

The hermeneutic future of the web: Epistemic and epistemological issues of social networks

The question of the political role of social networks raises epistemic and epistemological issues: the possibility for social networks to become tools for social transformation in the service of a collective intelligence implies these platforms to be devoted to controversy and structured debate, allowing the expression of convergences and divergences. In most of the current social networks, every user ignores that he produces traces: data unconsciously left are collected for profiling and marketing purposes, and the device is essentially used to anticipate behaviors. An alternative model of social network should make possible a reflected and collective production, visualization, coordination and interpretation of information, through users' practices of annotation and contributive categorization. The issue would be to transform the web into a critical and hermeneutic space for publication and peer to peer evaluation, thus constituting a new system of knowledge production.

Yuk Hui – Collective individuation: the future of social web



Yuk Hui is a postdoctoral researcher at the Center for Digital Cultures at the University of Leuphana. He worked with Harry Halpin in postdoc on the "[Social Web](#)" project, dedicated to the development of an alternative model of social network. In this lecture, he reconsiders the theoretical reflections which led to this project. He first approaches the question of the relationships between individual and collective and modulation of social processes, relying on Moreno's psychosocial analyses and on Simondon's conception of individuation.

-Sociometric research and modulation project

At the beginning of the 20th century, the American psychologist and sociologist [J. Moreno](#) developed [sociometry](#), both a qualitative and quantitative method aiming at a cartographic representation of social processes. Its [sociograms](#) thus allow to make visible social relationships through a model and to influence these relationships by modifying some parameters: J. Moreno considers a method for social modulating processes.

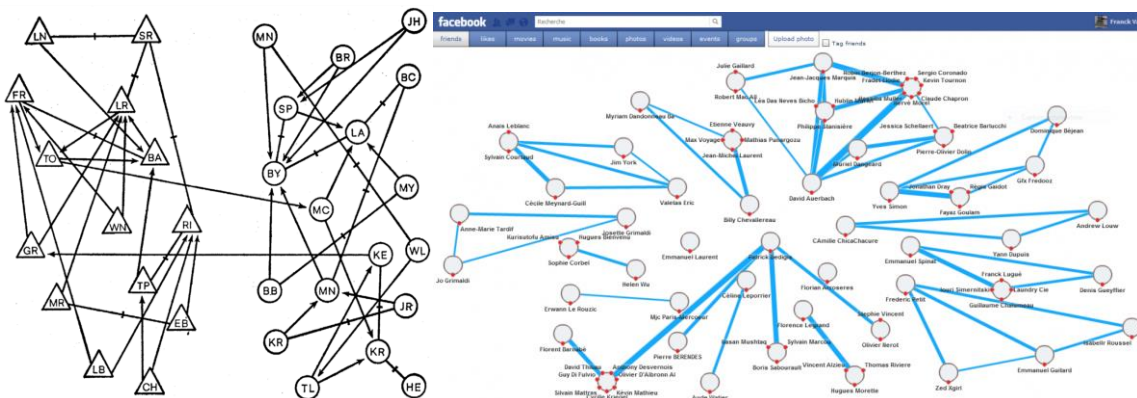


-Modulation as a control process

In [Postscriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle](#), Deleuze considers the future of control as a modulation process, which differs from the molding, i.e. from the confinement into the spaces imposed by the disciplines: “Les enfermements sont des moules, des moulages distincts, mais les contrôles sont une modulation, comme un moulage auto-déformant qui changerait continûment, d’un instant à l’autre ». According to Deleuze, disciplinary society follows an analogic logic, whereas control societies follow a computational logic.

-Modulation processes at work in social networks

The program of modulating social relationships according to picked up data can be accomplished by today’s social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter: as soon as a parameter is modified, the network and then the social relationships are changed, and the users have to adapt their habits and behaviors.



-Social atomism

The conception of the group underlying at sociometric research in most existing social networks is based on a social atomism:

- each individual is conceived as the most elementary entity of society,
- society is conceived as all the relationships between social atoms,

The group is not considered as a collective phenomenon but a whole constituted on the basis of the interactions between each atomized individual.

-A new conception of the formation of the collective: transindividuation

On the contrary, the philosopher [G. Simondon](#) argues that the individual is always already in a group, i.e. that the group is not a mere expression, but a field of forces between different orders of size. Individuation (which always is both psychic and collective) is the resolution of the tensions between these incompatibilities. Simondon thus makes possible a new conception of the formation of the collective, allowing to think a process of transindividuation, that Bernard Stiegler defines as such: “la trans-formation des je par le nous et du nous par le je, qui est corrélativement la trans-formation du

milieu techno-symbolique à l'intérieur duquel seulement les je peuvent se rencontrer comme un nous".



-Considering a new model of social web

The project "Social web" aimed at considering and elaborating a social network which would highlight the collective and allow the formation of transindividuation processes. To do this, there was a need to put in the center the participation of individuals to defined groups through projects, and to develop collaborative tools within the groups, or algorithms of group recommendations, in order to surpass both personalization and anonymity. Yuk Hui continues this project of a pharmacology of social networks.

Harry Halpin – The future of the web: from the NSA to the common



Harry Halpin is a member of the [W3C](#) and an invited researcher at the MIT and the IRI. He worked in his post-doc with Yuk Hui on the "Social web" project. His lecture focused on the question of the future of the web and especially the issue of the constitution of the web.

-The first conceptions of the web: the dream of a collective intelligence

If the web is "the dream of a collective intelligence transformed into a nightmare", Harry Halpin first introduced the pioneers' conceptions of the web, who wished to create a utopic space of freedom. [Douglas Engelbart's](#) and [Tim Berners-Lee's](#) pioneering visions converge on the idea of an open and contributive web devoted to the sharing of knowledge, described for example by Engelbart through his idea of a "collective intelligence quotient" also able to be augmented (*Augmenting Human Intellect*, 1962).



-The effective history of the web: the question of data and the constitution project

But these founding ideas are contrasting with the effective history of the web that retraced Harry Halpin retraced in the second part of his lecture, with [Edward Snowden's revelations \(2013\)](#) and the reactions they aroused. The discovery of the [PRISM project](#), set up by the Bush administration after the 9-11 attacks, put all the users' personal data to the hands of the NSA, using them for purposes that go far beyond the efficiency of anti-terrorism struggle, led Tim Berners-Lee to create the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to reaffirm his vision of the web. As well as Snowden, he started to defend the idea of a constitution for the web.



-The constitution of the web: inscribing the rights into the very structure of the Internet?

The last part of Harry Halpin's lecture focused on this "Magna Carta for the global web". According to Snowden, "a magna carta for the internet is exactly what we need. We need to code our values, not only to write them on paper but to code them in the very structure of the internet". This constitution, which would be both legal and material, is also supported by Tim Berners-Lee for whom the Internet is so much part of our lives that it is at the same level as the human rights. Arguing that the Internet is a common good, Tim Berners-Lee stated the five **Rights of the Internet**:

- 1) Freedom of expression,
- 2) Free universal access to the communication platforms,
- 3) Protection of private information,
- 4) Right to communicate privately,
- 5) Network neutrality without discrimination between the Internet users

The next step towards this "magna carta" of the web is a W3C meeting which takes place in London on September 29, 2014: "The web we want".