

Unplugged - Voices: **The Internet's Own Boy: The Story of Aaron Swartz (2014)**

Research in management and organization may only gain by being inspired from arts, culture and humanities in order to rethink practices but also to nourish its own perspectives. Life in organizations is artificially separate from ordinary life: all of mundane objects are thus conducive to astonishment, inspiration, and even problematization. The unplugged subsection “voices” gives the opportunity to academics and non-academics to deliver an interpretation about an object from the cultural or artistic world. Interpreted objects are or not directly related to organizational life, resonate or not with the moment, but share some intriguing features. These interpretations suggest a patchwork of variations on the same object.



Directed by Brian Knappenberger
Production: Luminant Media and Unjustsus Films
<http://www.takepart.com/internets-own-boy>

Introduction - Aaron Swartz, and civil liberties at risk

"I don't like standing near the edge of a platform when an express train is passing through. I like to stand back and, if possible, get a pillar between me and the train. I don't like to stand by the side of a ship and look down into the water. A second's action would end everything. A few drops of desperation"

Sir Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill¹

The feeling of shame is one of the biggest motives in philosophy, assured Deleuze, reading Primo Levi. In one way or another, it may even be the common thread that binds across the diversity of professions, experiences and life choices the contributions that follow and that examine this special Aaron "If This Is a Man," Swartz.

What kind of despair pushes one to accomplish the irredeemable act? Can we see a unique pattern in the suicides of Primo Levi, Stefan Zweig, Kurt Cobain or the eternal temptation of a Winston Churchill to throw himself overboard? We think here, of course, of Emile Durkheim, the great scholar of suicide. But rather than citing him, we preferred to hear a few testimonials.

The four contributing authors deliver their versions and translations of the phenomenon of Aaron Swartz and in light of their respective fields and concerns. This is what comprises the richness of these intersecting viewpoints, whether they come from an entrepreneur or a writer intrigued by the power of finance and media; a journalist who likes to keep a low profile yet who is quite aware of the workings of the world of politics and media; one of the finest connoisseurs of the music industry; or a professor of management who has crossed the paths of the three others by way of his projects. All of these contributors also share a common passion and conviction, namely that language is and will always be a weapon. In these regards, we will read the essays, explanations, alarm bells and warnings as invitations to think further. In all cases, what unites these texts is the common hope that one day the world of tomorrow could be something other than what it has always been; namely one where the masses would have the right, the opportunity and the means to live their own life more than living a life determined by a small handful of people in small, closed circles.

Because the main and foremost message of this Aaron Swartz, who we imagine so well riding his bike, was: don't ever give up when others are seeking to take away your freedom.

In this publication, the editor Olivier Germain took the freedom to introduce this somewhat disparate and far-fetched set of views into an academic community that is, by and large, more used to operating in the more formal peer-review setting. Perhaps this is also why these writings also give rise to something that seems like an aberration: something that neither a machine nor any algorithm could ever conceive of. With this aberration we associate the image of a kid, with a smile on his face, revealing in the mischief he was fomenting when he connected his hard drive to the server and started downloading—yet all the while probably unknowing of the true risk he was taking on.

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1. Extract from *Churchill - Taken from the Diaries of Lord Moran : The Struggle for Survival, 1940-1965*, Norman S. Berg Publisher, Limited, June 1, 1976. Cited by Ghaemi S., "Winston Churchill and his 'black dog' of greatness," *The Conversation*, Jan. 23, 2015. <https://theconversation.com/winston-churchill-and-his-black-dog-of-greatness-36570>

The editor as well as the authors are grateful to the editors-in-chief of the magazine *M@n@gement* for having engaged in this initiative and for giving them considerable leeway in completing it in their own terms.

How we killed AARON SWARTZ

Brian Knappenberger wanted to honor his friend's death with a freely licensed film, available free of charge on the internet, thereby embodying the values of one of the biggest defenders of knowledge. He created a work that did justice to his friend, about the massacre on intelligence.

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A genius of the internet with an angel face, unknown to the public and not taken to distinctions and awards or to showy effects, Aaron Swartz was very much loved in his close circle. The latter included people who had made a name for themselves, such as Tim Berners Lee, inventor of the Web; Larry Lessig, the expert on cyberspace law; and Cory Doctorow, agitator of the free internet. It also included close friends and accomplices who more or less understood Aaron's social and especially his moral codes. Together they shared dreams, projects and a part of their childhood.

I never knew Aaron; I didn't have the chance to get to know him. Yet some of his friends became mine. And through them I realized that I was, indeed, intrigued by him.

Aaron worked non-stop and lived only for his ideas. He was an old soul in a young body, which he neglected. The latter retaliated by torturing him with an ulceritis colitis that laid him flat. Gradually, he began to distrust everything he swallowed—food as well as information.

Aaron was meticulous, demanding, probably unbearable. He insisted on taking a path of integrity, contemptuous of facility. He fought against complacency. Persuaded that he was right, he could get quite riled up when he felt misunderstood.

Aaron had grand ideas and was already showing the traits of an almost frightfully ambitious man. He was the king of hackers, in a noble sense: he liked to understand how systems worked (computers, the media, politics) with the view to ensuring that these can benefit the greatest number of people and the public at large. According to him, the internet, as the global cortex that never sleeps, was intended to help humanity come to fruition, to assume its real power and *raison d'être*. His goal was not to get rich, famous or immortal but to advance humanity by giving it a consciousness of itself. Solitary, independent, arresting, Aaron found himself, knowingly so, at the center of a historic opportunity. He understood that technology could be used not only to have fun and entertain but also to enslave and subjugate.

The time of his birth coincided with the nascency of the internet. He grew up with the internet, and died with it. At the very least, the internet sweetens the pill. It is a place for sharing the extraneous, for doling out likes and looking at cat photos. It allows one to forget reality, or at least to render it more palatable. Yet, the essence of the material is sealed behind pay-for-access platforms or submerged somewhere in the masses of "media porn." As the promise of emancipating or advancing humankind, the internet is a powerful surveillance tool, and one that defines dreams, tastes and desires. It shapes destinies, even life itself. As such, it is a path for attaining freedom yet also a tool, if not a weapon, for imposing social control.

The FBI had had him on their radar for years. Aaron was too talented, too free. Money did not interest him. He had become a millionaire almost by accident, as a cofounder of the highly popular social media network Reddit). As a staunch defender of the freedom of knowledge and information, he decried the media and the publishing industry. Finally, rubbing shoulders with the established intelligentsia of Silicon Valley at the tender age of 14, he was indeed a prodigy.

Aaron wanted to act, to have an impact on reality. Yet he never recovered from what he witnessed. He saw idealists become ruined by marketeers and businessmen, saw the internet get stripped off its substance on the altar of profit. He

saw money take over the playing ground, as it had done in politics, education, nature and human relationships. Aaron saw, before everyone else did, corruption in action. More than a programmer, he was a genius. A visionary, he understood the matrix and the forces at work.

For the authorities, Aaron was dangerous; not because he was stealing credit cards but because he wanted to liberate knowledge. Throughout his life, Aaron worked for the dissemination of knowledge, with open access. He wanted scientists to be able to capitalize on each other's work without having to pay or start from scratch. He downloaded, in huge volumes, scientific publications protected by copyright from the servers of MIT. His aim was to create a huge open access encyclopedia of research. Yet, he crossed the Rubicon and was drawn into a Kafkaesque trial. The US government stopped him by prosecuting him and threatening him with 35 years in prison. Essentially, Aaron's exceptional destiny was thwarted by the fortresses of a post-911 America. His fault was to have believed deep down that his country valued intelligence and courage. He believed in the good intentions of his country. In rights, justice and common sense.

The insanity of the plot launched against him by Judge Holder stopped him in his tracks. America hates intelligence once it begins to veer from its logic of profitability. It is suspicious of those who raise questions and holds those in contempt who confront it with its own mirror image.

Ironically, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which draws its astronomical power from trading a locked code, annually invests nearly twice the WHO budget for scientific research projects. It announced in 2015 that it would from then on make each of its donations dependent on the removal of copyright, as aspired for by Aaron Swartz. Yet that came late, much too late. Aaron did not live to see his impact on reality.

The life of Aaron was one marked by a terrible misunderstanding and a tragic reflection of what has become of the leading power in the world. It also shows that the ignorance of one's contemporaries is possibly more difficult to grapple with than the maliciousness of a government.

He sent out warnings, but we looked elsewhere. Fighting alone, he eventually capitulated. In this way, Aaron has become a symbol for youth and for all those who are in some way seeking to transcend beyond a predetermined course.

AARON SWARTZ, patron saint of the free internet

On December 4, 2015, three weeks after the deadly attacks in Paris, *Le Monde* published an internal memo from the French Ministry of the Interior about the fight against terrorism on the web. In the wake of Information Act, proposed after the attacks of Charlie Hebdo and a Hypercacher in January, and enacted in July of 2015, what could be more logical for the French government to do than to exploit the fear or ambient apathy that prevailed in the population in order to enforce further liberty-destroying laws.

Candice Marchal, french journalist

The main targets of the memo were free wifi and shared connections, internet cafes, telephone cards and, above all, a tool still poorly identified by the public at large but well known to web actors and defenders of anonymity: TOR (aka The Onion Router)

Created to counter a growing state surveillance apparatus, TOR is a navigation system preserving the anonymity of research and exchanges. As such it is solicited by journalists and political dissidents in danger in their country of origin and who seek to communicate without risk. TOR is thus a platform offering "hidden" services, the most essential of which, especially for journalists and their sources, is the protection of anonymity in the most secure way possible.

So, in reading this article from *Le Monde*, which shows yet again how the state erodes our civil liberties, some bird names verbal abuse came to mind, followed by, very soon thereafter, a first and a last name: Aaron Swartz.

I'm neither a programmer nor a coder or cracker/hacker. However, my curiosity as a journalist led me to read an article a few years ago about a young American who fought for the free internet combining technological prowess, strategy and political activism. Aaron Swartz was then facing multiple charges based on a law on computer security dating from 1986. In light of the rapid pace of evolution of technologies, tools and practices, it goes without saying that this law was very outdated.

Unfortunately, despite receiving considerable backing from others on a continuing basis, Aaron Swartz was unable to bear the weight of this trial and killed himself on January 11, 2013 in New York, at the age of 26 years.

One year later, the film director Brian Knappenberger presented a documentary tribute at the Sundance Film Festival called *The Internet's Own Boy: A Story of Aaron Swartz*—obviously open access, as Aaron would have wanted.

The documentary opens with the following reflection by Henry David Thoreau (*Civil Disobedience*, 1849), which pretty much sums up the tone of the film:

"Unjust laws exist; shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once?"

I urge any journalist to see this documentary. Indeed, I consider it essential for understanding the pressing need in this day and age to fight for our freedoms as citizens and journalists and for the protection of sources.

Aaron Swartz's story is characterized by innovation, commitment and self-education, and by putting his skills and computer engineering genius to the service of others, driven mainly by a spontaneous and pragmatic altruism.

The documentary by Knappenberger retraces the path of Aaron since his childhood: curious, with a zealous love for learning, he knew how to read perfectly at the age of three and began, at the same age, to be interested in the family computer. At 12, he already knew how to program and create InfoBase, which can today be regarded as the predecessor of Wikipedia. At the age of 13, Aaron

was on a committee that developed the RSS (dissemination and content update tool) together with Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web and himself an ardent fighter for an open internet for all. From age 15 on, Aaron examined the question of copyright and joined Lawrence Lessig, a renowned advocate of internet freedom, around the Creative Commons project seeking to advance the ready availability of culture on the internet. He subsequently launched Open Library, a free database listing all books published in all languages, in whole or in part.

Thus, Aaron Swartz positioned himself clearly in favor of a cost-free, open and shared internet from a very young age. He was committed to ensuring public access to the public domain. To demonstrate the failings of PACER, the pay-per-page Public Access to Court Electronic Records system, he even downloaded 20 million pages from the Federal Court. Indeed, this action earned him his first run-in with the law.

Contemptuous of the education provided at school, Aaron compensated his absences with extensive reading on the networks. He could not understand why academic publications were retrieved by a company that then resold them on a subscription basis to universities and students. And he decried the inequity of this system in which students from poor countries were thus unable to gain access to these publications. In his eyes, the legacy of scientists should be free and not appropriated by commercial companies.

In 2011, connecting to servers at MIT, he orchestrated the massive download of 4.8 million scientific articles. Yet this time he was dealing with secret service agencies whose role had been strengthened considerably with the Patriot Act, resulting in a legal case that took on epic proportions.

The early 2010s were characterized by widespread social unrest, WikiLeaks, the Arab Spring, Anonymous and protest movements. Aaron developed political aspirations. He worked against SOPA (Stop Online Piracy Act) and PIPA, two bills that threatened the freedom of expression and civil liberties of internet users. He created Demand Progress, a pressure group using the internet to influence political parties about public freedom, including through large-scale online petitions. Eventually he was followed and supported by all the web giants and the two bills ended up being postponed.

But as Aaron's activism stepped up, the response of the government likewise heightened, whereby the charges against him increased from 4 to 13.

Long before Edward Snowden, Aaron Swartz was worried about governments spying on their own citizens. Before his death, he was working on Secure-Drop, an information protection site that served in particular to allow whistleblowers to send their documents without jeopardizing their safety. This secure data transmission was to become TOR—the famous TOR which the government of France now wants to ban.

I was quite dismayed in early 2015 when the Bill on Intelligence (*Projet de loi relatif au renseignement*) was underway to see such few reactions from journalists. The bill has since been (largely) enacted in the whirlwind of the urgency and emotion of the attacks earlier that year. As a surveillance law, the Loi relative au renseignement now fundamentally affects our individual freedoms not only as citizens but also as journalists, since it eliminates all means to secure our sources. In other words, we may soon face insurmountable obstacles when seeking ways to encrypt our messages.

Watching the documentary film we are sometimes inclined to question the point of Aaron's actions in light of the gargantuan feat he was seeking to accomplish. However, his tenacity and the resistance he mobilized succeeded in tipping the scale. It stopped the passing of SOPA and PIPA and forced the government to acknowledge and respect what a small consortium of experts had to say about a communication system that they themselves had trouble understanding. Perhaps that is what is lacking in France: a committed public figure and collectives who can work hand in hand with the legislature. There is Quadrature du Net, which does phenomenal work in teaching and activism yet which lacks human and fi-

nancial resources. And in Brussels there is European Digital Rights, a digital liberties advocacy group, which barely has a handful of individuals where a staff of 20 people would be needed.

Aaron's legacy is immense in the fields of IT and cyber activism. Beyond the human loss, we also regret the loss of a free spirit, a gifted rebel and a member of the generation called "the children of the internet."

After his death, two US senators reformed the 1986 law about computer fraud. This new law is called Aaron's Law.

AARON SWARTZ, Or a mythology resurrected

« *Unjust laws exist; shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once?* »

In some ways, this question posed by Henry David Thoreau is a self-fulfilling prophecy, such as prevails in mythology, in that it invites us to envision such a transgression in the first place. Indeed, is injustice not a scourge to overcome “with all necessary means,” as Malcolm X said? Enter Aaron Swartz, the perfect candidate for the role of the Shining Knight of the internet. Young, of a stunning beauty unique to timid types bordering on autism, endowed with a superior intellect ... yet with one sizeable flaw. In the French slang (*argot*) of French rap, he might have been termed a “baptou fragile” (in turn derived from “toubab,” an African term for white person), also used more colloquially to refer to a Caucasian male susceptible to having frayed nerves. These emotions, combined with the phenomenal pressure of a court case, led him to commit the irreversible act: a suicide committed in his Brooklyn apartment on January 11, 2013, by hanging. At 26 years of age. His body was discovered by Taren Stinebrickner-Kauffman, his fiancée.

Arrested two years earlier, almost to the day, on the Harvard campus by a secret services agent, Aaron was in many ways treated worse than a terrorist involved in the bombing of the twin towers. His crime? Having copied almost all the information contained in JSTOR, an MIT database (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) containing a vast amount of academic articles. He did so first via his official account as a university researcher at Harvard and then, once blocked due to an excessive download, through his own laptop which he connected directly to the MIT server. Aaron’s laptop was discovered by employees in the closet where he had hooked it up. Yet, instead of unplugging it, the university authorities left it in place and installed a video camera allowing to identify the culprit once he or she came to recuperate the laptop. Smile, Big Brother is filming you.

What followed was a spate of incidents having a butterfly effect, or rather an atomic bomb effect, which brought the young prodigy to his downfall. A million dollars in legal fees, the sword of Damocles of a prison sentence, a criminal record, plus being treated as a threat to society. ... All that for so-called computer crimes motivated by the rather noble ideal that information should belong to the people and not to corporations who sequester it and disseminate it only for financial gain.

When I saw the documentary film *The Internet's Own Boy: The Story of Aaron Swartz*, I discovered the sad story of Aaron. A fighter for the web who during his short life had a huge impact on the internet operation (see his Wikipedia page, a site on which he collaborated extensively, to learn about his commitments, discoveries and activism).

First observation: I’m convinced that somewhere in Hollywood, on the desk of some film producer, perhaps that of Harvey Weinstein, lies the draft of a screenplay based on the dramatic fate of Aaron. Leonardo Di Caprio is perhaps a little too old for the role, but one might imagine a Jesse Eisenberg, who played Mark Zuckerberg in David Fincher’s *The Social Network*, embody this idealist and libertarian Icarus who burns his wings when confronted with the faceless monster that is the power in place. I am sure that within a few years, at maximum, Aaron will be resurrected in a blockbuster movie full of suspense, even if his sad ending

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would require a departure from the happy ending tradition of hollywoodian blockbusters productions.

Second reflection: in discovering the history of this internet wunderkind, I remembered a rather mainstream TV series from the 1970s, *The Persuaders*. In the space of a few seconds, I saw images unfolding before me of the parallel evolution of the two heroes, played by Roger Moore and Tony Curtis. One was born rich and moved effortlessly from a director's office to a polo match, and the other was born poor and grew up in a ghetto, scrambling to make a living by any means possible, such as playing the horses and flirting with illegality. In my mental analogy, Roger Moore was Aaron Swartz and Tony Curtis was Eazy-E, the founder of the rap group NWA (Niggaz With Attitude). Indeed, as Swartz, NWA was under heavy pressure from the authorities, in his case the FBI.

Yet, what really happened to this group that made the headlines and put gangsta rap on the map of popular music, this ultra-violent version of hip hop of the late 1980s? After the release of their debut album *Straight Outta Compton* (followed by the eponymous Hollywood biopic of the group released in late 2015), NWA received a letter from the FBI, stating it was at odds with one of the songs from the album, namely "Fuck Tha Police." The manager of NWA, a Jew from Cleveland who had managed the American tours of David Bowie and Van Morrison, was terrified. Eazy-E, the group leader, was too. They knew that the FBI, founded by the Machiavellian J. Edgar Hoover, was an organization that had broken more than one individual, union, party or collective, be it black or white, over the years.

The first reaction was fear. The FBI had killed Malcolm X, say those who are always quick to scream conspiracy—yet who nonetheless proved to be right. Then they had the bright idea, which changed everything and turned the tide, of evoking the First Amendment of the US Constitution, guaranteeing the freedom of expression. As perhaps *the* most powerful weapon of the constitution, this amendment forms the backbone of the American mentality and the main means with which to forge an ultimate consensus. And in the context of that process of contesting the threat from the FBI, a truth rose to the surface: the letter had not been sent by the management of the institution but by one of its zealous employees. The man had spoken in the name of the institution without having been mandated to do so, and was subsequently demoted. Ultimately then the FBI, while utterly disapproving of the "Fuck Tha Police" song, conceded that the group has the right to express its hatred of the blue uniforms of the LAPD (Los Angeles Police Department). Thus, freedom of expression won over censorship, with the result that there was neither a trial nor the type of ruthless defamation such as Malcolm X had been the victim of. On the contrary, the FBI intervention had earned NWA free publicity and added to building up its profile as a storied public figure. As "the group that defied the FBI," NWA had thus enhanced its standing. Eazy-E died prematurely too, but unlike Aaron it was not pressure from above that got the better of his life, it was AIDS. He died at the age of 30, at the peak of his glory.

A violent death can be one way in which a reputation in the cyberworld can become immortalized. As an icon who suffered a tragic ending, Aaron Swartz may also conjure up Kurt Cobain, frontman of the rock band Nirvana who committed suicide and who represented the rock revival of the 1990s. The commonality between Aaron Swartz and Kurt Cobain? Both would have been under the spotlight for a long time had they overcome their demons and an inherent sense of guilt. It's not primarily their tragic death that made them a legend, it's what they did with their lives. Killing himself at the age of 26, Aaron was almost part of the 27 Club, which Kurt had joined on April 5, 1994 by shooting himself with a shotgun in his Seattle-area home.

Their premature endings remind us that genius is fragile, as befits a babou. Aaron, had he been born in Compton, would have been perfect in the role of a gangsta rap nerd in Niggaz With Attitude. The brain of a rap-slash-Bonnot

Gang. If he had assimilated the hip hop codes, he too would have known that the only way to escape from the deadly ambit of a government attack is to return its own violence against itself. In other words, he would have retaliated with a counter-attack that reversed the roles and transformed the assailant into a victim, as in Kung Fu. Then, as a Kung Fu master of the 2010s, he would have been the geek who can nonetheless stay balanced while doing a sidekick against the U.S. Attorney Carmen Ortiz. An enticing scenario for an alternate history novel.

“Show my head to the people, it is worth seeing,” said Georges Jacques Danton before being guillotined. To this day, the spirit of Aaron Swartz appears to linger, haunting the conscience of those who pushed him to his death, and to serve as an emblem of the struggle of the altruistic David against the Goliath of repression. The achievements of Aaron Swartz will continue to be prized by a grateful cybernation who will ensure him an electronic perpetuity verging on immortality.

Like an ancient mythology, resurrected to life.

We all have something of AARON SWARTZ in us.

I don't remember what day it was. But I know perfectly well that it was by telephone that the news reached me. He was dead. I didn't know, then, how old he was. I would have guessed, say, 29 years. It was in 2006, or 2007. No, neither of those. I don't know anymore, namely because all this time I've been devoting considerable energy into *not* thinking about it. Even if the tears, which often catch me by surprise, come back regularly to remind me of this day which I thought to have been erased from my consciousness.

Thus, it wasn't entirely a coincidence that the two songs that first opened my eyes to the universe of the rapper Booba were "My definition" and "Pitbull." On the one hand, this "*on y pousse un peu d'travers / Skate, BMX, et puis nique la RATP / Tout ça rythmé de rap music.*" On the other hand, "Pitbull" has extracts from "Mistral Gagnant," by the French singer Renaud. "Mistral Gagnant," perhaps my favorite song, without doubt because it makes me think of Aaron so much.

In any event, it is this song that I chose to sing on the day of the funeral of my grandmother. Of course, in memory to one of my « bro' », primarily, yet secondarily for her, who had buried a son and a grandson in the space of only a few weeks. Just before leaving herself.

After having sung, before letting her go, I also read a poem by Rimbaud. The one which speaks of a sleeper, "The Sleeper in the Valley." It is this poem that his grandmother - who was also my grandmother - made me work on when I was a kid. On that day, the "Sleeper in the Valley" was for me, obviously, the face of her grandson. Not me, the other one. The one who died. On a turn in a night club that had gone wrong, it seems. Who finished first as scrap, outside. And for him, on the bottom of a cliff. Without life.

When it hits you, you're not ready. Since nothing can prepare you for that. All images get shuffled up: the granddaughter who grows up without her dad; the pranks we did as kids, during vacations; dinner a few weeks before, when he told me about his passion of photographing people's eyes, "because the eyes are the soul" Then there were his eternal deep waters that he got himself into, like the time he planted his 205 GTI in a tree, and where he too could very likely have stayed. Besides, he was the only one among us, when we were kids and riding bicycles, who managed this performance: end up in a car's windshield with skull fracture at the end of the journey.

I remember listening to rap with him. I thought it would go wrong, and that he was listening to pretty weird stuff, stuff that I hadn't been listening to any longer for a long time. Not, in any case, since I had seriously considered that the studies were over, that it seemed that I should become a bit more serious, like having kids and earning a living.

Just before he died, he seemed to be catching a glimpse of a way out. I found him calmer. He had left the Paris region and his stomping grounds. He had separated from his partner. He claimed that they had managed to not tear each other apart too much, to ease the transition for their daughter.

Once in the south, he intended to stay there. There was sun. He had plans to open his own garage one day. I even think he found a new girlfriend, the one I met on the day of his funeral, and who chose Bob Marley as a soundtrack accompanying him until the very end.

Why does all that in general and he in particular come to mind when I think of the first time I met Aaron Swartz? Because Aaron was not dead at the time, yet he made me think of him. Because Aaron's battles echoed some of his, and ultimately mine. For example, saving the freedom of the internet could also be seen

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as a way of tearing down the walls that keep youth from escaping the *banlieus* where they are stuck. In that sense, how can one *not* be captivated some way by this hacker? How can one *not* love him, this David who decides to tackle all these Goliaths?

When I learned of the death of Aaron, like all others who had heard of his story and his career, I was obviously shook up. In fact, for all the reasons stated above, I was more than shook up. Because deep down, Aaron's rope struck me as eerily similar to the bottom of the cliff where he had fallen—or maybe even pushed.

Strangely, the death of Aaron quashed any interest on my part in the question of open access. Probably because it was he, or his energy, who touched me more than the meaning of his struggle. This is how I resolved the issue: I read Bourdieu again, revisited Foucault, and made sure to cull out the essential from Girard.

I had long since lost faith in people, or mankind. I had learned a long time ago that today's idealism and good intentions often pave the way for tomorrow's hell. And, under these circumstances, it seemed worth a try to at least try to cope. To get ahead in a life where the key to survival means above all to resist the temptation to haggle over the which idiots and nutcases fight over.

The aspiration to "change the world" had for a long time been something that I was increasingly leaving up to politicians seeking electoral victories. Because it was since the beginning of time that the rich exploited the poor. And because in this field, the human imagination is fertile and the paths without limits ...

When *The Internet's Own Boy* came out, I watched it the same day. I was like everyone impressed with the story of the genius and his dreams and mad ambition. And I soon realized that beyond the story about Aaron as an individual and public figure, the film also did its part to establish the debate on open access.

Yet, I quickly realized that that debate wasn't mine. I saw through the inanity of this battle, or at least through the motifs justifying it. Because, if providing free access to articles were to suffice for people to read them, then college professors and high school teachers wouldn't be so bad off. And they wouldn't need to put so much effort into making recalcitrant kids take to reading. It is also because too few articles in my field seemed important enough to read, or to be governed by anything other than the enhancement of its author's profile, to make us fight to the extent of risking our lives to make them available and accessible to all. I even gave my own broadcast where I advocated people not to die for open access, now that Harvard had demonstrated the best way to increase the impact factor and visibility of its professors. This came, of course, at a dawn of a new digital era where more than ever before the winner takes it all and the rest of the world is left to share the crumbs.

In that context I gradually left Aaron aside. In any event, his image, or aura, was already voraciously exploited by those driven by promoting open access. In that context, one never thinks much about the employees of publishing houses, which could have well been riding on the same wave as those publishers who have, obviously, benefited more than their share.

In this world that was looming on the horizon, where open access was at the point of making the strong even stronger, and the weak even weaker, where the only law that was going to impose itself was the law of the jungle, I therefore sought other means to be faithful to the memories of those who have risked and lost their lives.

That's how I came to examine the issue of hip hop in general and that of rap specifically. To this way of getting in tune with the body and of coping with despair by putting it into words, images and music. These rap rhymes, flows and samples are strategic sources of regeneration since they empower people by giving them a voice. In one of Booba's raps, he sees it as "*des risques et du son, ma définition*". Some risks, some sound, his definition. Just beautiful.

This music, this poetry of a new kind, triggers effects. It enters your blood stream, takes over your brain and moves your body. Hip hop does not wait for you to come to read or listen to it. It imposes itself through the force of words swayed like fists. It is, in a way, the only way to move forward for those who have never felt rooted in the first place, "*Le ciel sait que l'on saigne, sous nos ca-goules...* Heaven knows we bleed under our hoods ..." raps Booba in "Pitbull." With rap, you discover that you are not alone in bleeding. And from that you draw a new strength: the one provided by the collective when you discover that the defeated are bound by a common destiny.

When I got interested in the hip hop industry, I discovered the trauma of the death of 2 Pac, and that Biggie Small was also part of the pantheon of ghosts. Which is also what renders American culture so uniquely fascinating and revolting at the same time: it worships equal opportunity; yet to achieve this, it gives the right to bear arms, even enshrining it into its constitution. In other words, the right to the American dream for all transpires from every pore, yet it is primarily through weapons that minorities, and especially blacks, die. Thus, although propagating lofty ideals, it ultimately does nothing to uphold them.

A judge will persecute you simply because you did not have the legal rights and the most sacred of rights of all in America is that of property. Whether you like it or not, it's Clint Eastwood, starring in his own film *Gran Torino*, who represents it better than anyone else, this America. Indeed, it is America that wanted to challenge Aaron Swartz. And it is America that would have won the fight in the name of a higher principle without which its multi-cultural society would collapse overnight under the weight of tensions between its communities.

When, following American rap, after the Jay-Zs and Kanye Wests, I became interested in French rap, I discovered Bram's, a best friend of Booba and some others. He committed suicide by jumping out a window. From what I gather, he never managed to leave the ghetto. It was with him that Booba hung out on the streets, and it was with reference to Bram's that Booba has a number tattooed on his face: "*Le negro nous a quittés, j'me suis fait tatouer le 7*" (When the negro left us, I tattooed a 7 on my head)— thereby immortalizing Bram's. Like a figure of impossibility, despite the successes, in spite of everything we want, to overcome his demons. He did not hang himself, like Aaron Swartz, did not "fall" off a cliff either, but threw himself out the window. It is this Bram's whom the song "2 Pac" by Booba is about, to which the video clip "Comme une étoile" pays homage, and to whom each of Booba's concerts are dedicated, as evidenced by the video "Paname." Ibrahim, better known in the french hip-hop industry as Bram's.

Today, looking back on all this with several years of a distance, I believe that we all have something of an Aaron Swartz in us. But just something.

Because the worlds of the internet, Twitter and other arenas are also those where pedophiles exhibit pictures of children playing with peckers of adult men. In fact, we're a little too old to believe in the naive dream that one day there might no longer be night clubs with VIP corners where champagne flows freely. Where some people might find themselves between « good » people. And where there will always be someone who will dream being part of the hollywood game. Because there will always be images that keep me awake, of the Egyptian revolution that eventually finish in bloodshed and rape, on Tahrir Square. Because men go mad when subjugated to the force of the crowd.

So, of Aaron Swartz I have above all this image of someone with an eternally bad conscience for having left his own turf, so to speak, in that he has left so many behind him and cannot take everyone with him. Of Aaron Swartz I retain that he regretted having to go to MIT rather than Harvard, where he might have been better trained in the art of patience and strategy. There they would have taught him the art of boxing with the weapons of the enemy. And he might have been less intoxicated with the dream of an internet that could one day be free and

of the notion that rendering knowledge available ("open") would suffice to make people more interested in it and to use it to change the world.

Had that been the case, Aaron might still be alive. At the bottom of the cliff, we might have found nothing or not, in any case, a dead body. And thus armed, Bram's, perhaps, like others, would not have chosen to give up.

In the terms of a complex dialogical analysis of an Edgar Morin, we might say that we could be happy to cultivate this something that we all have within us, of an Aaron Swartz or a Bram's. But, by fighting every day for it, it may last as long as possible. So, by first taking the example of those who hold on to life rather than those who give up and choose to put an end to their journey, or who take so many risks that they end up smashed against a tree or at the bottom of a precipice.

The best example might be Steve Jobs: What if, after all, death was the greatest gift of life? And if, remembering that we will die one day would be the best means to never give up and stop believing that we could have something to lose? And if one day, like Aaron, Biggie, 2 Pac, Bram's, like all them we were to end up breathless, that would be the first way to expose oneself and to consider that we should be guided at all times by the best of our passions? And if it was the way of thinking effectively that all the rest is, after all, just secondary?

I do not know if Noah Swartz, Aaron's brother, will read this text. But I just wanted to tell him that I felt as if I understood him perfectly by reading his text. That I imagine perfectly how to be the brother of a deceased person, one who was moreover adored, it not the simplest fate. And that he should therefore now try to rap bigger than himself, but above all for himself. Because there he will find a new strength: that of continuing.

That fight is winnable. It is also the best protection against those who project onto Noah Swartz or others the image of the model who represented the missing brother, but which is not necessarily the combat of those who are still alive. Some are obviously sincere. Others may have other ideas in mind. Of those who make you stumble, one day, off a cliff. Empty pockets. Without a phone or wallet. Since they took care to steal them from you before pushing you down.

The fight for open access is ultimately not much when compared with the appetite for knowledge and experience. Because it is that which primarily liberates and emancipates. And this fight is not won by the hope that one day the world might work differently. But by experience and thus through kicks in the mouth, given and received. Until the final gong. Wishing it would sound as late as possible.

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