FCJ-093 Beyond the 'Networked Public Sphere': Politics, Participation and Technics in Web 2.0

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In some ways discussion of the political implications of Web 2.0 reinvigorates a debate about the democratising nature of the Internet that began in the 1990s. The concept of participation is at the heart of many current debates about politics and technology. There are two main reasons for saying this. On the one hand is an ongoing and increasing concern about public participation, or lack of it, in modern (predominantly Western) democracies. This participatory deficit is to be seen in falling voter turnout at elections, public apathy on key political issues and scorn or indifference for elected political representatives. On the other hand, there is a wave of optimism concerning the potential of new technologies, particularly the web, to enable new forms of participation in economic and public life, to transform political debate and citizenship and to renew the ailing (or perceived to be ailing) institutions of democracy. This optimism around participation and politics, while it has played a role in utopian visions of the internet more or less since its inception, has been reinvigorated recently by the discussion around the so-called Web 2.0. This article argues for a much more critical or sceptical approach to the political promise of Web 2.0. Focusing particularly on Yochai Benkler's *The Wealth of Networks*, it argues that current accounts of the participatory aspects of web culture tend to take a rather narrow view of what such participation might mean. However, aspects of the work of Bernard Stiegler, and that of others in the *Ars Industrialis* group co-founded by Stiegler, can help inform a more nuanced account of the relationship between politics and participation. It looks specifically at the arguments in Marc Crépon and Bernard Stiegler's book *De la démocratie participative*, written during the recent French presidential campaign, and will examine how the idea of participation articulates with key themes in Stiegler's philosophy of technics. Finally it suggests some ways in which this debate on participation might be moved on.

Web 2.0 and Participation

The read/write web, encompassing weblogs, social bookmarking, wikis and other technologies, is often seen as a key aspect of what is understood by Web 2.0, marking a distinctive shift from earlier, supposedly less participatory, web technologies. Leaving to one side, for the moment, the question of whether the participatory transformations ascribed to Web 2.0 are actually meaningful, there is no question that these technological changes have been accompanied by an increasingly strident optimism on the part of media commentators about their transformative potential. To name just four recent examples from an extremely rich field we have Clay Shirky's (2008) *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organising without Organisations*, Tapscott and Williams's (2006) *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*, Charles Leadbeater's (2008) *We-think: The Power of Mass Creativity* and Yochai Benkler's (2006) *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. The titles of these book alone testify to the almost-euphoric sense of liberation that their authors ascribe to the participatory and collaborative possibilities offered by these new technologies.

The argument about the democratising aspects of web participation revolves, explicitly or otherwise, around a set of assumptions about the nature of political communication and the functioning of what is often referred to as the 'public sphere'. The general form of this argument is that the Internet, or in this case Web 2.0, offers a better medium for the creation of a public sphere in which a truly democratic form of political debate can take place. This paper examines critically these claims as they are made in Yochai Benkler's *The Wealth of Networks*, which offers one of the most coherent and rigorous attempts to outline and defend this thesis. What makes Benkler's book interesting is partly that it puts arguments about the democratising effect of the Internet in the context of long-standing debates in political theory and political communication, most notably Jürgen Habermas's ideas around the public sphere. But its other strength is the central role that Benkler gives in the creation of a new networked public sphere to the social, peer

or 'nonmarket production' of content that are often said to characterise Web 2.0 (i.e. 'User-Generated Content').

5 Benkler argues that a new network information economy, characterised by nonmarket modes of participation and production, makes possible a public sphere that better serves the exercise of political freedom necessary in a liberal democracy. While Benkler's analysis of the emergent network information economy is interesting, his subordination of the changes we are seeing in this economy to normative models of political communication and liberal democracy actually undermines his more radical insights about nonmarket production.

6 The first part of the *The Wealth of Networks* argues for the emergence of a new form of information economy, a 'networked information economy' which replaces the 'industrial information economy' which has been in force since the late-nineteenth century (Benkler, 2006: 3). The primary feature of this networked information economy, for Benkler, is the much greater role within it for 'decentralised individual action' (Benkler, 2006: 3). This empowerment of individuals is the result of two key changes in the new 'network information economy'. The first is a change in the topology of information networks from the hub and spoke model of mass media to a 'distributed architecture' with 'multidirectional connections' (Benkler, 2006: 212). The second is a dramatic reduction in or, as Benkler has it, the 'practical elimination of', communication costs (Benkler, 2006: 212). Together these changes allow a new, more democratic and participative, form of political communication which Benkler calls the 'networked public sphere':

7 > The second major implication of the networked information economy is the shift it enables from the mass-mediated public sphere to a networked public sphere. This shift is also based on the increasing freedom individuals enjoy to participate in creating information and knowledge, and the possibilities it presents for a new public sphere to emerge alongside the commercial, mass-media markets. (Benkler, 2006: 10)

8 One important feature of Benkler's analysis of the 'networked public sphere' is his claim that it is inherently more democratic than the 'mass-mediated public sphere'. Benkler believes his argument to be much more restricted than previous democratisation theses about the Internet. As he puts it, 'any consideration of the democratising effects of the Internet must measure its effects as compared to the commercial, mass-media-based public sphere, not as compared to an idealized utopia that we embraced a decade ago of how the Internet might be' (Benkler, 2006: 10). The great strength of Benkler's argument here is the understanding, derived from Habermas, that participation, in and of itself, is not the key criteria by which to assess the democratic promise of the web. The superiority of the network public sphere over the mass-mediated public sphere cannot be based simply on the ability of the web to give everyone a voice. As Benkler is well aware, such an idea would fall foul of the Babel objection: that is, that if 'everyone can speak at once, no one can be heard' (Benkler, 2006: 10). If the network is to function as a public sphere, in the Habermas sense, even the watered-down version of Habermas that Benkler is propagating, it must do more than this. Benkler therefore outlines a set of criteria, derived from Habermas, by which to judge the efficacy of the new networked public sphere. It must, according to Benkler show itself capable of at least five things: Firstly, 'Universal Intake', in that it must be open to everyone. Secondly, it must show itself capable of filtering relevant information that is 'plausibly within the domain of organised political action' (Benkler, 2006: 183). Thirdly, it must have systems for accrediting information sources that are likely to be reliable. Fourthly, it must be capable of synthesising public opinion, bringing together disparate individual opinions into a coherent public opinion. Fifthly, it must be independent from government control.

9 Naturally Benkler goes on to argue that in fact the networked public sphere does satisfy these criteria. This assertion is based largely on research into the link structure of web pages, or the topology of the network. What emerges from this research is that, according to Benkler, far from being a massive collection of disparate information and opinion, the web in fact presents a relatively organised network topology. Benkler cites research showing 'that the number of links that must be traversed from any point in the network to any other point is relatively small' (Benkler, 2006: 252). This is because creators of web pages tend to link to other material relevant to their concerns. In this way, clusters or groups of pages emerge. Bloggers link to stories in other blogs that they find to be topical. Therefore a kind of order emerges from the chaos: pages that are particularly topical or relevant find themselves being heavily linked to and their ideas become

more widely propagated. Benkler sees these link structures or network topologies as evidence of the filtering and salience necessary within a healthy public sphere. Benkler's conclusion, backed by the research he cites in relation to network topologies and a series of case studies, is that the network, in particular, the blogosphere, does indeed provide a better form of public sphere than mass media. As Benkler puts it, the network information economy has, 'fundamentally altered the capacity of individuals, acting alone or with others, to be active participants in the public sphere as opposed to its passive readers, listeners or viewers' (Benkler, 2006: 212).

10 Now there are a number of problems with Benkler's argument here concerning the networked public sphere. The first set of problems is with the way he uses Habermas. For Benkler's aim is quite explicitly to incorporate the idea of the public sphere within liberal political theory. Habermas's ideas tend to be associated, as Mark Warren points out, with a more radical model of democracy (Warren, 1995: 167-8). In particular Habermas's discursive model implies understanding individual autonomy in terms of social relations which is in most ways, as Benkler himself admits, quite alien to liberal political theory (Benkler, 2006: 278-9; Warren, 1995: 172-3). Where Benkler seems to think that Habermas's ideas can be blended with liberal theory one might well wonder if the two aren't in fact completely heterogeneous. Benkler's ideas of the public sphere, while drawing heavily on Habermas in many respects, curiously ignore one or two important aspects of his account. This becomes particularly evident in the case studies that are used in the *The Wealth of Networks* to demonstrate the operation of the network public sphere. The first one concerns a plan by the Sinclair Broadcasting Group to air, a week and a half before the 2004 US presidential elections, a documentary critical of the Democratic candidate John Kerry's Vietnam war record. Benkler's account shows how an online campaign, largely organised around the *BoycottSBG.com* website, targeting advertisers and local network affiliates, succeeded in undermining Sinclair's stock price and eventually forcing the network to change its programming. Benkler seems to see this case study as both an example of the power of the mass-mediated public sphere (the assumed influence that Sinclair's programme would have had) and of the ability of the network public sphere to counter it. However, this is in fact a highly ambiguous example of the networked public sphere. The Sinclair example demonstrates the use of the web not particularly as a medium for the rational debate of political policy, but rather as a tool for the organisation of collective political action. Whilst this is interesting and commendable, Habermas's conception of the public sphere explicitly excludes it as a forum for collective action. The public sphere is a forum for debate, not for political action. As Mark Warren puts it, 'Habermas emphasises that public spheres cannot be organisers of collective action...In any collective action, it is virtually impossible to have symmetrical relations of power, even if relations are fluid and voice is formally equal' (Warren, 1995: 171-2). It's very important for Habermas that this sphere for rational debate is kept separate from the political apparatus. The importance of this distinction to Habermas—and Benkler's indifference to it—is telling. At the very least it shows that while he thinks he claims to be operating with a very 'limited definition' of the public sphere he actually designates by this term in practice something much broader than Habermas. Now this is not just nitpicking with Benkler's use of Habermas but goes to the heart of his analysis: is 'public sphere' the right concept to describe the phenomena that Benkler is observing? Why not describe them instead, for example, as new forms of sociality or collectivity? The answer is that in Benkler's analysis new forms of sociality and collectivity, for example, the social production of content, are always subordinated to a basically liberal model, the capability of the new network information economy to promote 'decentralised individual action'.

11 My point here is not, implicitly or otherwise, to argue for the supremacy of debate to political action of vice versa. Nor am I arguing for the absolute authority of Habermas's model of political communication. The point is simply that, in as much as he misses the significance of this distinction in Habermas, Benkler skews the terms of the debate about the public sphere. By choosing, like many others, to make Habermas's ideas around the public sphere the reference point for his discussion of web participation, Benkler is asking to be judged by the standards of that model. To satisfy those standards Benkler really needs to find examples where online discussion is defining the terms of political debate, independently from state and other political apparatus, not merely being used a tool to organise political action in response to a debate that has already been constituted elsewhere.

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But there is actually a wider point here. It's not at all clear that 'democracy', 'citizenship', 'participation' and so on are the most relevant political concepts to describe the kind of changes that we are seeing in relation to Web 2.0 and within what Benkler calls the 'network information economy'. Other concepts that might be just as useful would be 'labour', 'property' and 'collectivity'. New forms of social labour are of course important to Benkler's case, but they are important for what they make possible, which is the better exercise of individual political freedom. Part of the reason for this can be seen from within *The Wealth of Networks* itself.

Nonmarket Production

13 One of the most interesting sections of Benkler's book is the chapter entitled 'The Economics of Social Production'. The principal topic of this chapter is the concept of 'nonmarket' production, the fact that people who contribute to *Wikipedia*, social bookmarking sites or even the blogosphere are collectively constructing works of clear economic value but are, for the most part, not participating in an economic market as such. For Benkler this raises three questions:

14 > First, why do people participate? What is their motivation when they work for…a project for which they are not paid or directly rewarded? Second, why now, why here? What, if anything, is special about the digitally networked environment…Third, is it efficient to have all these people sharing their computers and donating their time and creative effort? (Benkler, 2006: 91)

15 These are all, of course, good questions to ask but it's quite telling that Benkler doesn't ask another question: is all this free labour being exploited? This is, on the other hand, obviously a question asked by others, for example Tiziana Terranova in *Network Culture*:

16 > Simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited, free labour on the Net includes the activity of building web sites, modifying software packages, reading and participating in mailing lists and building virtual spaces (Terranova, 2004: 74).

17 Terranova rejects, or seeks to move on from, the answers that Benkler finds to the questions he raises about nonmarket production (which are, basically, gift economies and transaction-costs theory.)[1] Terranova, drawing on the Italian autonomist tradition, prefers a much more nuanced account of free labour, one that sees it as symptomatic of transformations within capital and labour themselves. The transformations within labour are not simply a product of the networked information economy, or the technical affordances of the internet as a distributed system, but are part of wider shifts in the nature of labour in postindustrial societies:

18 > The Internet does not automatically turn every user into an active producer, and every worker into a creative subject. The process whereby production and consumption are reconfigured within the category of free labour signals the unfolding of another logic of value, whose operations need careful analysis (Terranova, 2004: 75).

19 In fact there are two essential points that we can take from Terranova's argument here. The first is that we ought to be suspicious of the generalisation that the network, or as Benkler has it, the 'network information economy', is turning the 'passive' consumers of mass media into 'active' producers of the network public sphere. There is in fact a long and distinguished tradition in media studies which critiques the idea that audiences are simply 'passive' in their relation with mass media.[2] Consideration of this tradition might help to undermine the simple association between activity/passivity and production/consumption. The second point that Terranova is right to assert is that understanding the kind of changes implicit in the social production of internet content can't be simply a matter of understanding changes in network technology, but must always be understood in relation to wider social and economic changes. The significance of this point is underlined by existing perspectives on technological change offered by Science Technology Studies and Actor-Network Theory, which tend to argue that, as Andrew Feenberg puts it, 'technology is a social phenomenon through and through' (Feenberg, 2003: 74). Although Benkler's approach is undoubtedly more subtle than many net theorists, and despite his own rebuttal of the charge of technological determinism (Benkler, 2006: 369-72), he continues to regard the transformations he describes, such as social production or free labour, as fundamentally phenomena of network communications, rather than as examples of wider social change.

20 Moreover, although repeatedly making the claim about the centrality of participation to democratic life, Benkler doesn't really attempt to engage with the history of the concept of participation in democratic theory. Although in many ways more rigorous than other attempts,

fundamentally Benkler's thesis is fairly commonplace: there's a problem with the functioning of democracy in modern Western democracies, this problem is largely due to the limited kind of political debate that takes place in mass media, and the web can solve this by enabling greater participation. But what does participation really mean here?

21 Benkler's response to this question is shaped in no small part by his desire to reconcile his arguments with liberal political theory. As Benkler is clearly aware there is a conflict between on the one hand, arguing, as he does, that culture and the way it is produced is important to the operation of democracy and the argument that democracy is essentially the expression of individual freedom. As soon as you question the autonomy or preexistence of individuals in relation to culture, you are already at odds with liberal political theory. Benkler tries to reconcile that as follows:

22 > I claim that the modalities of cultural production and exchange are a proper subject for normative evaluation within a broad range of liberal political theory...Liberal political theory needs a theory of culture and agency that is viscous enough to matter normatively, but loose enough to give its core foci — the individual and the political system — room to be effective independently, not as a mere expression or extension of culture (276-7).

23 As the above makes clear, the relationship between culture and democracy here is essentially narrow. In fact for Benkler the benefit of the networked public sphere — and the participation that it implies — is that it renders culture more 'transparent' thereby minimising the effect of culture on individual agency or autonomy. The kind of participation that Benkler describes is limited to avoiding 'culture' getting in the way of liberal democracy, rather than any inherent change in the nature of democracy itself. Paradoxically, then, despite the fact that his argument is entirely concerned with participatory culture and its benefits for democracy, Benkler is not very interested in wider questions of participation and democracy, above all not ones that would question the liberal model.

24 In fact, surprisingly given its subject matter, Benkler's approach raises two fundamental questions, without addressing them at any great length. First, what is the relationship between technological change and social and political change? Secondly, what role does participation play in democracy? To comprehend the kinds of changes Benkler is concerned with we really need to address and challenge in a more radical fashion the relationship between technology, culture and democracy.

Participation, Technics and Individuation

25 It's really the question about participation and new technology that is addressed in Marc Crépon and Bernard Stiegler's *De la démocratie participative* (*On Participatory Democracy*) (Crépon and Stiegler, 2007). The essays which comprise this volume were written during the French presidential election and respond particularly to the campaign of Ségolène Royal, which consistently evoked the idea of participatory democracy, as evidenced by the website *Desirs d'avenir* (*Desires for the future*) which solicited contributions from the public in the building of her manifesto. Royal's commitment to participatory democracy, apparently inspired in part by the work of Rancière, is treated with some disdain by Crépon and Stiegler.

26 In his essay, 'La démocratie en défaut' ('Democracy in default'), Crépon argues that this call for participatory democracy must be analysed in terms of the coincidence of two phenomena: the first is a crisis in representative democracy, characterised by declining voter turnouts, disaffection with the political class and so on; the other is the rise of the new technological possibilities of the web. For Crépon this crisis in representative democracy is itself twofold, divided between what he calls the 'attachment', i.e., the attachment to hard-won democratic institutions, and the 'desire', i.e., the desire for democracy as a kind of open possibility. This desire is explained by Crépon with reference to Derrida's concept of a democracy that is always 'to come', which makes this desire also, constitutively, a kind of default or lack défaut. As Crépon puts it, this default 'maintains confidence in the possibilities of untold and unprecedented social, moral and political relations that democracy could or should still harbour' (Crépon and Stiegler, 2007: 27-28). For Crépon participatory democracy can only be meaningful if it gives a chance to both the attachment (to existing democratic institutions) and the desire for democracy as an open possibility, democracy to come etc.). Without addressing both these poles of the democratic crisis, participatory democracy might be even worse than the crisis it seeks to redress. Crépon says, 'the risk then would be that,

in the call for participatory democracy, the mirror of a direct participation, free from all mediation, a trap (miroir aux alouettes), finishes by effacing democracy itself'.[3] In other words, the risk would be that such a participatory democracy would descend into a kind of interactive televised populism.

27 Both Crépon and Stiegler see as dangerous the vision of web participation in which it opens a 'closed' political establishment to a new exteriority of public. The paradigmatic examples of this would be the televised interactive debates of the Royal campaign. Such participation makes great play of opening up debate to a class of people who are not political insiders, of allowing anyone to speak regardless of knowledge or expertise. But this utopian vision displays a kind of naivety about the nature of political discourse. As Crépon puts it, 'The words that everyone uses to voice their opinion are rarely theirs. They are tributaries of sources of information that are, for the majority of citizen-televison viwers, televisual information' (Crépon and Stiegler, 2007: 54). How meaningful is such participation when its terms and vocabulary are decided elsewhere? Indeed what can appear to happen in such debates is a kind of staged engagement with the outside, one which simply mirrors the political establishment. If the aim is to get outside a manipulated media discourse, what one finds at that 'outside' is merely a reflection of the inside, using the same language but with the authority of the ordinary and the popular. The problem, on the one hand, is that it can seem that apparently profound shifts in communication really represent nothing more than extension of the existing tools of political marketing or, '...a way to channel, identify, catalyse and performatively transform political tendencies...because what is targeted and solicited here is less an opinion than an audience' (Crêpon and Stiegler, 2007: 106). The danger, on the other hand, is that these forms of debate simply offer a way for the political to appear more legitimate, appear more open and accountable, while all the time de-legitimising and short circuiting the proper apparatus of representative democracy.

28 In order to explore what true participatory democracy might mean, Crépon invokes C.B. Macpherson's four models of democracy (which are also presented to some extent in Macpherson as four stages of democracy). These models are protective democracy, developmental democracy, equilibrium democracy and participatory democracy. The protective democracy model, which Macpherson associates with Bentham and James Mill, serves primarily to protect the self-interest of citizens from bad government. In this model, Macpherson argues, 'there is no enthusiasm for democracy, no idea that it could be a morally transformative force; it is nothing but a logical requirement for the governance of inherently self-interested conflicting individuals' (Macpherson, 1977: 43). Developmental democracy on the other hand, which Macpherson ascribes to John Stuart Mill, Dewey and others contained within it, 'a moral vision of possibility of the improvement of mankind, and of a free and equal society not yet achieved' (Macpherson, 1977: 43). Equilibrium democracy, the system which comes to prevail in the twentieth century, abandons this moral vision and is to a large extent for Macpherson a return to the values of protective democracy: democracy reconciles the competing and diverse interests of citizens through the party system where voters as consumers choose from policies like products offered by the various parties. The equilibrium model entails no sense of individual or social improvement but simply a reconciliation of competing interests through the market system of elections.

29 For Crépon, Macpherson's models of democracy are useful because they help to diagnose the democratic crisis. Equilibrium democracy situates the citizen as a consumer of political products of which they have no control of the supply, as Crépon puts it:

> 30 In making the citizen-electors hypothetical consumers of political products over which they have no mastery of the supply (and of which it must be analysed by what channels and which technologies they are imposed on them), the equilibrium democracy model only transposes the symbolic and spiritual misery of the market onto the political domain.[4]

31 Here we can see the difference between Benkler and Crépon in sharp relief. For Benkler the kind of participation empowered by the web is not a move away from what is described here as equilibrium democracy. Indeed, far from it: the best that can be said of Benkler's 'network public sphere' is that it fixes the equilibrium model by empowering consumers and therefore enabling a 'freer' market in the consumption of political products. For Benkler there is nothing wrong with the political system per se, there is just a problem with political communication that can be fixed by enabling a more transparent form of communication, one 'freed' from the distortions of mass

media. For Crépon, on the other hand, it is because culture is right at the heart of democracy that its industrialisation in the form of mass media poses such a problem.

32 In this description we can also see Crépon moving the debate into distinctively Stieglerian terrain with the concept of 'symbolic misery' (as outlined by Stiegler in the two volumes of *De La misère symbolique* (Stiegler, 2004a, Stiegler, 2005). Stiegler defines symbolic misery as 'a loss of individuation which results from a loss of participation in the production of symbols'.[5] The loss of participation here is fundamental to the production of culture in the equilibrium model. It cannot be corrected simply by the appearance of a communication medium that harnesses 'decentralized individual action'. In the first place this is because Crépon and Stiegler have a very different understanding of the relationship between culture and individual or group identity than Benkler's narrow liberal model allows. This model can be seen in the reworking of the relationship between 'technics' and 'individuation'.

33 The concept of individuation, which is central to Stiegler's work, is itself derived from the concept of psychic and collective individuation in the work of Gilbert Simondon. For Simondon the production of the 'I', the individual and that of the collective 'we', the group are inseparable. (Crépon and Stiegler, 2007: 68n1). Collective individuation is to be understood as a process of transformation within a preindividual milieu and not as the coming together of a set of preexisting individuals. The loss of individuation which forms part of the condition Stiegler calls symbolic misery relates to the theorisation of technics which Stiegler talks about in his early work. For Stiegler philosophy is both founded on and founders on what he calls 'technics'. What he means by technics is not to be confused with technology in the modern sense. Technics encompasses everything from primitive tools through systems of writing to modern telecommunications. Stiegler even thinks under the terms technics something like language, for example. For him, 'technics is the condition of culture' and it would be 'absurd to oppose technics to culture' (Stiegler, 2004b: 59). Technics in this sense is therefore inseparable from culture and society and it makes no sense either to talk of technics determining culture and society or vice versa. Culture and society are not constituted by technics as if by cause but rather constituted through it. Nor does technics in Stiegler's sense represent scientific progress or a deterministic evolution; rather, however strange this may seem, technics a kind of pure accidentality or contingency. Indeed for Stiegler it is because of the exteriorisation of the human into technics, artefacts or inorganic organized matter that culture and society constitute themselves contingently.

34 > Mortals, having no qualities except by default, prosthetically, are on the contrary, animals condemned to seek ceaselessly their quality, that is, their destiny, that is, their time [...] Humans are only by default. That means, they are only in as much as they become[6]

35 Technics thus understood is not merely instrumental, a means to an end, where the 'end' remains a resolutely human need or desire. Rather technics shapes what it means to be human in the first place and the 'human' in this sense is constituted always already through technics. Indeed it is the prosthesis of the human: the human is constituted not by some interior capacity (e.g. consciousness) but by a new prosthetic relationship with matter. If there is a crisis caused by technics in the form of modern technology it is not because something 'natural' or human is supplanted by something technological. Rather it is because there has been a transformation in the essential technicity that belongs to the human. To be more specific there has been a transformation in a specific form of technics that Stiegler calls 'mnemotechnics' or tertiary memory. All forms of technics support a type of cultural, non-genetic or 'epiphylogenetic', memory, but there is a subset that 'one must call mnemotechnics, to speak properly',[7] a type of technics that is specifically 'made for keeping memory'.[8]

36 One obvious example of mnemotechnics is writing and indeed Stiegler dedicates a large part of the second volume of *La technique et le temps*, 'La Désorientation', to a discussion of the transformation in mnemotechnics represented by the shift to orthographic writing.[9] However, it is in a new transformation in the course of mnemotechnics, one represented by the audiovisual tele-technologies of mass media, that lies the cultural crisis of which Stiegler writes. In part this is because these new forms of audio-visual recording introduce a new class of industrial temporal object. Simondon argues that the rise of the machine tool removes the ability of the skilled worker to differentiate their labor from that of other workers: 'a loss of individuation' which Stiegler sees reproduced at the level of consciousness by the new teletechnologies and their industrialization of

memory. The rise of these new 'orthothetic' analogue and digital recording technologies marks a break with the recording technology of orthographic writing.[10] Moreover, the new industrial temporal objects of analogue and digital recording represent a new relationship between singularity, consciousness and time:

37 > The society of industrial temporal objects thus transforms our existences into a prefabricated series of clichés that we string together without perceiving very much. The coincidence of the time of the industrial temporal objects' flow with our consciousnesses has the consequence that, in making them our objects of consciousness, that is, of attention, we embrace and adopt their time: we adhere to them in such great intimacy that they come to substitute themselves for the proper temporalities of our consciousnesses. Such is the catastrophic utilization, by cultural industries, of the power of temporal objects, which results in a ecological catastrophe in the milieu of spirit that is epiphylogenesis.[11]

38 However sceptical one might be to ascribing passivity to the mass media audience, it would seem that the industrial model of mass media does situate the audience as consumers, passive or active, of media products. To that extent mass media implies an asymmetric relationship between producers and consumers. As Stiegler argues in De la démocratie participative, whereas language is an associative symbolic milieu, in that everybody who understands a language is intrinsically a speaker of that language, mass media represent a dissociative milieu in that they oppose producers to consumers (being able to consume television doesn't imply being able to make it) (Crépon and Stiegler, 2007: 75-79). It's obvious to both Benkler and Stiegler that in some sense the new types of collaborative cultural production associated with Web 2.0 represent a potential challenge to the industrial and asymmetric model of cultural production. However, Stiegler argues web participation will only be meaningful politically if it brings about a new type of associative milieu (and argues for government intervention to promote these types of usage of the web). For Benkler, the main benefit of the network is improved possibilities for communication between already-constituted individuals, leading to enhanced possibilities for 'decentralised individual action'. For Crépon and Stiegler, the network's potential will only be realised in new forms of individual and collective individuation, that is, new ways in which individuals and groups are constituted, new forms of sociality. This leads them to be much more cautious about participation as the achievement or destination of Web 2.0.

39 The issue of participation is the pivot between those who understand the web in the context of wider social and cultural transformations and those who see it primarily as a communication medium. In Benkler the problem of participation is construed negatively: the network is 'freer' than previous forms of media and this removal of the barriers of corporate ownership and control allows an organic decentralisation and empowerment of individuals to occur. However, for Stiegler participation to be meaningful must also represent a much more positive social and economic empowerment. More widely, a true participation must mean more than simply new technologies of participation, it is a politico-economic project, not simply a technological one (Crépon and Stiegler, 2007: 85). In a sense this echoes the argument we have seen Terranova make earlier. Benkler (and others) are far too ready to see web participation or nonmarket production as simply consequences of network communications. However, participation, like free labour, must be understood in the context of wider social and economic changes and not simply as a network phenomenon.

Author's Biography

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Notes

[1] On transactions-costs theory, see Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 55-57; Benkler, 2006: 106-116. [back]

[2] On the history and development of this tradition, see for example Moores, 1993. [back]

[3] 'Le risque alors serait que, dans l'appel d'une démocratie participative, le miroir d'une participation directe, affranchie de toute médiation, miroir aux alouettes, ne finisse par effacer la démocratie elle-même.' (Crépon and Stiegler, 2007: 29).

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[4] En faisant des citoyens-électeurs d'hypothétiques consommatuers de produits politiques dont, en réalité, ils ne maitrîsent pas l'offre (et dont il faut analyser par quels canaux, avec quelles technologies il leur sont imposés), le modèle de la démocratie d'équilibre ne fait que transposer la misère symbolique et spirituelle que produit le marché sur le plan politique.' (Crépon and Stiegler, 2007: 42).

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[5] 'Par misère symbolique, j'entends donc la perte d'individuation qui résulte de la perte de participation à la production des symboles' (Stiegler, 2004a: 33).

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[6] 'Les mortels, n'ayant pas de qualités sinon par défaut, prothétiquement, sont, au contraire, des animaux condamnés à rechercher sans cesse leur qualité, c'est-à-dire leur destin, c'est-à-dire leur temps. Cette temporalité se fonde dans ce fait que, à l'origine, dans ce fait que, à cet égard, les mortels n'ont pas d'origine. Les hommes ne sont en quelque sorte que par défaut. C'est-à-dire qu'ils ne sont qu'en tant qu'ils deviennent.' (Stiegler, 2004b: 43).

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[7] 'Il faut soigneusement distinguer la technique comme milieu de la mémoire épiphylogenetique en général, et ce que l'on doit appeler les mnémotechniques à proprement parler' (Stiegler, 2004b: 59).

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[8] 'faite pour émoire' (Stiegler, 2004b: 60).

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[9] See Stiegler, 1996: 67-73.

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[10] 'Orthothetic' is Stiegler's neologism of which Stiegler comments: 'I have had to construct this neologism on the basis of the Greek words orthotès thésis. The orthotès , and the thésis [position]. The utterances that I call 'orthothetic' (as is the case with alphabetic utterances) set down [posent] the past exactly.' ('J'ai dû construire ce néologisme à partir des mots grec orthotèsthésis. L'orthotès 'exactitude, et la thésis . Les énoncés que je dis «orthothétiques» (c'est le cas des énoncés alphabétiques) posent exactement le passé' (Stiegler, 2004b: 64-5).

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[11] 'La société des objets temporels industriels transforme ainsi nos existences en séries préfabriquées de clichés que l'on enchaîne sans trop s'en apercevoir. La coÏncidence du temps de l'écoulement des objets temporels industriels avec le temps de nos consciences a pour conséquence que, en faisant nos objets de conscience, c'est-à-dire d'attention, nous en épousons et en adoptons le temps : nous y adhérons en si grande intimité qu'ils viennent se substituer aux temporalités propres de nos consciences. Telle est l'utilisation catastrophiques, par les industries culturelles, de la vertu des objets temporels : il en résulte une catastrophe écologique dans ce milieu de l'esprit qu'est l'épiphylogenèse' (Stiegler, 2004b: 85-6).

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