

Faculty of Arts  
Charles University  
Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

-Ms. Snezhanna Markova

-“Towards a new social media model: the redistribution of power in the subscription-based creator economy

-MA thesis

-Supervisor’s Report

Brief summary of subject: The title of the thesis itself well illuminates the topic, “Towards a new social media model: the redistribution of power in the subscription-based creator economy”, which precisely this study seeks to explore and upon which to shed light. By focusing on the creator economy of this field the candidate tries to find a way out of the deadlock and impasse in which the contemporary situation finds itself: a digital dystopia in so many regards according to this study; the work of Bernard Stiegler is rolled in for illustrative purposes in this regard.

Methodology and structure: The 83 pp. thesis contains an Introduction, three principal chapters, a Conclusion, a Bibliography, and an Abstract/Abstrakt with Keywords. The study blends theoretical and cultural studies readings across a range of focuses.

Achievements: The thesis profiles a crucial matter nowadays and in so doing references a key theorist of twenty-first century modernity, Bernard Stiegler, with special reference to his, *The Age of Disruption: Technology and Madness in Computational Capitalism* (trans. 2019), *The Neganthropocene* (trans. 2018) and *Automatic Society, Volume 1: The Future of Work* (trans. 2016). It also explores a way out of the deadlock of the digital dystopia with reference to a book chapter from Erik S. Roraback on “Toward a New Frame; or, Trans(in)fusing the Capitalocene into Neganthropocene Cultural Capital” (In *Trans(in)fusion and Contemporary Thought: Thinking in Migration*, 2023). For example we read the following,

In the 21st century, Bernard Stiegler attributes the nihilistic outlook of modern generations on the internet to the tragic extent to which cultural memory and expression are shaped by information congregators guided by algorithms and oriented towards profit motives. He notes the systematic exploitation and “physical reticulation of interindividual and transindividual relations – serving what is referred to today as the ‘data economy’, itself based on data-intensive computing, or ‘big data’.”<sup>1</sup> Digital tech giants, or the Big Four – Google (Alphabet), Meta, Amazon and Apple have hijacked the Web 2.0 revolution by centralizing user-generated content on a handful of platforms controlled by the desires of advertisers. The users of these platforms, who are simultaneously the customers and the workers, are reduced to mere data points, the value of which can be extracted and sold without the users’ intervention. This hijacking resulted in major social media networks posing as environments where users have power in theory, yet in reality, that power is consistently expropriated. (5)

This is all important material. Also we encounter this,

This age of disruption brings forward the absence of any discernible strategy or the specific authority to mitigate its effects. Audiences find themselves in a pivotal moment in history, living through a kind of crisis of knowledge distribution and

creator compensation. Stiegler prompts us to deliberate on the extent to which we are willing to entrust our lives to computational rationality tailored for market purposes and perhaps consider what kind of transformation could take place to mitigate the exacerbation of this situation. In an earlier work, he posits that “time saved by automatization must be invested in new capacities for dis-automatization, that is, for the production of negentropy.”[fn. 24] As Erik S. Roraback argues, there is a need to turn these effects into negentropic ones “so as to service neither the Anthropocene nor the so-called Capitalocene, but rather for the cultural commons [P. 15] in an emancipated Neganthropocene”. [fn. 25] He further posits that the reimagining of the wealth/capital as “neganthropic (trans-)cultural non-capital” would be an “epochal-altering idea” that would shift the relationship between cultural production, capital and the individual. [fn. 26] The present work will proceed on the assumption that this transformation cannot be divorced from upheaving the very structures of digital labour and therefore requires brand-new models of knowledge exchange that place the tangible monetary value exchange in the hands of the producers and consumers of knowledge instead of the managers. The subscription model offers that type of alternative and arguably has the potential to change the status quo and mitigate the effects of late-stage capitalism in the digital realm. (14-15)

These points also are worth remarking, which is why I quote from them. Markova also writes this, which is key to the basic argument of the thesis:

The new creator economy, demonstrated by platforms such as Substack, Patreon and Nebula, presents a model in which power and agency shift to the players creating value, instead of extracting it for the platforms’ benefit. This shift represents a ground-breaking change in both practical and theoretical terms for all involved sides. The users of this model, both creators and consumers achieve a practical means of taking over control over their consumption habits, production means and revenue. This marks a novel and positive deviation from the exploitative strategies employed by the major tech conglomerates, which have historically not prioritized the interests of users. (53)

In addition, here is the final outcome:

The sense of hopelessness articulated by Stiegler arises from the acute powerlessness ascribed to consumers and creators by IT platforms and advertisers. It is precisely this issue that subscription models attempt to address. This approach not only addresses the melancholic side effects of existing within digital structures but also fosters aspirations for a more liberated and expressive manifestation of digital tertiary memory. (74)

Shortcomings: Though one cannot do everything within the confines of a diploma thesis, the candidate might have engaged even more works by Stiegler.

Formal features (e.g., language & style, referencing, bibliography, formatting, abstracts): The formal features to this text are excellent. However, the hyperlinks should be removed from the footnotes and Bibliography so that they are not active.

Questions: Does the candidate propose any solution of their own as it were for the current malaise and impasse in which social media finds itself? That is to say, is there a way to institute a more egalitarian and equitable situation for all the parties involved?

Conclusion: I recommend the thesis for defense and propose a preliminary grade of 1.

Seattle, 18 i 24,  
doc. Erik S. Roraback,  
(D.Phil. Oxon.)