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Technology, the Internet and the Sociology of Cultural Consumption. Experience and Expertise in the Contemporary Cultural Field.

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As announced, I will address the issue of contemporary fandom by taking the point of view of the sociology of the « culture industry ».

To choose the terms made infamous by Adorno and Horkheimer has the interest of immediately confronting us to the sociological issues raised today by the Internet, that is to say the potential effects of a « major technical innovation in cultural production and distribution and in information systems » on legitimate culture and on social relations¹. Furthermore, even if I disagree with their conservative — and fallacious — vision of the cultural industry, the strength of their discourse relies on their close attention in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to the action of the *objects* — films and series — produced and distributed, at their time, by the Hollywood studios and the first TV networks. The rather surprising celebration by Adorno, in the sixties, of the Long-Playing record as a stunning technical revolution of the opera consumption brings confirmation of this regard given to the objects operated by the cultural consumer to achieve his pleasure : « The term “revolution” is hardly an exaggeration with regard to the long-playing record. The entire musical literature could now become available in quite authentic form to listeners desirous of auditioning and studying such works at a time convenient to them »². In this case, according to Adorno’s own words, a new technical object — in the sense of the material product used as an operator — offers the listener a means to come in possession for himself of another technical objects— here the musical technique of the opera’s composer experienced by the listener — which he was obliged to share with the audience of a musical venue³. Adorno’s celebration of the LP record is thus a contribution to the ontology of art by underlining the two types of technical objects which are intertwined in any so-called « cultural product ». With the help of the LP record, « objectification, that is a concentration on music as the true object of opera, may be

¹ Raymond Williams, « Culture and Technology » (1983), in *The Politics of Modernism*, London, Verso, 1996, p. 119. See of course, Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet Is Killing Our Culture*, 2007 that stresses the danger of the Web 2.0 by making a shift from the defense of the Legitimate culture to the preservation the Professional culture killed by the copy theft and the ignorance of the regular consumer. It is interesting from this point of view to note that the « cultural industry » can be seen nowadays as the illegitimate dictatorship of the consumers instead of the domination of the corporate power.

² T. W. Adorno, « Opera and the Long-Playing Record » (originally published in *Der Spiegel*, 29 March 1969), translated by Thomas Y. Levin, in *October*, Vol 55, Winter 1990, p. 62-66, p. 63.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 63 : « In music, *Technik* has a double meaning. On the one hand, there are the actual compositional techniques and, on the other, there are the industrial processes that are applied to music for the purpose of its mass dissemination. The latter do not, however, remain completely external to the music. Behind both the technologico-industrial and the artistic discoveries there is the same historical process at work, the same human force of production. This is why they both converge ». The antagonism between Adorno and Benjamin on the virtue of « reproducibility », which is now a pedagogical device in the field of cultural studies, need to be, as we can see, lightly corrected.

linked to a perception that is comparable to reading, to the immersion in a text. This offers an alternative to that which opera does in the best case — and which is just what an artwork ought not do — that is : cajole the listener. The form of the gramophone record comes into its own as a form of sound figures. The ability to repeat long-playing records, as well as parts of them, fosters a familiarity which is hardly afforded by the ritual of performance. Such records allow themselves to be possessed just as previously one possessed art prints »⁴.

This close attention to the *objects* used by the people to entertain themselves during their leisure time presents, as I will show, a strong methodological interest for the sociology of culture, especially the French sociology of culture which has got wrongly used to speaking of culture by looking exclusively at the persons and by deducing their « cultural practice » from their social identity. More generally, this respect for the objects supporting a cultural practice helps us to recall, when scrutinizing the cultural exchanges on the Internet, the anchoring of these exchanges in the real life operated by the participants. In short, this choice will allow me to discuss the Internet not only as a tool of communication but as a marketplace, which is a part of a material economy by the mediation of material objects (films, books, songs, etc) sold and priced in e-shops, and as a public space, itself embedded in a localized political space through the uses of the Internet by the people to meet and cooperate in *offline* actions. It is the simplest way to bring in my main topic, the Internet as a « natural laboratory » (Park) for the sociologist, as a place of observation well-fitted to visualize the expertise of the “regular” spectator. It means that the observation *on* and *through* Internet is not only a means to assess the cultural innovations made nowadays possible by the new technologies. It means moreover that, used as a tool of a multi-sited ethnography, the Internet can help us to reach a better sociological understanding of cultural consumption outside the Internet, by taking in account this expertise of the regular spectator. But I have first to present the intellectual background of my discourse.

1. The sociology of culture in France

I will express myself as a French sociologist who feels himself peculiarly concerned with the new field of research offered by the cultural uses of the Internet and by the way they challenge the traditional tools and methods of the French sociology of culture. This challenge is strikingly illustrated by the scarcity of the empirical studies on that subject in the French sociological literature strictly speaking, i.e. the articles and books published exclusively in the academic field of the discipline. Most of the French sociologists have no interest in the observation of the cultural uses of the Internet, except in debating the issues of the copyright and of the protection of children. This had to do, of course, with their age, but also primarily, with the definition of their professional identity. They are usually, even when they work on audiences, very careful not to be confused with researchers in mass medias on one hand, and with scholars in arts and literature on the other hand. It seems to them that they have nothing to do, as researchers, with the observation of the personal experience of the cultural consumers but that they have only to assess the way the social structure shapes altogether the production and the reception of the arts and, thus, explains the conduct of the cultural consumers. This cognitive frame is directly linked to the historical and political specificity of France, the promotion of the arts being a part of its national identity, « la

⁴ Ibid., p. 64-65.

Nation littéraire », and the democratization of the fine arts established as an obligation of the State, « l'Etat-culturel », and a responsibility of the true intellectual towards the laymen. And it leads, through the financing of the sociological research by the public funds, to the limitation of the empirical studies to the public field, the « Musée » as an appropriate word (Moulin), to denote not only the public museums but the numerous public institutions —, legitimate theaters, operas, musical stages and contemporary art centers financed almost exclusively by the authorities. In fact, French sociologists are now preoccupied mostly by the observation of the « artistic work » (Menger) supported by these public institutions, either from the point of view of the « sociology of art » (Heinich) — the study of the different types of professionals operating in the public field — or as a means of assessing the limits of the democratization of the legitimate arts. As a consequence, the observation misses the most important part of the cultural consumption — reading, listening, viewing — which, nowadays, is operated through the market and is located in the private space, the living space of the consumers, rather than in public venues⁵.

It results from this context that, as a French sociologist, my strong interest for the observation of the cultural uses of the Internet makes me a kind of outsider. First, because I use Internet as a fieldwork, as a means of a multi-sited ethnography⁶, as defined by George Marcus, the multiplicity of sites allowing to « cut-cross dichotomies like the “local” and the “global”, the “lifeworld” or “system” »⁷ (or, in the French Theory, Régis Debray's vision of the “mediatized market-place” as promoting « experience » against « analysis », meaning the sacrifice of the « content » to the pleasure of « first-person enunciation »⁸). Secondly, because, I consider that exploring the computer-mediated-communication on the Internet can help us, as I said, to reach a better understanding of the cultural consumption as a personal experience and, most of all, as a form of expertise. In other words, the observation of the cultural uses of the Internet reveals the limits of Bourdieu's theory of practice, and the heuristic interest in the sociology of culture of the « technology » promoted by Marcel Mauss, and especially of his provocative category : « the techniques of the body ».

2. Marcel Mauss's « Technology » and Cultural Consumption

Luc Boltanski signals the epistemological limits of Bourdieu's *habitus* as a means of explanation of a social conduct by the schemes incorporated previously by the individual, without regards to the situation in which he operates. By leaving aside the « question of the situation » and claiming that the *habitus* makes the conduct of the individual predictable by the sociologist, Bourdieu cancels any possibility of action and contradicts his previous

⁵ I let aside, of course, the works of Bernard Lahire on cultural consumption and their contribution to an *aggiornamento* of the French sociology of culture.

⁶ Cf. Jean-Marc Leveratto et Mary Leontsin, *Internet et la sociabilité littéraire*, Paris, BPI, 2006.

⁷ George E. Marcus, « Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography », *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 24. (1995), pp. 95-117, p. 95.

⁸ Régis Debray, *L'Etat séducteur. Les séductions médiologiques du pouvoir*, Paris, Gallimard, 1993. Cf. the acute commentary of Max Silverman, *Facing Postmodernity. Contemporary French Thought on Culture and Society*, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 109 that relates this opposition to the vision of Gilles Lipovetzky, *L'ère de l'individualisme*, 1983.

attention to the « experience of a subject acting in the world »⁹. Thus, his stressing on the « corporeity » of the practice — which is to say to the living conduct of a singular person —, leads, on the contrary, to the vision of the body as an agent of conformation of the individual, against his will and without knowing, to a preexistent type of conduct. The success of his writings in the French cultural professions and the radical groups is directly linked, unfortunately, to this vision. It allows the professional or the militant to undermine any taste or idea that doesn't fit his own practice and, in the same time, to confirm his own commitment and ability to resist authentically the authority of tradition or the lure of fashion.

The main contribution of Marcel Mauss's technology to the theory of practice lays in the fact that he emphasizes, on the contrary, the ability of each individual to use his proper body as a tool, as a means of producing certain effects thanks to the traditional way it is used. This is what he called the « Techniques of the body », which is not to be confused, as most of the French sociologists always do, with Bourdieu's *habitus*. Contrary to the *habitus*, indeed, an important part of the « techniques of the body » are based on explicit conventions and skills, as in the learning of car driving, and are conscious way of using the efficiency of the body not only to succeed in certain tasks or to communicate with others, but to get pleasure by operating it directly or indirectly. This means that the « techniques of the body » cannot be reduced neither to traditional manners or physical skills used in the ordinary life of a local community, neither to a professional know-how such as the techniques of the ballet, nor to ways of moving one's own body for the sake of the pleasure it brings, such as dancing, playing football, etc. A close reading of the text shows that the notion can apply as well to the activity of the reader, the listener or the spectator — and of course today of the video-game player — considered as a way to involve his body in the situation, to make it more sensitive — thanks to the corporal discipline and the experience of this type of situation — to the efficiency of an artistic technique, and to consciously incorporate the emotions staged and expressed by the means of this technique¹⁰. It's a contribution to the pragmatist vision of the art — art seen primarily as an experience — which has a the double interest to ground the existence of an artistic technique on the *pleasure* experienced by the spectator and to link the transmission of the technique to the conscious « incorporation » — in the sense of learning-by-doing — of the *emotions* produced by its uses. The « techniques du corps » are hence a way to recall not only the *coproduction* of the artistic work — the fact that the user participates to the realization of the artistic service performed by the professional —, but the *technical knowledge* they shared, based on their previous experience of the same masterworks, and the *common sense*, in a Gramscian sense, that allows the user to share and promote the kind of pleasure he has lived. The uses by the spectator of his body ensure and enhance the emotional

⁹ Luc Boltanski, « Usages faibles, usages forts de l'habitus », in Pierre Encrevé et Rose-Marie Lagrave, *Travailler avec Bourdieu*, Paris, Flammarion, 2003, p. 153-161, p. 157.

¹⁰ Cf. Jean-Marc Leveratto, « The 'techniques du corps' by Marcel Mauss. American Culture, Everyday Life and French Theory », in Cherry Schrecker (ed.), *Transatlantic Voyages and Sociology*, London Ashgate, 2010, p. 83-96, and Jean-Marc Leveratto, « Lire Mauss », *Le Portique*, n° 17, 2006. A "technological" approach of the cultural consumption is proposed in Jean-Marc Leveratto, *Introduction à l'anthropologie du spectacle*, Paris, La dispute, Paris, 2006.

efficiency and the intellectual interest of a certain artistic technique, and of the situations it serves to produce. The *maussian* anthropology of the technique explains the artistic efficiency as the result of the spectator's involvement in a situated-action, in which the cooperation of the power of the technical objects and of the corporal and intellectual ability of the spectator to make them work — to « perform » them, in the words of Bruno Latour — give to fictitious objects a real consistency and efficiency and therefore, the social power and the cultural value of things that matter.

The modern artistic techniques are, from this point of view, a contemporary equipment of the magic considered by Mauss and Hubert as a « primary form of the technique », in the general sense of the power to do things with things. The artistic efficiency cannot be reduced, like in the French sociology of theater of the sixties, to the power of the collective *ritual*, its capacity to impress the individual and make him believe in the supra-natural efficiency of a thing or a person, which in fact is only the result of the action of the collective on the perception of the individual. A good example is given, according to Mauss, by the prayer : « We cannot understand why a man believes when he prays, for example, that his prayer is effective, unless we realize that when he speaks, he hears his own words and he believes, he exhales in all the fibers of his being »¹¹. The singular body of the individual, who handles his own body to make it perform some emotions (by assimilating the proper esthetical efficiency of the object that he uses) finds, with the support of the bodies of the other participants, the ontological reality of what's happening, in the reading, viewing, listening to a work of art, just like in the prayer.

The technology of Mauss combines, therefore, a sociology of interaction — that emphasizes the mixture, in the processing of the artistic situation, of « the body, the individual consciousness and the collective » and an ontology of the technical objects, including the body itself. « Interaction », in this frame of understanding, refers not only to the personal interactions between people made possible by the uses of technical objects, but to the interaction between the objects made possible by the collective involvement of the persons using these technical objects¹².

As such, it fits perfectly the observation of the uses of the Internet, and vice-versa. The normalization of the Internet has silently erased, and makes it today highly laughable and difficult to understand, the sociological studies published at the beginning of the World Wide Web on the predictable dangers of the “virtual community”. Practically every young adult in the Western world is familiar with the different functions of this technology, as a *tool* of information and communication — a technical object handled by individuals and groups to give or to get information —, a *means* of exchange and transportation of *things*, mostly cultural goods, and a *place* of remote social interaction, which mix nowadays the usual interpersonal computer-mediated communication, based on typing, and video-mediated face-to-face interaction. Plus, today, the Internet is more and more becoming a place where we, humans, are « interacting in a face-to-face mode with virtual agents » like avatars of video-games and to verify that in this « humans tend to react socially and use

¹¹ Marcel Mauss, *Sociology and Psychology. Essays*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 27.

¹² In the words of Bruno Latour, the interaction between « human and non-humans » combines « intersubjectivity » and what he proposes to call « interobjectivity ». Cf. Bruno Latour, « Une sociologie sans objet ? Remarques sur l'interobjectivité », *Sociologie du travail*, n° 4 (1994).

communications mechanisms, which are primarily social and embodied ». In short, our day-to-day experience with the Internet confirms our capacity of « integration of different levels and types of reality »¹³ of the body or, as Goffman said, our ability to handle in the same time different frames of experience. This is the ordinary « magic », in the sense of the common expertise shared by all the regular users of the Internet, of the practical sense which allows us to know exactly where things are really located, to understand correctly what's happening, to hear and to see authentic things on Internet, even if they are *virtual*, and to make real things in the real life, even if we are *online*.

Vice-versa, the uses of the web offer the sociologist the opportunity to directly visualize the relevance of the technology of Mauss to explore the contemporary cultural consumption. He strongly emphasized, in his texts on the nation, written just after the First World War, and on the eve of the Second one, that the aesthetical objects, just as the technical and economical objects, cannot be jailed inside the frontiers of a localized community. They are traditional actors not only of the exchanges *inside* a society, but *between* the societies. Against what he calls the « fetichism » of the national community, he emphasizes the fact that the aesthetical objects, just as the technical objects are « by essence, inter-social [sont, par essence, intersociaux »]. It implies that they have always been — in traditional communities, ancient societies as well as in modern times — at the same time the agents, the contents and the products of a « commerce » between communities, in the classical sense (« commercium »), exceeding the economical relations, but applying to every kind of relations, and to the reciprocal services of every type ». Because of their strength and their sensorial efficiency, because of the pleasure they give to their user, aesthetical objects are, like technical objects, borrowed and transported from place to place by those who want to use them for their own delight and to in turn give themselves pleasure to others. By traveling from place to place, the aesthetical objects enhance this power to build relationships between humans through the exchange between groups. Because of the involvement of the body required to handle the sensations and ideas experienced by dealing with the aesthetical object, such transactions transcend the divisions between the spiritual and the material in a way which is, according to Mauss, really "magical". From a technical point of view, they ensure, by a transformation of the ordinary experience of things, the presence of non-existent things and the emotional efficiency of a fictitious presence (of a character and of the author). From a sociological point of view, they create a social bond between the giver and the recipient. The giver does not merely give an object but also part of himself, for the object is tied to the giver : "the objects are never completely separated from the men who exchange them"¹⁴. Because of this attachment between giver and gift, the act of giving creates a social bond with an obligation to reciprocate on part of the recipient.

Contrary to the dominant paradigm in the field of the French sociology of culture, the persistence of a magic value of the aesthetical object and the mysterious power, from a rational point of view, of a simple thing to generate collective passion is not, for Mauss, the effect of the domination of collective representations which thwart our sense of reality and lead to a complete misunderstanding of the real stakes of the uses of an artistic technique.

¹³ « Introduction » of Arvid Kappas and Nicole C. Krämer (ed), *Face-to-face Communication over the Internet*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 7-8.

¹⁴ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (1925), New York, Norton Press, 1990,

On the opposite, it is a sure sign of the intellectual progress of the whole humanity, of the capacity acquired by the layman to deal, in the course of his social life, with different types of social organization of the experience, and therefore, with different types of objectivity, and of different types of objectification of the artistic pleasure. As a matter of act, we are fully aware, following Kant himself on this point, that a book, in the same time, has a corporal existence (« *opus* ») and « a spiritual reality » (« *opera* ») which is the reason of its price, but that this price is not a guarantee of the reality of the pleasure his seller promises. In simple words, which are pragmatic words : the exchanges via the Internet, home and mobile, are a preeminent occasion for their participants, people-like-you-and-me, to practice the frame analysis of what happens and to implement different kinds of ontology of the aesthetical object. It is a way of mastering the social implications of the objects made present by the CMC and to handle the interactions made possible by their activation, the normal way to deal with the different types of cultural exchange supported by the aesthetical objects.

2. The frameworks of digital cultural exchanges

To recognize the ordinary user of the Internet as an observer is the key to a pragmatic understanding of the making of the cultural exchanges over Internet. The felicity of these cultural exchanges relies on one's capacity to handle, according to the anthropologist Philippe Descola, different ways of « attributing to things, or denying them, the capability of a certain type of action »¹⁵. From the point of view of a contemporary scientific look at the world cultures, the different ways of dealing with material things can be accepted as equally effective as long as they have a proven efficiency for the members of a community. The four kinds of « ontology » — animistic, naturalistic, totemist, analogist — explaining the personal power of a material object in a given culture can thus be understood as common ways in the contemporary culture to refer to the images and to contribute to their making. As modes of « keying » our interactions with the objects used to build an artistic situation — a certain type of « fabrication » in Goffman's vocabulary — these « ontologies » support the reality of the pleasure given by an intimate experience with the objects of an artistic technique — music, fine arts, performing arts, visual arts, including the novel — as well as the social value of the intellectual discourse able to found this reality by describing and analyzing their efficiency¹⁶. As frames of the collective experience, they allow, through the activation of the kind of power given to the objects by their engagement in a definite frame, the « sharing of the sensitive » (Rancière). They thus ensure the passage from the personal sensitivity to the esthetic community, from the individual to the collective, from the local to the global. These

¹⁵ Philippe Descola, « Manières de voir, manières de figurer », in Philippe Descola (dir), *La fabrique des images. Visions du monde et formes de la représentation*, Paris, Somogy et Musée du Quai Branly, 2010. These « ontologies » are different ways of « granting, or not, things of certain aptitudes providing them capacities to operate a certain kind of action » (de « doter les choses, ou non, de certaines aptitudes les rendant capables de tel ou tel type d'action »). In other words — Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005 — they are cognitive ways to « establish differences and similarities between ego and other beings » (p.163).

¹⁶ As he himself emphasizes, op. cit., p. 17, the identification of the « links between the structure of an ontology and the means used to confer to an image the ability of representing this structure and to operate it » is a way to describe the « morphology of the relations » we build on an everyday basis with the things, rather than to establish another « typology of artistic forms ».

ontologies must not be seen as fighting each other or as attached exclusively to a certain kind of person or a certain kind of thing. Each of us may handle them while dealing with the objects met in our everyday life.

Due to the primary role it gives to the body, the artistic experience relies necessarily upon a pluralistic ontology. This artistic experience is not only the perception « at the level of the object of the kind of proprieties that may justify the immediate reaction » [« au niveau de l'objet des propriétés qui sont de nature à justifier la réaction immédiate »¹⁷]. It is the experience of a « thing whose qualities and defects have to be tested by other addressees of the work of art, on the basis of their own perceptive commerce with it [« chose dont les qualités et les déficits doivent être testés par d'autres destinataires de l'œuvre sur la base de leur commerce perceptif avec elle »¹⁸] From a phenomenological point of view, the « perceptive commerce » with the works of art leads normally, as long as the reality of its potential qualities depending locally on its tactile exploration by a singular body, to different types of qualifications of the pleasure it brings.

The main interest of the proposition of Philippe Descola is his building of an equivalence, with the help of the « material culture »'s theoreticians, between the scientific attitude, the « naturalism », and forms of behavior that have been frequently reduced, under the general accusation of « fetishism », to a negation of this attitude. Their rehabilitation as « techniques of use » of the esthetical power of an object is, in the same time, a recognition of the magic use of the scientific attitude. The relevance of this reorganization of our usual perception of modernity is easy to confirm. It enhances our ability to describe the diversity of the contemporary forms of cultural exchange according to the specific type of construction of the reality of the body each of this form requires.

They give us a key, for example, to relate the uses of the Internet to academic ways to deal with works of art, to make what Bourdieu calls the « science des œuvres » [« science of works »] :

— *Naturalism*, for example, is the basis of the objective assessment of the qualities of the objects and the person required by the industrial organization of the market. It is a tool of legitimization of the vision of the cultural consumption by the sociologist, as long as he puts it as an interaction « between the world of the humans, considered as the only beings able of rational judgment, of symbolic activity and of social life, and the crowd of the non-humans for ever condemned to a mechanic and non-reflexive life ».

— *Animism*, on the contrary, opens the possibility to experience the *real* action of objects inspired by a hidden entity. Thus, it brings a justification to the assessment of the objective efficiency of characters of fiction and of the presence of their author by the consumers of this fiction as well as the specialists, estheticians and collectors. Works of art are, from this point of view, considered as « persons, intentional agents of whom we usually say they have a « soul » and [...] therefore must be treated, in regards to the law, as real subjects with whom we can link relations of every kind »

— *Totemism* makes it possible to recognize and study the power of the objects due to the fact that they « share, inside a class in possession of a name, a set of qualities applying

¹⁷ John Dewey, *Art et Experience*, Paris, Folio, 2010, p. 496

¹⁸ Ibid.

themselves indifferently to human and objects ». It justifies as well the association of the admirers of the same artistic things as the study by the ethnologist or the cultural historian of the esthetical link as a form of « weak tie »¹⁹.

— *Analogism*, as a basis of the ethical claim of the equal respect due, from a cultural point of view, to the persons *and* to the objects, justifies the mundane activity of the interpretation of the work of art by a regular spectator — one's public expression of one's personal feelings — as well as its professional reading by a scholar. In the two cases, their action is based on the association of objects and beings able to illuminate the singularity of the impression given by the thing. In the two cases, an effort is made to organize the world « in signifying things and in pictures of attributes, to try to bring sense and order to the human destinies, individual as well as collective ».

The practice of this “symmetric anthropology” requires to “relativize” altogether the point of view of the observer and of the observed. By emphasizing their identical worrying of the reality of the object of a cultural exchange, and of the authenticity of its qualities, it reveals the common ground, for example, of the sociologist's focus on the objective stakes of the cultural exchange and of the practice of a buyer of a book or a film assessing afterward, on Amazon or on Imdb, if it's worth the expense. Or, the similarity of the practice of a blogger discussing the different aspects of the pleasure he took to a definite film, and the one of an academic scholar reflecting, on the basis of a series of well-known films, the specific strength of each of the technical factors of the pleasure given by the cinema.

Browsing the Internet from this point of view is a good opportunity to get confirmation of the existence of a “shared knowledge” that brings an esthetical interest to the discourse of the academic scholar and the common contribution, through their public expressions, of the ordinary consumer as well as the academic scholar, to the promotion of a certain type of cultural exchange. The « cultural goods » as a way to approach the « publics » (the French common word for « audiences ») ; the « creative work » as the basis of the « symbolic production » ; the « passion » as the reason and the tool of the « mediation » ; the « network » as an equipment of the search for « singularity » : these are four different ways to express and to operate the construction of the cultural exchange we can easily observe *on* the Internet and *outside* the Internet.

I have underlined in *La mesure de l'art* the fact that the sociologist is now part of what he is observing, by exploring the way humanities and social sciences have contributed to the process of rationalization of the artistic experience²⁰. Through the intermission of the school, the medias and, nowadays, the Internet, academic knowledge have become equipments of the common perception and of the personal judgment of the qualities of the cultural production, of the pleasure given by modern and ancient works of arts as well as traditional and primitive objects. In my opinion, as means of a collective justification — historical, philosophical, economical, ethnological — of the type of a social bond promoted by a certain artistic technique, they play the role of current « savoirs de la qualité »²¹ that can be easily

¹⁹ Cf. of course, Marc Granovetter, « The strength of weak ties », in *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 78, N° 6, May 1973, p. 1360-80

²⁰ Jean-Marc Leveratto, *La mesure de l'art*, Paris, La dispute, 2000.

²¹ On the identification of these different types of knowledge of the artistic quality — or ways of arguing on what makes the artistic value of a situation — spread by the circulation of writings, the medias and the conversation, cf. Jean-Marc Leveratto, *La mesure de l'art*, *op.cit.*

referred to by anyone willing to generalize the pleasure he has personally found in a cultural event.

The Internet is the very convenient place for the sociologist to find a confirmation of the pleasure of the cultural consumer to share one's pleasures. The observation of this activity on the Internet has a double interest.

The Internet gives us access to « natural » conversations, conversations that are not operated by the sociologist. The price to pay is the neutralization of the current social indicators of the identity of the person speaking. The counterpart is the opportunity to collect situations of personal expression by consumers who try to translate the pleasure given by an object in words able to convince their readers to test it.

One of the originality of the Internet is this inscription, beside commercial advertising, professional accounts and scientific vulgarization, of personal words of cultural consumers, words grounded in their practice. And, if we give a closer look to these personal words, we will recognize their embedment in different kinds of cultural exchange, according to their intentionality. Some are advice given by a consumer to other consumers. Some are intellectual exchanges about the know-how explaining the strength of a specific event. Some are participations to the building of a fictive world. Some, at last, are explicit counter-gifts for the pleasure received.

These exchanges are difficult to use as sociological data, because the proper action of the object and the agency of the subject are interwoven in the production of personal words on an artistic experience. Thus, we must be careful not to reduce these words of cultural consumers to a form of expression of « fans », or « amateurs », by selecting those attesting explicitly of the action of a cultural object on the one who speaks. The consequence would be, in this case, to focus on an exclusive type of pleasure, the one provided by the curiosity for an artistic technique or the familiarity with an author. As observed by Leonardo Quaresima and Valentina Re, it leads, for example, to emphasize the power of the DVD to generate what seems to be a completely new type of cinephilia — based on the Do It Yourself, and the pleasure of mastering the techniques of editing and producing one's own images — but must be rather understood as an aspect of the empowerment of the cognitive expertise of the “old” regular movie-goer²². Rather than to emphasize exclusively « the operational character of the DVD » and the bonanza, the resources brought by the digital exchange, to a the bunch of young users particularly fond of images, the sociologist must take advantage of the fact that the Internet, and generally speaking, the digitalization of cultural goods, brings « the work of art at the level of the user » [« à hauteur d'usager »]. By focusing on the observation of the content of the situations, the proper activity of cultural mediation usually made by a regular consumer, and the way one qualifies oneself when qualifying the objects of the exchange, can thus be illuminated, .

As recalled by Quaresima and Re, it is clear that the competences of the users revealed by the Internet are not only the consequences of the ease of access, licit and illicit, to cultural contents, nor of the ease of making films, texts and pastiches. The normalization of

²² Cf. Leonardo Quaresima et Valetina Re, « “Faites votre Antonioni vous-mêmes” : DVD, archive et réseau », in *Theoreme*, p. 75-87, p. 83. On the issue of the modernity of the contemporary cinephilia , cf. Laurent Jullier et Jean-Marc Leveratto, « Cinephilia in the digital age », in Ian Christie (ed), *Audiences*, op. cit.

the cultural exchanges over the Internet helps us to understand that a work of art has always been, long before the birth of the cultural industry, a « system » of uses rather than a « text », that the conversation between users has provided an oral « paratext » long before the invention of the term, and that the passion for a novel or a film has always generated a specific production specifically devoted to its celebration. The Internet contributes to the empowerment of the expertise of the regular consumer, by offering new tools of conversation, on line and off line. From this point of view, the « relocation » (Cassetti) of the cinema means, beyond the multiplication of screens and the ease to handle films, the relocation of the film expertise in the uses of the body and the personal conversations staged on the Internet. The Internet is one of the channel of the continual passages from the frame of the artistic event to the frame of the conversations about this event operated by the individuals, and a place of “ritualization”, as well as in a natural conversation, of the personal emotions provided by the artistic technique²³. This ritualization is peculiarly well illustrated in the “totemist” manifestations — using the vocabulary of Descola — organized by associated fans, like Comic-con masquerades. These are spectacular ways of anchoring a certain type of artistic experience in the social world, of promoting in the face of the public the esthetical pleasure it brings, and, as such, diverted by contemporary artists or volunteers promoting the preservation of a cultural landmark²⁴. But the public expression of one’s artistic pleasure, through conventional devices to indicate one’s emotion, is the ordinary form of this ritualization. Today the Internet provides a current place to operate this promotion of the pleasure given by an artistic technique, and to justify the generalization of its consumption. This activity requires to relate the objects concerned, according to a chosen ontology, to a form of « Common Good » or to a type a social world according to the

²³ We uses the word « ritualization » in the sense given by Julian Huxley, as « the formalization of behavior based on a emotional motivation », cf. Julian Huxley, *Le comportement rituel chez l’homme et chez l’animal*, Paris, Gallimard, p. 9.

²⁴ The presentation of the masquerade of the oldest American *Comic-con*, the San Diego Comic-Con International, is a good example of the ontological framing of the event that guarantees the aesthetical meaning of the personal involvement of the participants : « Our 39th annual **Costume Competition**, showcasing costumes inspired by movies, comic books, TV, fantasy, Japanese animation, video games, and the imagination of our attendees. Note this is **not** a dance or party, but a show on a stage. It is free for Comic-Con attendees to participate in or be in the audience. Most contestants provide recorded music and choreograph dramatic or humorous action for their presentations. Some entries will be individuals, others will be groups with a shared theme. Impressive Comic-Con custom award medallions, as well as cash and other prizes will be given in various categories. The large stage will feature theater-style lighting and sound, and excellent viewing for all in the audience will be provided by giant high-definition video screens suspended overhead ». The interest for this kind of performance is spreading, cf. for example : « Les *Power Rangers* prennent d’assault le Trocadero » [20 Minutes, 5 juillet 2013, n° 2503, p. 6] « Á l’occasion des 20 ans de la série « *Power Rangers* », une cinquantaine de fans ont revêtus les costumes des justiciers colorés et ont investi le Trocadéro à Paris pour rendre hommage aux héros de leur enfance. Un flashmob spectaculaire et moult qui a laissé dubitatifs certains touristes... [with photo] ». See also, « Festival Comic Con’ : LES FANS SONT PRIS AU SERIEUX [Direct Matin, 5 juillet 2013, n° 1330, p. 23] : Depuis cinq ans, le *comic con’*, le festival européen des pop cultures, né à l’ombre de sa grande sœur, la *Japan Expo*, gagne en prestige. Á l’heure où les séries télé déploient des trésors d’imagination, il était normal de leur offrir une place de choix. Demain, c’est Simon Astier, fidèle du *Comic Con’*, qui présentera en avant-première les images de la saison 3 d’*Hero Corp*. Les fidèles se rueront aussi sur les célébrations des 50 ans du *Doctor Who*, avec le départ de son acteur principal, Matt Smith. Mark Gatiss, l’un des scénaristes, donnera une masterclass dimanche et des dédicaces. Enfin, une série culte, *Buffy contre les vampires*, prolongera la magie avec la venue de Charisma Carpenter, Kristine Sutherland et Nicholas Brendon, alias Cordelia Joyce, la mère de Buffy et Alex [with photo] ». *Comic Con’*, Saison 5, Parc des Expositions de Paris-Nord Villepinte (93), www.comic-con-France.com

vocabulary of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thevenot. By this way, the account given by the cultural consumer becomes an explicit expertise of a type of artistic pleasure.

3. Frameworks of cultural exchange and modes of expertise of the artistic pleasure

The history of the « culture de masse [mass culture] » is, in France, the new field of studies opened by some French historians, inspired by the success of the so-called « histoire culturelle »²⁵. It brings a contribution, through the recognition of the « culture médiatique »²⁶, to the sociology of the cultural expertise. Even if the term can sometimes be used in a superficial sense — the « weltanschauung » insidiously imposed to the people through their uses of the medias and their media-based cultural consumption — it has primarily an epistemological function for these French historians of the mass culture. It is a way, on the one hand, to apprehend empirically the cultural consumption in its entirety, by taking in account the « re-mediation », the circulation of the objects of leisure through the mediation of different technical supports and means of communication, and the « intermediality » which has always characterized, since the XIXth century (and before, if we consider the leisure of the elite) the artistic experience. On the other hand, as an equivalent of « technical literacy », it brings into the light the educational effect of the « reproducibility », as emphasized by Walter Benjamin in his famous essay, ie the way the simple habit of dealing regularly with the cinematographic entertainment, « makes an expert out of every movie-goer ».

Thus, the notion of « culture médiatique » is a way to recognize the spectator as the benefactor of an “extended” cultural knowledge — based on the “hybridation” of the human senses with technical objects such as books and stages — long before the invention of the Internet and its « extended humanity », even long before the invention of the first phonograph, in « pre-modern » phases of the cultural consumption. The democratization of this cultural consumption initiated by the conjunction of the industrial revolution and the development of the public space, the spreading of the literacy have more and more extended, since the beginning of the XIXth century, the different types of artistic pleasure and the collective memory of the artistic events shared by the common urban citizens. This knowledge relies not only on their personal memory but on their acquaintance — through their regular frequentation of local cultural venues, their readings and their conversations about shared artistic references and experiences, — with the collective resources, names, words and images, required to assert the cultural value of a situation. We could say that the personal knowledge of the spectator is thus embedded in a common « culture médiatique » that brings him the familiarity with “common places” of the artistic quality and the ability, on the basis of his habit of consumption, to experience, in the sense given to this term by

²⁵ Cf, Jean-Pierre Rioux et Jean-François Sirinelli (dir), *La culture de masse en France de la Belle époque à aujourd'hui*, Paris, Fayard, 2002.

²⁶ Pascal Durrand, « La "culture médiatique" au XIXème siècle. Essai de définition-périodisation », in *Quaderni*, n° 39, automne 1999, pp. 29-40. The author defines the « culture médiatique » by the presence and multiplication of standardized and mediatized products [l'« existence et profusion de produits média-formatés »], the showcasing by the medias of their own reflexivity [la « spectacularisation réflexive de l'appareil médiatique »], and the feeling of belonging to a community based on the same sensitivity to the actuality [l'« être au monde médiatiquement informé »].

John Dewey, the value of the novelties released on the market.

Two aspects of the expertise supported by the digital exchanges are therefore characteristic.

a) The first, innovative, is the modification of the social perception of the cultural expertise.

The Internet has contributed, through its « user generated contents » to the constitution of the personal experience as an artistic expertise in a double sense :

- the recognition of the cultural authority of the regular consumer, founded on the individual initiative to post, for the sake of the public, his judgment on the quality of artistic goods he has experienced or, through modes of collective action, such as forums, votes, games, and so on helping the consumers to improve their knowledge of the artistic quality of cultural goods. Based on the good will, these associations of digital consumers have established the word of mouth as a tool of expertise by emancipating it of its traditional face-to-face transmission or its previous commercial exploitation that the Internet has extended. The « empowerment » of the cultural consumers is thus challenged by the new means and the greater strength offers to commercial advertisers by Internet (exemplified, in our every daylife, by the irritating task of the desinscribing of our e-mail address)
- the promotion of the aesthetical power of the digital productions of the regular consumer — posts, blogs, texts, images — among the young users, opening thus a new path to artistic professionalization.

b) The second aspect is linked to the anchoring of their cultural expertise in the social world made by the Internet users. The tensions produced by this anchoring can be easily observed through the contemporary debates generated by the definition of the « Digital Humanities » as an academic field. The anchoring of the activity of cultural expertise has to deal permanently with the conventionalized brackets, mostly linked to the professional organization of the artistic experience and with the « justification constraints » linked to the expressing of a judgment in the public place. Thus, the public valuation of the artistic quality of a certain type of consumption is dependent, through the practical making and the editorial equipment of a judgment acceptable for the public, on the social laminations of the activity of consumption.

Classical technical rationalizations of the experience of the cultural consumer — such as the distinction made by the theoreticians of literature between the « reader » embedded in a physical environment, the « reading » as the reader's art of giving life to the text, and the « read » as grounded in the intimate experience of the reader²⁷ — are a mode of recognition of these social laminations. Historical observations of the evolution, in France, of the signification of the « public » give confirmation of this mental organization of the experience of the cultural exchange in relationship with its social organization. From the eighteenth century onto the nineteenth century, a splitting of the term happens, from its ancient general meaning of *Res Publica*, into different meanings — the « author » as embodying his audience, the « République des Lettres » as the community of the literates, the « State » as a protector of the arts, and finally the sum of the personal customers²⁸ — each linked with the social organization of the process of consumption (the professionalization of the arts, the generalization of the college, the action of the public authorities in the field of leisure,

²⁷ Cf. Michel Picard, *La lecture comme jeu*, Paris, Minuit, 1986.

²⁸ Hélène Merlin, *Public et littérature en France au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1994.

and the expansion of the cultural market).

Therefore, it is easy to recognize the different ways the framing of the experience of a given artistic technique brings support, by the mediation of the ontology that founds its social reality, to a specific kind of cultural expertise :

The **political expertise** requires the implementation of a naturalistic ontology which is the condition to assess the shaping of the artistic experience by collective agents such as the market, the State, the social classes, the professional organizations and so on. And this political expertise contributes to the expansion of the things belonging to the civic and industrial worlds, according to the grammar of collective action proposed by Boltanski and Thévenot. In a certain way, this form of expertise grounded in the individual and collective will of “making things public” to use Bruno Latour’s *motto*, is an obstacle to the recognition of other forms of expertise, because of the importance they give to personal things or to the magical things (in the sense of Marcel Mauss).

This is particularly the case of the **aesthetic expertise** as usually opposed in France to the « artistic » expertise, a label restricted, since the success of *La distinction*, to the judgment of the intellectuals, and primarily the « professional artists », able to combine Kant’s « aesthetic judgment » with a personal knowledge of an artistic technique. Partly invisible — even if the Internet is a way of observing it — or giving place to spectacular events perceived only, just like the recent world success of the Harlem Shake, as opportunities to “have fun”, the aesthetic expertise of the regular consumer is therefore difficult to recognize. But as the public expression of one’s personal sympathy with certain artistic objects based on the feeling of sharing with them the same qualities, the aesthetic expertise cannot be exclusively restricted to a certain type of consumers, seen as illiterate and preoccupied only with self-expression. The use of a *totemic* conduct — i.e. the public ritualization of one’s personal admiration for an object — is the common way for the contemporary cultural consumer to involve himself in the inspired world, in the sense of Boltanski et Thévenot. Initiated in France by the first cultural cenacles and « artistic battles » of the beginning of the XIXth century, it is a means of expressing one’s own admiration, of sticking to one’s judgment and, by publically celebrating the thing one feels personally attached to, of sharing the artistic inspiration one has felt. The contemporary recognition of this aesthetic expertise is due to the fact that it is a help to revitalize traditional techniques by using the aesthetical power of objects of the « cultural industry », in the sense of Adorno et Horkheimer, or of the contemporary « digital culture ». The recent exhibition on *Tarzan !*, organized by the Museum des Arts Premiers du Quai Branly is a good example of this utility²⁹.

Hence, the aesthetic expertise is quite different from the **technical expertise**, which is the activity referred to by the French philosophers using the term « aesthetic » as a scientific label and an exclusive designation of the legitimate arts. The Internet, as emphasized by the

²⁹ According to its presentation, this exhibition (16 June - 27 September 2009) « dedicated to an icon of popular culture allows the public to discover how the hero was created and decipher the myth that he embodies. Although Edgar Rice Burroughs is the father of the Tarzan character, all those who used him in comics, films, posters, models, records, games, etc refer to collective images and representations that are at the roots of one of our century’s strongest myth. The exhibition looks at the origins and nature of Tarzan, as a character as well as a myth (from *Saturnin Farandoul*, a 1914 documentary, to *Greystoke* in 1983), and redefines the character as a modern hero fighting for the protection of nature ».

searchers, reveals the « authority » acquired by the ordinary consumer eager to improve his understanding of a certain type of artistic pleasure by using his body as a tool of measurement of the technical know-how involved in its production³⁰. The technical expertise of the regular consumer, given by a long habit of consumption and focusing on the respective ability of the objects to make the consumer enter a certain kind of fiction, is particularly favored by the Internet because of its ability to identify and to choose experiences worth having and worth paying. Taking the point of view of the person looking forward to being caught by the magic and to experiencing the living presence of the world built by a technique, this expertise is easy to handle by its reader because it is based on the personal assessment of the ability of the technical object to directly speak, without the help of words, to the consumer. It is well fitted to the merchant world instrumented by the Internet as well as to the inspired world operated freely by those willing to promote a certain type of artistic pleasure.

The fourth and last kind of expertise is the one that should deserve the most important attention because it is often forgotten to the benefit of the political expertise and its promotion of a professional point of view focusing therefore the attention on the self-representation of the artists cultural heroes. It is what we can call the ***ethical expertise***. Its importance comes from the fact that, because it is based on an analogist ontology, it contributes by assessing the ethical value of the representation of the world given by an artistic technique, to the self-representation in the public space of the consumer who recognized himself in the persons and the domestic things represented. The *Italian Film Festival* of Villerupt, in Lorraine, founded by the sons of the Italian immigrants working in the steel factories of the town as a tribute to their parents, is a good illustration, like plenty of similar Film Festivals flourishing today in the world, of this type of expertise³¹. This ethical expertise, by re-inscribing the action of the technique artistic in the domestic space, contribute positively to the expansion of the civic world, through the acceptation of alternative forms of personal identities it helps to promote against traditional norms of conduct. It contributes, this time negatively, to the expansion of the cultural industry, by imposing the ethical acceptability of the content of the representation and its individualization according to the nature of the persons concerned by the artistic technique. The moral ratings of the contemporary American movie guides are the contemporary token of the restitution to the regular consumer of this ethical expertise confiscated during 30 years by the Studios in the name of the famous Production code.

I will conclude on this restitution to the regular spectator of his/her ability to expertise the artistic things. It is the intellectual justification, political and ethical, of the *sociology of the artistic quality* that I try to promote in my personal writings and those published in collaboration with Laurent Jullier. It doesn't propose a new theory of the culture but a different way to practicing it, by demanding the sociologist to be attentive to

³⁰ Cf. Jean-Marc Leveratto et Mary Leontsini, *Internet et la sociabilité littéraire*, Paris, BPI, 2008, for an observation of the construction of this technical expertise by regular readers of novels. See also Brigitte Chapelain, « De nouvelles pratiques d'autorité dans les blogs de lecteurs », in Oriane Deseilligny et Sylvie Ducas, *L'auteur en réseau, les réseaux de l'auteur*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de Paris Ouest, p. 167-186, who analyses, contrary to the title of her article, the way the writers of personal blogs fond of novels conquer their legitimacy on the Internet by showing « an ethos and an identity of amateurs ».

³¹ Jean-Marc Leveratto, *Cinéma, spaghetti, classe ouvrière et immigration*, Paris, La dispute, 2010.

the « common sense » that he himself uses to understand the cultural practices he observes, rather than the *habitus* which makes it impossible to recognize the contemporary competence of the cultural consumer. This competence is the ability, just as the sociologist who observes him, to combine the different types of expertise, esthetical, technical and ethical, whose interpenetration guarantees the common artistic quality of an experience.