, and he had translated all the way to volume 19. Then *Beck* got licensed, he was hired to translate it, and he had to take all of his *Beck* translations down. However, the interviewee pointed out that he didn’t know if they hired him knowing that he had already been translating the series. Thirdly, four interviewees believed that, in general, the publishing houses observe the feedback the scanlations (probably more the English ones than the Italian ones) have among the users in order to choose which titles to publish. Others remembered having been invited/menaced to remove scanlations from their sites, or warned that x title had been bought and they could work on it only until the first volume would have come out in Italy. One interviewee said he has the general impression that some publishing houses are quite tolerant (e.g., J-Pop), others hate them (e.g., Star Comics), and others are trying to find out a way to exploit them (e.g., Planet Manga).

I tried thus to get hold of Italian manga publishers in order to scan their attitudes towards scanlation. Only a small publishing house answered asking what I wanted from them, and after that, I never got any answer back. So, to get an idea of what the industry attitudes towards scanlation are, I had to look online, in particular, on the English-speaking side of the world. As Lee correctly pointed out, reactions are mixed (2009, 1018-1019). Some artists are flattered, other are enraged. Some figures active in the manga industry see scanlation as an opportunity, whereas others feel threaten by it. For example, Steve Kleckner, former Tokyopop’s vice president of sales and distribution, said in regard of scanlation: “Frankly, I find it kind of flattering, not threatening” and that:
To be honest, I believe that if the music industry had used downloading and file sharing properly, it would have increased their business, not eaten into it. And, hey, if you get 2,000 fans saying they want a book you’ve never heard of, well, you gotta go out and get it (Yang 2004).

Comic creator and manga editor Jason Thompson who have been working for example for Viz and Del Rey, has been quoted saying that although few or no American manga publishers ever mention them, scanlations have become extremely important to the American manga scene. They’re a way of gauging a title’s popularity. If the scanlations are popular, you know that a title has a fanbase (quoted in Macias 2006).

Interviewed by insidescanlation.com, Thompson wrote that the existence of scanlations didn’t really cause any alarm in the industry until around 2002-2003, when the manga market started to take off. It was only around then that it became big enough for industry people to take notice (and get worried about it). 18

Former Tokyopop Associate Publisher Marco Pavia, who worked in the marketing department, when asked by insidescanlation.com if he has ever read any scanlation, answered that he looks “at what’s new or popular with an eye toward acquisitions”. He also wrote that many in the industry think that scanlations hurt sales. However, he added that the “industry simply does not have resources to police these sites”. 19 This is quite understandable. It’s enough to think about the failure of the RIAA and MPAA in fighting piracy in their respective media business sectors to realize that the less lucrative and powerful manga industry doesn’t have the material resources to go after thousands of scanlations’ sites. In this regard, Toren Smith, the founder of Studio Proteus, argued in 2006:

When the Japanese publishers ask me why I don’t go after the scanslators--or worse, the scanners--I reply that if the RIAA and MPAA, with their (literally) billions of dollars and hundreds of lawyers can’t stop bootlegging, what chance do I have?

I know from talking to many folks in the industry that scanslations DO have a negative effect. Many books that are on the tipping point will never be legally published because of scanslations. This is not only unfair to the honest fans, it is robbery from the very creators the otaku profess to love.

19 From insidescanlation.com’s interview with Marco Pavia, Associate Publisher of Tokyopop, September 2009, at http://www.insidescanlation.com/interviews/tokyopop.html.
And yes, the neo-otaku (my neologism for the new generation of entitlement-minded and puritanistic manga and anime fans) have mutated into a truly awful bunch of people, which is part of the reason I dropped out of the biz. Why work twelve hours a day, seven days a week for such an audience?20

Simon Jones of Icarus Publishing, when asked by insidescanlation.com about when he discovered scanlations and his attitude toward them, answered:

Notice? Wasn’t the Internet made for scanlations in the first place? It certainly feels like they’ve been around from the very beginning… before Tokyopop, before Viz, before there was a sizeable North American manga market to speak of. Hey, I’ve read scanlations. Everyone in this industry has at one point or another, and many probably still do; anyone who says otherwise is lying, over the age of 50, or not a true fan at all.

As for my attitude towards scanlation groups when I entered the business proper? It didn’t really change. By that time, I’d grown out of it. Ooh, DMP licensed Berserk, guess I don’t need to follow Band of Hawks anymore.21

Furthermore, pointing to the fact that sometimes scanlators are hired as professionals, Jones wrote that it’s not rare that scanlators do a better job at translating “slang and pop culture references that suit-and-tie agency professionals”. Moreover, some famous group receiving millions of hits such as Toriyama’s World became for a while (in 2002) Viz promotional partner in catching readers subscriptions for Shonen Jump in exchange of some bonus and a paid server (the move rose a wave of criticism within the community who blamed Toriyama’s World of selling out and reacted providing free publicity for Jump’s competitor– Raijin Comics); while scanlator’s manga news services such as MangaNews, or Nanoda, have strict alliances with the manga industry. Regarding the impact on the industry, Jones said that

I don’t think any publisher has a problem with scanlation readers, as long as a modicum of civility is maintained. At our core, we’re all fans. Nobody wants to turn this into an us-versus-them kind of situation. Context matters, intent matters. Scanlators aren’t doing it for profit, they’re not out to hurt the publishers overtly. They’re not the same as pirates. We know that. But that doesn’t mean the two don’t often have the same net effect on the business. 22

However, although, as it came out from the interviews, scanlation is first and foremost a free service by fans for fans, there are some individuals that are in it for profit. The most famous example is the project started by Tazmo, the webmaster of NarutoFan, who began to ask users for donations to maintain his many servers. Moreover, he even offered the users a sort of premium

22 Ibid.
account for downloading *Naruto* behind the payment of a monthly fee.\textsuperscript{23} Many of the free online readers/aggregator sites make money out of ads, like OneManga; MangaHut; MangaToshokan; MangaFox; etc. Also, as pointed out by the interviewees, there are groups of teens that make money with download numbers by uploading scanlations to sites like (the now defunct) MegaUpload; and there are individuals that just scan the printed translated manga and upload them online without changing anything, just to make available manga for free for those who don’t want to pay for it. Besides the material fact that the industry doesn’t have enough money to take legal action against those pirates, Jones highlights two issues about fighting manga digital piracy. First, the fact that fighting online piracy would require extensive discussions with Americans, Japanese and other jurisdiction; second, the lack of “public backing”:

> It’s not that I think most people actually support manga piracy, but not enough care about the issue passionately to rally around a solution. No law is enforceable without the support of the people. But this is why, even though we may not necessarily take direct action against pirates, I feel it is necessary to call out those who would make completely baseless, senseless, immoral justification for illicit sharing. If the lies and misconceptions go unchallenged, the situation will never improve.

> I’m going to say something to the pirate apologists that other publishers have refrained from because they have better business sense than I: If you’ve never had to talk to a retailer who’s cutting manga books because “all the kids just steal it online now,” or have had to explain to a mangaka why his royalty payment was so low, then you don’t understand what piracy is doing to the industry. Stop pulling assumptions and rationalizations out of your nether regions, please.\textsuperscript{24}

The publishers thus obviously know about scanlation and use it to find what’s popular and new talents. But that’s not all. Two of my subjects has a direct experience of having their labour exploited by the industry. They reported working for the Digital Manga Guild, which is an instance of a new way of commercially approaching scanlation’s produsage. Scanlation with a copyright clearance, if you want. Hikaru Sasahara, the president/CEO of the small LA publisher Digital Manga Publishing (founded in 1996) decided not long ago to co-opt scanlators for the localization of his licensed titles. Sasahara blames the current licensing system which includes paying to the Japanese a guarantee of thousands of dollars upfront, for the fact that consumers are not able to get hold of manga. His solution? The Digital Manga Guild. As it is stated on its website:

> *Digital Manga Guild* is an online open platform community. Our mission not only helps bring thousands of manga to fans everywhere, but gives anyone the chance to gain paid experience in the manga industry.

\textsuperscript{23} See http://stoptazmo.com/.

Anyone is free to join and help us revolutionize the way manga is made. Show us what you’ve got and take our localizing tests. We are looking for both teams and individuals as Translators, Editors, and Letterers.

Once you pass our localizing tests, you will be assigned titles from Digital Manga Publishing, Inc. Once titles are completed, they will be up for sale at emanga.com as digital editions. You, our Japanese publishers and DMP will be paid based on sales. (http://www.digitalmangaguild.com/).

As mentioned, the business model involves three parties: the publisher in Japan who provides manga titles which have never been published before overseas; hundreds of manga translators, letterers and editors which should localize the manga; and the DMP, which will take care of getting the licenses and putting the translation on the web on their emanga.com store. After registering, scanlators are supposed to pass an entry test, organize in small teams and get their pack of manga containing up to six titles and start the translation, editing and lettering processes. After checking the quality, DMP uploads them on their online store for sale. Sales revenues are supposed to be shared between all parties.

My two subjects had the following to say about Sasahara’s approach. The first works as a team manager for one of the groups that localize manga. He also translates and edits. He reported that a group is usually constituted by a translator, an editor and a typesetter. DMP and the Japanese get 88% of the revenue share while they get the other 12%. He mentioned that DMP hands out a package of projects to each group and the 12% is based off the overall sales of the final products. He said that he thinks that there’s not a big enough audience for DMP’s products to get rich anyway, so he is doing it more for the resume padding and to see if he can see himself translating professionally. He pointed out that pros don’t make much anyway so you get into it because you love it. He said that the last package was six months for three volumes and that he is not used to that amount. Usually he only manages two volumes with his scanlation group. If his group members aren’t finishing stuff in time and he can’t get word from them, he will just do it himself, as he did in his old group. He mentioned that he works full time and so it’s like another 20-30 hour job on top of that, but he is work-a-holic so he gets fidgety when he is not doing something productive.

The other interviewee does the typesetter and until now has done one assignment, which consisted in a package of three manga. She said that the DMP’s people aren’t well organized. For example, they are slow in replying to emails and evaluating entry tests; the distribution of titles is random; guidelines are contradictory; the level of the entrance tests are really low compared to scanlators’ as well as the quality check which is very superficial. Moreover, it seems they have allowed the guilds to menace scanlators that scanlate the same titles. As the other interviewee, she said that her group is supposed to get 12% of the revenue share. However, she specified that DMP
pay them *only* if they sell more than 100 US dollars and every six months. She commented that since the titles on which they work are awful and sold at too high a price, she doubts they will ever get paid.

It seems obvious that those two subjects are working for free and that a lot still has to be done in favor of more equity between DMP and the scanlators. This and the other examples illustrate one thing: my subjects are really critic of actors who exploit them and their prodused artefacts without their consent (e.g., other groups who steal their artefacts and upload them on hosting sites making money with ads). Nonetheless, they aren’t in principle against commercial operators harnessing their productivity (cf., Bruns 2008, 32) by, for instance, monitoring their communication on their sites and getting data about what they like, and so forth, and they don’t hesitate to make use of free services provided ad-hoc by profit seeking corporations (such a ForumFree). However, commercial operators interested in harnessing scanlation community should be aware of the fact that scanlators don’t appreciated closure; that is to say, to be locked into proprietary frameworks which limits their possibilities of choice, their organizative autonomy and don’t allow them to openly distribute their artefacts. Scanlators want to control the means of produsage.

Reflecting about the possible future business models of the industry, all subjects observed that the paper remains undefeated. With the benefit of the doubt, they claimed that who wants to pay, buys the collectible printed version. Who doesn’t, will always read scanlations, in whatever way they will be distributed– by websites, IRC, torrents or pigeon mail. They all agreed upon the fact that digital manga should be given away for free, or in any case, low priced otherwise they won’t have a future. The few of them who experienced reading digital manga reported that the offer is still way behind compared to what is available in Japan (i.e., bunko editions) and that reading a manga or a scanlation with Kindle, for instance, is a frustrating experience because it is almost impossible to read the microscopic fonts.

Also, they invariably pointed out, the manga should appositively been created thinking digital and not just converted from analog. It could work, if the distribution would be done through a very good application who enable users to access and read a vast range of manga for free with the maximum ease. This could compete with visiting 30 scanlators’ sites looking for a chapter; wait for RapidShare to buffer; unzipping and downloading special programs. Several reflected that the publishing houses should risk more, create the appetite, compete, be professional whereas today there’s apathy, no entrepreneurship, no investments. They mentioned that it’s ridiculous that the industry isn’t able to compete with teenagers who fail conjunctives. The corporation, they argued is
always better, since they have at their disposal the original copies of the Japanese titles. Hence, there’s no point in qualitatively comparing scanlations and official translations, many reflected.

One theme emerges (again). Although as a matter of fact, scanlation is a self-organized and self-managed model of manga reproduction and distribution which poses itself as an unofficial alternative to the corporate industrial model, most of my subjects expressed support towards the industry. They don’t want the death of the commercial manga machine. They demand to improve it. To translate and distribute more and diverse manga. And until the industry won’t comply, they will continue to try to improve it by themselves, from within it, by their own means.

If it seems realistic that fans increased ‘control’ over intellectual property which they don’t legally own but distribute openly damages the manga industry based on faked scarcities, it also seems that scanlators’ productive innovations can be profitable for the industry. As Larkin (2004) pointed out in relation to Nigerian cinema, the infrastructures of the ‘legitimate’ industry are often constructed using the blueprint of the infrastructures of piracy. For example, it was fans who started manga publishing companies in North America and Western Europa. It was fans who started to produce manga closely similar to the authentic artwork, without flopping the pages, translating SFX and adding colour, decades before TokioPop started to do it upon Toriyama’s request in 2002. Of course, this was initially done for reasons of simplicity, and not so much for high fidelity issues, or in a coordinated attempt to have an impact on the institutional formats used by the industry. James Rampant, who analyzed how Japanese comics came to the West by comparing official translations with scanlations, showed how “translational norms have developed particularly because of the impact of translation strategies adopted by scanlation groups and their impact on current publishers” (2010, 221-222). In other words, produsers’ pressure has policed manga translators norms within the market. This of course, could be also interpreted as an instance of market segmentation: fan values and authenticities are sold back to them (see also Jenkins 1996b, 30). Fan knowledge labour, universally accessible online, renders highly visible what the fans want. And the manga industry watches. The problem is, does it also listen to them? Does the industry really cater to their interests and needs?

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Answering the research questions

I hope that with this work I made a contribution for the better understanding of communal produsage practices, by the produser themselves. As Jenkins has been claiming over the last 20 years, although there is a lot of talk about participatory culture, media, and technologies; in the end,
collaborative online production, usage, and distribution happens because of the people who communicate and socially network with each other on the Web. Therefore, an understanding of those people is highly recommended in the first place, to anyone who has to deal with them. Moreover, since in the actual technosocial environment produsers operate in different ways than consumers and users, it is even more important to explore and analyze their processes and principles.

The aim of this thesis was thus to analyze what differences there are in the practices and understandings of scanlators, with a special focus on their ethics and norms about intellectual property, and their attitudes concerning commercial motives. The main research question the present work answered was then: How do scanlators understand their cultural production, reproduction, and distribution practices; with a focus on which meanings do they ascribe to copyright infringement and the anti-profit motive? Furthermore, this research has also found answers to the following subquestions: How do some become scanlators? What are the main motives of the scanlators? How is scanlation organized? How is it managed? Which beliefs underpin it?

My sample was limited (e.g., it didn’t include informants from groups that make money out of scanlation—something that may be done in future studies), therefore I cannot claim that I have found all differences that there are in scanlation. Qualitatively interviewing scanlators about what happens in the scanlation community, taken here as a specific instance of produsage community and project, I gained an understanding of scanlation’s participants, processes and principles. Scanlation is certainly not a monolithic culture. On the contrary, it’s as messy and unruly as participatory fan cultures could be. The evidence analyzed in my study shows that scanlation is primarily free and affective collaborative produsage by fans for fans. Its official purpose is the universal, accessible (open and free) distribution of quality and/or speed translations of manga. It is an alternative cooperative reproduction and distribution system self-organized and autonomously managed by enthusiast and skilled participants who connect with each other through social networks across time and space to translate and share manga.

Operating in online spaces under conditions of probabilistic and equipotential contribution, and granular and shared content, as offered by the new technosocial affordances (Bruns 2008); scanlators groups and teams, some more strongly than others, embody the four key principles of produsage: open participation and communal evaluation; fluid heterarchy and ad hoc meritocracy; unfinished artefacts and continuing process; and common property and individual rewards (ibid.).

As the results show, there are variations among the different range of groups and teams. Although the technosocial space of the scanlation community is by default open to new participants,
and actively seeks to turn leechers into scanlators, that is to say, users into produsers (cf., Williams 1981, Duncombe 1997); there are groups within the community that filter participants by examining their skills and competences with entry tests. This, since the scanlating process is composed by a sequence of individual modules which, though not too composite (cf. Bruns 2008, 20), require a particular set of skills, a certain degree of expertise, organizational autonomy, and of course, a lot of enthusiasm. The positive or negative result of the test will then determinate if the volunteer has what is required to participate in the project. Therefore, even if the characteristics of their online settings allow for probabilistic and equipotential contribution, and granular and shared content, and thus anyone is assumed to have equal opportunities to self-select himself and share his know-how to solve a specific task within a group, if this will be the case depends on the principles hold by the social agents who already constitute the group. As Bruns notes, the forms that produsage can assume vary according to where, online, it takes place; what the object of production is, and the type of community working on it (2007, 1).

As it emerged from the interviews, in the case of scanlation, it is really the interactions among the individuals who form the different groups and teams working on various projects that determinate the forms that produsage can take; since, by and large, the scanlation community takes advantage of the same media and communication technologies to scanlate their object of fandom, and to communicate, collaborate and compete with others within and beyond the community. Thus, even if the networked technosocial environment of scanlation affords the possibility of solving granular tasks in a probabilistic, not hierarchical way, and to share the outcome of this process in the information commons (cf. Bruns 2008, 19-20); there are variations in the degree the groups are (1) open in regard to new participants, to the distribution of the prodused content, and to the open sharing of their other resources); (2) organized, and (3) managed. In brief, these vary from generally open groups to less open groups: while some of these are organized ad hoc and heterarchically, others have developed over time organizational structures that mirror the industrial, professional ones, that is to say, they operate in less decentralized and more hierarchical ways; furthermore, while some groups share their resources and artefacts without conditions, others try to maintain a certain amount of control over them.

5.2 Impact and implications of scanlation

I turn now to discuss the impact and implications of scanlation communal produsage processes and principles- as they were reported by the scanlator themselves, for the manga industry; copyrights, commercial operators interested in harnessing scanlation produsage, and cultural life and society.
### 5.2.1 For the manga industry

Taking advantage of the convergence of participatory media and technologies which lowers the entry barriers for engagement with media production and usage (but by no means determinates it), scanlation on the frames of Web 2.0 poses a twofold challenge to the emerging digital manga industry, as scanlators simultaneously compete and cooperate with the traditional industrial model of manga publishing.

As emerged from the accounts provided by my interviewees, on one hand, they support the industry of manga as their cultural translation and sharing practices give visibility to and promote content and authors that are unheard of or marginalized, helping to create a word of mouth effect and a fanbase for diverse titles which are not (yet) in the mainstream, for free. In this sense, they work as a free advertising agency for the industry. Furthermore, as acknowledged by publishers, and by some scanlators, scanlation groups function also as a talent pool and as a cheap market-research tool.

Some commentators could interpret this as evidence of new forms of domination, commercial cooption, surveillance, exploitation, and so forth (see, for example, Kücklich 2005; Burkart&McCourt 2006; McCourt&Burkart 2007; Ritzer&Jurgeson 2010; Fuchs 2011; Gogging 2011). However, if manga producers and distributors harness and harvest the participatory practices of scanlators, these on the other hand, are not to be trifled with. As a matter of fact, scanlators do not only cooperate with the industry but also compete with it. Their open, free, ad hoc and heterarchical alternative model of (unauthorized) manga translation, reproduction and distribution constitutes a corrective to the many, real or perceived, shortcomings of the traditional model: it is free, faster and universally accessible; whereas the latter is expensive, slow, and geo-locked.

All considered, scanlators’ highly visible cultural participations on online environments push the manga business to change, innovate and adapt to their demands for universally and instantly accessible, free digital translations of Japanese releases. In this sense, scanlators’ produsage and their artefacts, as alternative and competitive to the industrial production process and products, participate in cooperation and competition in shaping the business of manga production, reproduction, and distribution in the era of the convergence which is, as Jenkins claimed, both a top-down and bottom-up process negotiated between producers and consumers (2006b).

### 5.2.2 For the copyright regime

Obviously, scanlation is an imperfect solution: the object of produsage, which is also scanlators’ object of fandom, that is to say the printed manga book, is first commercially produced and copyrighted, and then taken, reproduced, translated and published over the Web without the
author’s permission. That the scanlating process, as many other instances of fans’ participatory practices (cf. Jenkins 1996b, 24-25; Fiske 1992, 42), wouldn’t take place without the unauthorized borrowing and open distribution of intellectual properties which are legally owned by the manga publishing industry is a problem. Especially when, adopting a prohibitionistic attitude (cf. Deuze 2007), the latter criminalizes - without making distinctions - those illegal instances of appropriation and menaces potential lawsuits, fostering discourses which describe its most loyal fans as part of a deranged fringe of youth culture which ignores and disregards intellectual property law.

However, as my findings show, my subjects observe intellectual property. They do not, in principle, reject and/or resist copyrights. I found that scanlators criticize the cumbersome licensing system and right handling process, not to mention economic and editorial censorship and Americanization, as damaging Japanese intellectual property exports and imports by slowing and dumbing down the distribution and the offer of manga content. Moreover, as authors of content themselves, they show to pay respect to author rights, in particular moral rights (cf., Thushnet 2007), that is to say, the right of the author to be credited for a work, to control its circulation, and to protect it from distortion. They don’t refer to political anti-copyright movements to justify the continuous scanlation of announced, licensed, or published series; but to their status as fans loving their fandom object, and to the right to protect the original work against unwanted distortion by official translators (cf., Daniels 2008). In the case of the scanlation of mainstream series such as *Naruto*, *One Piece* and *Bleach*, they pragmatically acknowledge the fact that they keep scanlating these works even if they are available commercially because they help attract and keep an audience and thus to maintain their websites, blogs and forums alive.

Folk culture has always been engaged in media culture reproduction, until when the stories people could tell haven’t been bought and locked down under exclusive copyright frameworks by mass media conglomerates, which then sold them back to the consumers as spectators to be consumed in awe as finished products (for example, see Martin-Barbero 1993; Jenkins 2006b). If industrial information ‘products’ can be considered finished is a debatable issue; for they certainly are not considered as such by fans (cf., Fiske 1992). Fans are willing to collectively take advantage of the means of production and distribution which are accessible to them thanks to the new technosocial tools to not only get them without permission, but transform them and re-distribute them as they like. The time issue is particularly important. Scanlators reproduce, translate and distribute in no time at all content which will never be published outside of Japan by legal means because of market strategies and rights handlings struggles among copyright owners and publishers; or that will take approximately 10 years to be produced and distributed through legal processes and channels. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that, then, it will be accessible. For this reason, I
personally think that a limitation to copyrights should be introduced for foreign content which is not available commercially in translation.

So, on the one hand, we have the scanlators who start to break their self-policing mechanisms in relation to licensed and commercially available series; while on the other hand, we find the Japanese publishers and copyright owners who, after turning a blind eye towards scanlators’ participatory activities for decades considering it as potentially beneficial, start to adopt a prohibitionist approach (Deuze 2007) and criminalize fans’ participatory activities. As Jenkins points out referring to the breakdown of the moral economy of the media (1992b; 2006), this is the result of market shortcomings coupled with moral failures: media producers don’t trust the former media consumers anymore, and vice versa.

Thus, to re-establish the social contract between the producers and the produsers, users and consumers, trust and emotional bounds should be rebuild (Green & Jenkins 2009). The manga industry would be better off abandoning the prohibitionist approach and keeping up with catering to produsers needs and interests. On the other hand, produsers should take greater responsibility and really cease and desist the distribution of unauthorized translations of commercially available manga.

5.2.3 For commercial approaches

That cooperation between producers and produsers is possible and preferred over competition is also indicated by scanlators’ attitudes concerning economic questions. As the results indicate, although my subjects aren’t motivated by money, they don’t, a priori, despise attempts by individuals and groups within and beyond the community to capitalize on scanlation produsage, if those are carried out in line with the practices, ethics and norms that are already in place within the community.

Scanlators’ rejection for the profit motive, or the fact that they online spaces are in general free from monetary considerations, as it emerged from the interviews, it’s less a rejection of the principles of capitalist exchange and more a self-defense and preservation mechanism.

First of all, being aware of the possibility to be sued for copyright infringement, they don’t want to aggravate their case by adding the possibility of being seized for criminal copyright infringement for scanning copyrighted works and distributing unauthorized translations over the web for commercial gains. The produsers that do this then, are heavily condemned because they put the whole community of scanlators in danger.

Secondly, avoiding money is a way to preserve their spaces as free, self-governed and self-managed; that is to say, to maintain the autonomy of the community. Scanlators claim that
accepting money will take away the freedom to determinate, the power to control what they want to scanlate, how, when, for whom and so on and so forth. This point is also supported by their recurring mentions of scanlation as an hobby, an activity they do for love, work which is creative, truly satisfying and fulfilling (cf., Duncombe 1997, 95).

Thirdly, as their attitudes towards commercial motives show, my subjects are not in principle against the idea of having individuals and groups within or beyond the community to commercially harness produsage, if this happens on their own terms. For example, many scanlators use free-hosting services which are set up by commercial third parties harboring the produsage communities (Bruns 2007; 2008). A few of my interviewees who work in produsage spaces at professional levels, as Pro-Ams (Leadbeater & Miller 2004) if you want, have been employed by the industry or want to be hired by the industry. Thus, they are trying to bridge the gap between media produsage and media production. Furthermore, scanlators expect the publishers to monitor their online spaces and extract information for catering to their needs.

However, they are against commercial approaches that use their prodused artefacts (e.g., their translations), that manipulate them, and that lock and exploit the produsage community for profit, that is to say, in Bruns’ terms, commercial approaches that harness, harvest and hijack the hive (2008, 32-33). These approaches aren’t perceived as legitimate since first, scanlation produsage is based on copyright infringement and thus its artefacts aren’t just unfinished but illegal. In this sense, one could only wonder how professional and ethical it could be to want to exploit these processes and artifacts for profit. Second, as the two interviewees whose work had been co-opted by Sasahara’s DMP project reported, it seems that producers and copyright holders invariably keep all the revenues while scanlators do all the work (cf., Lazzarato 1996; Kücklich 2005; Goggin 2011). On the long term, illegitimate approaches could only delude fans’ expectations and alienate them further.

It seems that manga producers still don’t know how to properly harness scanlators’ “collective intelligence” (Lévy 1995). Again, it might be suggested to commercial operators to think more about catering to the community needs than coming down over scanlators’ produsage spaces trying to control and exploit their free and affective labour. As I mentioned above, anyone dealing with participatory fan cultures online ought to look into their practices and understandings in order to know what are their main motives, how do they organize, how do they manage their community, and which kind of ethics and norms do they already have. Only this way they can be approached in a way which will be perceived as legitimate. Otherwise, as Bruns (2008) notes, any attempt to capitalize on their produsage that doesn’t respect their unwritten rules is inevitably doomed to fail.
One of the major problems which has been highlighted by the interviewees, is that they feel as the manga publishing houses don’t really cater to their needs, but they tolerate them or try to find ways to exploit them. Moreover, they claim publishers don’t really know how to treat web content. I think my subjects have a point here. Web content, as understood by my subjects, cannot be treated in the same way as printed content. If the printed manga books are collectible objects that you buy and consume as they are, digital manga instead, should be free, shareable, and transformable.

One last issue I would like to address is, considering the great amount of projects started and never completed, lying around in scanlators’ archives, waiting for a someone interested enough to pick them up and push for their completion, how reliable is the process of scanlation, and when is it reliable? (There is no point in asking how reliable are their products since first of all, they are not products but unfinished artifacts; and secondly, they are illegal.) As we have seen, scanlation is a voluntary and temporary engagement. Therefore, one central question for commercial operators interested in harnessing their produsage process is how to keep produsers motivated and make them do even more. Money isn’t the solution. Scanlators don’t want to be paid. Considering their interests and needs, I think that maintaining the information, knowledge and culture shared in the commons and building a strong community are central to answer these questions; as scanlators are rewarded by the esteem and the mutual enrichment they gain from peers for being able to contribute to a common purpose, that is to say, “sharing the love” for manga.

5.2.4 For cultural life and society

As Deuze notes, we live in a world in which “we can only imagine a life outside of media” (Deuze 2012, x). Media are ubiquitous and pervasive (Williams 1981, 54; Silverstone 2007; Deuze, 2009, 2012, xi). Consequently, the question of who owns and controls access to the means of media production and distribution becomes crucial; for, being able to control access equates with the power of the people to be in control of their life, their processes, their practices, their creations (cf., Mosco 1996, 25). Considering that nowadays a few media conglomerates own and control media; non-market and non-proprietary spaces such as scanlators’ websites, forums, blogs, and so forth, are to be welcomed as a self-organized, self-managed collaborative and cooperative alternative which enrich and diversify media culture.

What are scanlators doing? They are reading, watching, listening and consuming the content which the manga publishing industry offers. They are using it and criticizing it, for there are some things that they like but others that they don’t like. They identify problems, debate solutions, and make decisions. Taking advantage of the technosocial tools available to them in that moment, they
autonomously organize with others to do something about it, to change what they don’t like. This way, they make commercial Japanese popular culture more their own (cf., Benkler 2006, 15).

There are so many basic skills and social competences that consumers and users turned into produsers learn by participating in scanlation. They learn how to access and get information; how to use information and communication technologies; how to critically read media texts; how to relate to other people; how to network; how to work and collaborate with other people; how to build a thriving community; how to get attention; how to promote themselves, their interests and their work; decision-making; negotiation; consensus making; leading by example; to take responsibility for themselves, for others, for their work, for the consequences of their actions; and so on and so forth. Obviously, all of this knowledge accumulated while playing/working, deeply emotionally invested in the community of shared interests, can spill over in other realms of life (for example, see Benjamin 1998, 101; Duncombe 1997, 15; Toynbee 2000, 162; Van Zoonen 2005, 52-68; Jenkins 2006b).

In my opinion, the most important competences produsers learn in scanlation spaces are social. Scanlation is no individual task, it is social and it educates people who often have never met offline but with whom they share common interests to take action collectively, to work together to change something they don’t like in the world around them. The scanlation community learns while playing how to harness what Lévy’s calls collective intelligence (1995): how to connect with each other and self-organize their various know-hows in ad hoc and heterarchical ways to reach a common goal. In their networked spaces, scanlators feel like they can really participate as equals—not bounded by age, sex, class, ethnicities, and so forth, but only by their know-how and potentials. Their work - what they do - matters. Therefore, by reflection, since fans’ creations are like extensions of themselves (Sandvoss 2005), they too matter.

Moreover, they learn to do things for themselves on their own, that is to say, to be autonomous. In their open, ad hoc, heterarchical spaces, scanlators really determinate on their own, what to do, how to do it, and for whom they are doing it for. And since, as Duncombe points out, “doing it yourself is the first premiss of participatory democracy” (1997, 129), it might be written that by participating in manga produsage one learns how to become free. In this sense, scanlators and their spaces act as complex agents for social development and engagement.

5.3 Conclusion

The following concluding remarks on scanlators participatory practices online were inspired by an open lecture given by Jack Halberstam, Professor of American Studies and Ethnicity, Gender
As mentioned, many of the categories with whom we were used to explain and order life—work/play, professional/amateur, production/consumption, and so forth, don’t work anymore. Artifical distinctions are breaking down. Sometimes it seems that it doesn’t even make sense to talk about norms anymore. People are disappointed by norms. They break norms. Halberstam, while examining shifts in gender and sexual politics, argues that we are at the end of the normal, even beyond normal (2012). Indeed, when infringing copyright to reproduce culture for open distribution for free becomes a practice for a whole generation of people, you may think that he is right.

The discourses of economic actors and policymakers criminalize illegal instances of participatory culture as piracy. On the other hand, consumers, users, and produsers tend to legitimize their actions by arguing that sharing is caring. When scanlators, as impatient and frustrated fans, take in their hands the power to control the access to the means of production and distribution in order to reallocate Japanese commercial popular culture resources on their own, thus changing the social relations between producers and consumers of manga culture turned into produsers, they become more free, and independent.

Scanlators’ self-organized communities show one thing: that an improved, more equal, inclusive and responsible alternative to the many cultural, political and economic failures of the capitalist industrial system is possible. Unfortunately, it seems that fearing instability and uncertainty, those complex and fluid new sets of interactions tend on the long term to step back from their new cooperative forms of produsage, organization, management and distribution, as some groups fall back into the exclusive, competitive and hierarchical production processes and logic of capitalism (see fig. 11 below). I write unfortunately because the argument that scanlators make in their favour is that their processes and principles give space to more meaningful, although temporary, relationships between dispersed others. Theirs, are alternative forms of kinship: not based on hierarchy, and thus more equal, and not based on money, and thus more free. Not on wealth or fear, but on love. Thus, as Duncombe points out, but in relation to zines, “They are politics by example” (1997, 196). Maybe then, produsers shouldn’t just test the boundaries of cultural industries consumer capitalism. They should break them.
Figure 11: Scanlation groups with small teams of scanlators scanlating projects in cooperation and/or competition
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Appendix: Interview guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thanks for your time. I’m Stephanie. I’m writing a thesis about the world of scans. I am interested in your experience as scanlator. It will take about one hour. Anonymity and confidentiality are guaranteed.

Breaking ice
- Present yourself. Who are you, what do you do. Describe your group(s).

Scratching the itch
- Tell me how did you start participating in the team. What made you begin to scanlate?

Practices
- Tell me about your activities within the group(s). What’s your role? What do you do? Which are your tasks? How do you do it? What makes you scanlate successfully? What could hinder you?

Organization/Processes
- Tell me about the scanlation process. How do you go about scanlating a chapter? Describe what do you do from the beginning to the end. How is it organized? How do you control it? Which type of technologies do you use? How is it financed? How do you communicate with each other? How do you coordinate? How do you share material? How do you evaluate each other work? How do you know that your job there is done?

Structures/Relationships
- I want you to talk about the way the group is managed/governed. How do you get the job done? How do you decide new projects? Who is in charge? Who take the decisions? How come? Tell me about the power structure of your team. Tell me about the relationships within your team. What kind of relations do you have with other groups? What kind of relations does your group have with other groups? Have you made joints? Who is in competition?

Ethics, norms, beliefs
- I want you to talk about what kind of beliefs, rules and norms do you have in your team. What’s the politics of the group? What kind of rules do you have? Who established them? What is your sharing policy? How do you get credited for your work? Which are your most popular projects? What make you scanlate licensed/published series? Some groups have special rules regarding making profits out of scanlations, what do you think about it? How do you tackle this issue in your group?

Experience/Motives
- Tell me about your experience as scanlator. What’s in it for you? What do you like to do? What don’t you like to do? What makes you continue? What made you stop/What could make you stop? What make you comfortable about participating in what are you doing? When does participating become impossible? What will you miss? What won’t you miss?