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POSTSCRIPT ON CONTRIBUTION SOCIETIES

Antonio Ceraso

Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age by Clay Shirky. New York: Penguin Press, 2010. Pp. 448. \$39.95 cloth.

Mashed Up: Music, Technology, and the Rise of Configurable Culture by Aram Sinnreich. Science/Technology/Culture series. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010. Pp. 240, 10 illustrations. \$80.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

For a New Critique of Political Economy by Bernard Stiegler. Translated by Daniel Ross. Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2010. Pp. 154. \$14.95 paper.

Surveying the landscape of mid-century industrial society, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer observed the strange role of variety in consumer and cultural goods. The techniques of mass production in the factories and studio system had, oddly enough, managed to produce not a surface of sameness, but a great diversity of things. On the one hand, however, the diversity of goods that faced consumers was merely apparent, decipherable as false by “any child with a keen interest in variety.” On the other hand, the variety of offerings on the market was functional and effective at securing the social order. “Something is provided for all,” Adorno and Horkheimer gloomily observed, “so that none may escape.”¹ If the Frankfurt school theorists could peer into contemporary culture, they would observe a stunning intensification of variety, as well as a search engine–optimized system for identifying and catering to niche desires that would make their imagined color-coded advertising maps seem quaint by comparison. The difference between the cultural consumption analyzed by Adorno and Horkheimer and today’s practices is not the variety, which has only proliferated. Rather, it is the unidirectional character of *being provided for*. The subject of the industrial society is positioned as passive in this regard, whereas the consuming subject today is active and productive: the

famous prosumer we've heard so much about.

Today, as we're told in nearly every Web 2.0 business book, consumers are not merely provided with a variety of goods. Prosumers actively codevelop and coproduce; successful production depends on empowering prosumers and valuing their contributions. And such statements need not be read cynically. The principle of free and open source software production—that users will identify bugs and needed features and contribute code as a common resource—actually seems to work, and work beyond the limited sphere of software programming. People contribute videos on YouTube; contribute T-shirt designs and ratings on Threadless; contribute entries and up to the minute updates on *Wikipedia*; contribute to the marketing of bands, films, books, political candidates by sharing, linking, and liking them on Facebook; contribute images on Flickr; contribute artwork and music and poetry with Creative Commons licenses; contribute endless commentary, opinions, fan fiction, breaking news, and survey data on Twitter, on blogs, and on news sites; and so on. This is, indeed, where the first version of the World Wide Web fell short, still asking its users to *submit* information, in order to be better provided for. The shift from the *SUBMIT* button of Web 1.0 to the *SHARE* button of Web 2.0 can, from this

perspective, be seen as the putatively radical shift away from being-provided-for and toward contribution. It was, of course, one of the signal achievements of cultural studies (or its most notable ideological production—the jury's still out), to show that the passive consumer of Adorno and Horkheimer's account was never quite as passive as they imagined, but if the variety of goods they saw facing the consumer has multiplied exponentially, the condition of *being-provided-for* has shifted its directionality completely. The first clause of their famous diagnosis—"Something is provided for all"—might be better rewritten today as "Everyone may contribute."

The second clause is trickier. All this contribution in the area of new media is regarded as the escape itself, an escape from the passivity, limitations, and gatekeeping functions of the old media. Using Twitter, in this sense, is not merely a matter of coproducing the information sphere. It is, both in the aggregate and at the individual level a reassertion of publicness that both overcomes and surpasses the limits and controls of mass media. This is, of course, well-worn territory. The notion that people are empowered by all this contribution might even be the dominant thought of our current media sphere. If there are disputes, they revolve around whether such contributions are repressed and restricted (through

intellectual property laws), or eventually co-opted, folded into the very media systems from which they are thought to free people.

The positions are perhaps less clear-cut in other areas of contribution. The value of the state as the provider of last resort seems to experience a dramatic price drop just as the tendency to contribute media content explodes; today consumers contribute, sometimes indirectly and sometimes deliberately, the now commonplace “portion of the proceeds” to all kinds of charitable causes. The number of grant-making foundations has more than tripled since 1975, while independent giving and corporate foundation giving have both seen similar growth since the late 1980s. It might be easy enough, then, to detect the resonance between what Richard Barbrook famously labeled the “Hi-Tech Gift Economy” that we see emerging on the Internet and growth in the nonprofit sector (the low-tech gift economy?) since the 1970s and 1980s. If being-provided-for invokes the passive consumer of the bad old days in Web 2.0 discourse, it might also invoke the so-called entitlements of the industrial state apparatus, themselves everywhere under threat.²

Other kinds of contributions that emerged from and became common since the 1970s and 1980s could be added to the mix, especially in the area of finance. In describing what he calls *financialization*, or the

“diversion of savings from household economies to . . . securities,” economist Christian Marazzi highlights the role of the defined-contribution plan: “[I]t was 1981 that saw the first defined-*contribution* pension plan, the 401(k) program, which, differently from the earlier defined-*benefit* plans, makes pension fund benefits dependent on returns from the securities in which the funds are invested.” The emergence of the 401(k) and similar contribution plans was connected, according to Marazzi, with the late-1970s “politico-economic crisis of the international Fordist model;” financialization was driven by monetary policies and other policy decisions that had as their goal “draining off savings in order to reinforce stock market financing of the economy” (16–17). The old defined-benefit pensions of the manufacturing sector might thus be aligned with the being-provided-for model of Fordism. The subject participating in the defined-contribution plan, on the other hand, looks much more like the prosumer (a term itself, incidentally, invented during the same period) when it comes to the status of and relationship to the fund. In the recent labor protests in Wisconsin, labor activists focused primarily on the efforts of the conservative governor and legislature to strip public employee unions of their collective bargaining rights, which the activists identified as the long-term

threat. The more immediate question, however, involved the level of contribution to state employee retirement funds: how much should be contributed (which is to say, provided) by the state, and how much should be contributed by individuals. The unions offered near total concessions on this question, presumably a political and rhetorical loser.³

Mashing up these admittedly very different domains can be justified, I hope, if the resultant mix serves to open or extend investigations that critically parse out and examine the forms of contribution people engage in, and their political, economic, and aesthetic functions. Much of the critical inquiry around what we've called, in this issue, *open source* culture has positioned its practices against traditional models of property and economic organization, or against originality in aesthetic production. Viewing contribution as a generalizable diagram, one that displaces and supplants being-provided-for in multiple domains, may open such inquiry to new questions. What, for example, are the resonances between tax policy, the global nonprofit sector, and the desire to share images? How do subjectivities related to contemporary finance capital—and the recent financial crisis—relate to the aesthetics of DJing, or corporate contributions of code to open source projects? Such questions, to

be sure, sound a discordant note at first. The beats may match better when we learn that a primary area of tension in free and open source projects today is the character of contribution agreements, which stipulate the legal status of contributed code; the other time people commonly encounter contribution agreements is, of course, when they sign up for their 401(k) or 403(b) plans.

The three texts under review here provide readers with an entry into mixed forms of contribution by working through the character of contribution in multiple political, economic, and aesthetic registers. In both its argument and accessible style, Clay Shirky's *Cognitive Surplus* is perhaps the most familiar, especially to readers of other popular studies of network culture, or, indeed, Shirky's previous blockbuster *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (2008). While Shirky remains fascinated by the way individual contribution to collective projects seems to liberate people from the old restrictive structures of being-provided-for, *Cognitive Surplus's* most fruitful aspect is Shirky's attempt to locate such contribution within distinct social and technological systems while also evaluating the social and political effects of such generosity. A far more direct engagement with the political economy of contribution, and particularly its relation

to finance capital, can be found in Bernard Stiegler's short collection of modified lectures, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*. Much like Shirky, Stiegler sees what he calls an "economy of contribution" as intimately related with nonwork time. Unlike Shirky (who—surprisingly, given his book's economic focus and 2010 publication date—does not discuss the financial crisis at all), Stiegler seeks to position contribution as an alternative not merely to the old industrial economy but also to a neoliberal finance capital.

Aram Sinnreich's *Mashed Up* takes up the political-economic question in an aesthetic register, focusing on that most notable of emerging aesthetic forms: the music mashup. *Mashed Up* provides a useful set of categories for evaluating emerging aesthetic practices that have most occasioned definitional disputes on the nature of contribution and property; it is especially valuable for its attempt to demonstrate gradations within those practices. While Sinnreich partakes in the by now familiar moves of juxtaposing restrictive social forms of modernity with newer, and presumably less hierarchical or elitist, practices, *Mashed Up* is nevertheless intent on showing how these new practices develop their own sets of values, how deterritorialized music is *reterritorialized*.

Together, then, the three books reviewed here may demonstrate

that a discourse almost numbingly obsessed with intellectual property disputes is turning to other matters, examining the constitutive elements and power arrangements immanent to emerging cultural production or examining open source culture's relationships with other spheres of activity.

If one question has occupied nearly all commentators on network culture, it might be this: Why do people contribute creative works—from software code to novels to music—so freely on digital networks? In *Cognitive Surplus*, Shirky seeks to explain this phenomenon by developing the concept of a cognitive surplus and detailing the conditions that both create it and enable it to function. The cognitive surplus is created by the "amount of unstructured time cumulatively available to educated populations," particularly after the Second World War—free time that "began to add up to billions of collective hours per year" (4–5). The book's primary historical claim is straightforward: this free time was occupied, cognitively, by technological forms that promoted passivity or "pure consumption of media," particularly television (15). It is here that Shirky may be closest to Adorno and Horkheimer, replaying the trope of movement from *SUBMIT* to *SHARE* that marks so much similar work. What the emergence of networks makes available is the transformation of the

surplus into “behaviors other than passive consumption” (11). Shirky’s first goal is to analyze the technico-social configuration that generates such behaviors, or what he calls the means, motives, and opportunities that transform the “raw material” of the cognitive surplus into something that produces meaning and value.

This odd factory for transforming the raw material of cognitive surplus involves, first, tools. Shirky tells a story by now familiar to students of both print and Internet culture, in which the age of passive consumption really begins with the printing press, which involved multiple economic risks and the kinds of scarcity such risks produced. With the emergence of the Internet as a tool, what we encounter, rather, is abundance, a condition that scrambles our evaluative categories. While it was always clear that the particular emergence of print was historically contingent, it is more difficult to detect the contingency of all the social valuations that emerged alongside it. If people still have trouble processing the aesthetic value of contributions, Shirky suggests, it is because “abundance can remove trade-offs we’re used to,” and so “can be disorienting to the people who’ve grown up with scarcity” (49). The communication tools, no longer controlled and no longer scarce, make traditional evaluative categories difficult but are always in the process of creating

new possibilities. With the tools for abundant social sharing now in people’s hands, Shirky turns to the thorny question of motives. “The novel modes of charity” emerging on networks, Shirky suggests, “rely not only on the existence of tools that connect us and let us volunteer our time, talents, or money; they rely on our being motivated to do so as well” (82).

On this point, Shirky is perhaps at his least historical. Drawing on psychological and economic studies, Shirky argues that “intrinsic motivations”—among them desires for autonomy, competence, and belonging, or connectedness—are “fundamental to human nature” (86). If the previous mode of social organization served to restrict access to or control over tools for contributing and connecting, it also served to suppress or redirect these innate desires, which were restricted to private activities: “Our motivations for using those tools are the ancient, intrinsic ones, motivations previously remanded to the private sphere but now bursting out in public” (95). The machinery of human nature through which Shirky runs the raw material of the cognitive surplus is at the very least a cause for raised eyebrows here—one might suggest that these very desires are immanently produced within the particular technico-social configuration, rather than preexisting it, and that generalizing them as an essential “desire for

autonomy” (itself a suspect historical or even cross-cultural category) obscures more than it reveals about contemporary culture and production. It is a suspicion not quelled by Shirky’s rather ahistorical modes of supporting this fundamental claim. His target, however, seems to be analysts who would attribute emerging cultures of contribution to technology alone.

In any case, the desire to contribute meaningfully also requires, for Shirky, opportunities (or sites) for collaboration and coordination. In this regard, Shirky seeks to add multiple modes of coordination to pure market logics, or find the “optimal” mixture of competitive and collaborative values that would promote both quality production and ethical behavior. So, for example, the empty swimming pools of 1970s California provided the right competitive and collaborative mix for the development of modern skateboarding. In other cases, the right proportion gravitates against competition, as in some free software production:

The advances in Apache (and in all large free software projects) rely on the existence of a collaborative group of people, and the ability to recruit that group and integrate their work has driven Apache’s decade-long dominance. Apache doesn’t just happen to be noncommercial;

it has to be noncommercial in order to take in contributions from as many people as it can as cheaply as it can. (116)

The factory that transforms the cognitive surplus into a value involves the tools, or technologies, but also requires configurations of culture that draw out and satisfy desires while successfully coordinating a group’s knowledge-making activities and sense of purpose.

Of course, all kinds of groups and sharing activities can do *that*, so Shirky seeks to establish a scale of value for the kinds of contributions people make. He turns to this question in the last part of the book, developing a set of definitions for personal, communal, public, and civic sharing, placing personal sharing at the lower end of the scale in terms of the difficulty of producing and maintaining structures, and the value created for nonparticipants, while locating civic sharing, which takes “improving society as its major goal,” at the higher end (173–75). This set of categories does not yield many surprises—production and sharing of ICanHazCheezburger images occupy the lower personal sharing end, whereas a Facebook group that effectively combated a religious sect’s attacks against women in the Indian city of Mangalore produces civic value. The categorization is itself, however, a useful heuristic for parsing out contributions, or

attuning observers to the multiple ways contribution, if it is to be read as the expression of the surplus set loose from formerly restrictive structures, transforms both cultural production and cultural politics.

While primarily a matter of description on its surface, Shirky's text, like much in its popular genre, is rhetorical, even evangelical. Shirky is asking those who relied on the gatekeeping function of the cultural industries and other forms of creative participation to see networks and their forms of contributions in a different light. It remains odd that a book about generosity and emerging forms of economy and community could be published in the midst of the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression without even a passing mention that financial and housing markets—those other spaces of coordination both with and against which he positions his generosity—had collapsed in near catastrophic failure, throwing millions into foreclosure and unemployment.

The absence is no more striking than when Shirky addresses the question of free labor. The problem of establishing a labor theory of contribution has haunted the discourse of open source culture almost from its inception; Tiziana Terranova's influential 2000 article "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy" formalized the question for many in the academic humanities, but the

question has persisted in popular form whenever the status of contributors has come up.⁴ As a result, most proponents of *free culture* see the need to address the question of *free labor*. Shirky sets up the problem this way:

People sharing their writing or videos or their medical symptoms or seats in their car are motivated by something other than money. The people running services like YouTube and Facebook want to get paid, and they do. It can seem unfair for amateurs to be contributing their work for free to people who are making money from aggregating and sharing that work. (57)

Shirky's solution is to compare such platforms to a bar where people will pay more than they would to drink alone in order to feel "a sense of connectedness," while the bar owner will profit from the customers' mere presence, the sense of connectedness—the scene, perhaps—they create by being there. For Shirky, in other words, the entire problem is stated incorrectly because it drags along a "fifteenth-century publishing model" and thereby presents the people contributing to these sites as workers, where they should be classified differently: "But what if the contributors aren't workers? What if they really are contributors,

quite specifically intending their contributions to be acts of sharing rather than production? What if their labors are labors of love" (58)? The correct economic model for thinking the status of contributors is thus not the factory or sharecropping site, but the gathering place. The model is further supported by a reading of ordinary consciousness, as Shirky has it: "[M]ost people affected by this state of affairs don't seem to be terribly up in arms about it" (57) (a remarkably unconvincing addition, since one might say the same about any number of exploitative relationships). While the position that these relationships are about enjoyment and connectedness rather than traditionally conceived *wage* labor may seem somewhat tone-deaf as unemployment hovered at near 10 percent, there is a sense in which Shirky's premise is correct. It is problematic, at best, to import concepts of labor developed in an industrial setting—labor as being-provided-for—into such arrangements. It is no less problematic, however, to import concepts of leisure that were themselves developed in industrial contexts. This is the default move for proponents of open source culture (Linus Torvalds titled his book *Just for Fun: The Story of an Accidental Revolutionary* [2001] on the development of Linux) but is increasingly a case where the frequency of justifications demonstrates their nagging insufficiency.

If Shirky's omission of the financial crisis has any effect on *Cognitive Surplus*, it is to give the book an almost dated feeling, as if the various analyses emanated from the heyday of such books in the mid-2000s, markets humming along (toward a cliff), unemployment at 5 percent. This criticism is, to some extent, unfair—the question may be beyond the scope of Shirky's very well targeted rhetorical and taxonomical goals. At the same time, popular texts such as Shirky's on open source culture might be profitably combined with more critical texts that do connect the historical coemergence of such contribution networks with neoliberal financialization, as has been the project of much Italian autonomist thought for the better part of the last decade. A key recent text for forging such a connection is Bernard Stiegler's *For a New Critique of Political Economy*.

Stiegler's short text contains two lectures. The first, "For a New Critique of Political Economy," was adapted from a lecture he delivered in January 2009. The second, "Pharmacology of Capital and Economy of Contribution," was delivered in December of that year. Both works are direct responses to measures taken in the wake of the financial crisis, and particularly the various stimulus measures designed to reconstitute what Stiegler calls the "consumerist model," which he argues is "obsolete" (4). At the same time, the short works

can be considered summaries of Stiegler's larger projects, such as the three volume *Technics and Time*, deploying the conceptual apparatus so central to those works (tertiary retention and grammatization, the industrial or technical history of memory, and so forth). A full exposition of Stiegler's tightly woven and terminologically heavy argument would likely require a treatment the length of the volume itself. For my purposes here, I hope merely to locate some consonances on the question of contribution.

For Stiegler, the disaster of the financial crisis is not accidental but a logical outcome of the course of capitalist development. The first essay traces this development by pursuing two themes: the development of proletarianization beyond Marx's concept, and a redefinition of investment that would counter speculation. The first theme requires Stiegler's concept of tertiary retention and grammatization, which can be defined as the exteriorization of various kinds of knowledges. If Marx could detect the exteriorization of forms of work, or knowledge of making, he could not predict the exteriorization of forms of life, or knowledge of living, that would come to dominate the experience of consumer society. Whereas the first kind of proletarianization leads to, and Stiegler remains classical on this point, the transformation of labor power into a commodity, the

second affects libidinal economy, transforming desire into drives. The result is an economic system in which consumers lose their own knowledge of "living," having both their social relationships and material desires exteriorized, calculated, and packaged for them, while speculators hurry after satisfaction of short-term results rather than tending to long-term desires. Stiegler seeks to redefine investment as an ethic of care that extends networks and practices ("long circuits of transindividuation") into the future rather than a system of drives that seek short-term returns.

If one concept in the first essay connects Stiegler's analysis to Shirky's, it is *otium*, or the Roman concept of "studious leisure" (53)—the idea that people work on creative projects outside the time of employment, even necessarily so, since the temporality of creative or noetic acts never quite maps on to a remunerated work time. While Stiegler discusses this "time of leisure" in reference to the *intermittents*, or temporary cultural workers, the outline of free time to pursue and share work—as a form of work, but not employment—comes into focus. It is precisely through such incalculable or immeasurable forms of cognitive work, moreover, that Stiegler sees the potential for taking proletarianization (and its catastrophic results) in another direction: the development of alternative practices and forms of

work and life, practices that would constitute an economic “system of care.” Indeed, Stiegler is at his most Derridean on this point. As much as the proletarianization of cognitive capacities expropriates forms of knowledge, it also establishes the space in which capital mutates, the “rupture through which associated milieus are formed” (48). Proletarianization, and capital in general, is in this sense *pharmacological*, both poison and medicine. Needless to say, Marx already told us this, but only, Stiegler suggests, in an industrial context. If the factories were the site of proletarianization, they were also the site where solidarity developed. Stiegler’s advance here is to recast that dynamic on digital networks: if networks are the site in which cognitive knowledge and knowledge of living are exteriorized and expropriated, they are also the site in which new forms of communal practices—transindividuation—emerge. Citing Mackenzie Wark’s *The Hacker Manifesto* (2004) and Pikka Himanen’s *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2001), Stiegler portrays hackers in general as an example of an associated milieu opened up by proletarianization. He calls this emergence, of course, the “economy of contribution” (70).

Whereas the first essay could be seen as a symptomology of neoliberal capitalism, the second develops the treatment plan. Despite the at times dizzying route by

which Stiegler’s argument travels, his conclusions on the economy of contribution are, in fact, not that different from Shirky’s. The second essay ends with a section titled “The Economy of Contribution as a New Relation between Technical System and Social System” (127). In this concluding section, Stiegler invokes software programmers as the paradigm case for an economy of contribution that would work as the “sociotherapy” to poisonous elements of capital:

In 1990 Philippe Aigrin and myself [*sic*] put forward the idea that the software industry and its digital networks will eventually cause associated techno-geographical milieus of a new kind to appear, enabling human geography to interface with the technical system, to make it function and, especially, to make it evolve, thanks to this interfacing: collaborative technologies and free license software rest precisely on the valorization of such associated human milieus, which also constitute techno-geographical spaces for the formation of positive externalities. (128–29)

Put more plainly, Stiegler sees free and open source software development as having the potential to develop into an alternative to

proletarianization and its attendant short-termism. If the pathologies of capitalism lead it structurally to “carelessness,” these emerging forms of activity—in an always risky manner, of course—would function “contra the economy of carelessness” (129).

At times, Stiegler’s analysis of contemporary political economy, and certainly his initial demand that philosophers pay attention again to economics and critique, are valuable, strikingly original, and much needed. At other times, they can sound like fairly commonplace critiques of the excesses of neoliberal capital arrived at through an odd process. For example, Stiegler provides the following:

“This capital, however, becomes purely speculative when it no longer measures a capital of confidence in the future of the assets of the production apparatus—in relation to which it constitutes, as a system of anticipations, capacities for investment—but instead relies on operations which are purely self-referential (such that anticipations created by the financial sub-system anticipate nothing but itself and come at the expense of the production system) or else are oriented toward the production apparatus, but are structurally short-term (that is, based on

disinvestment, that is, on the *pillage* of the production apparatus)” (81).

For anyone following the aftermath of the financial crisis, this may sound—after extensive examination—like a fairly complex way of restating the Wall Street–Main Street or finance capital–productive industry divide we’ve heard so much about (or even summarizing in philosophical terms the plot of Oliver Stone’s *Wall Street*, 1987). Even if such moments suggest that Stiegler’s view of finance may itself be limited by traditional categories (investment vs. speculation, for instance), his critique is most useful when it raises the question of the relationship between the economy of contribution and finance capital, a question, I’ve suggested throughout, that requires further examination. It is also valuable for sketching out the subjective components of particular practices within an economy of contribution. Stiegler focuses on hackers and free and open source programmers. I’ll now turn to what may be considered another location of such activities: the work of mashup artists.

Aram Sinnreich’s *Mashed Up* is a sustained and concrete examination of one particular kind of contribution practice: the work of mashup artists and its effect on the social and aesthetic assumptions of modernity. It is, in this sense, both a remarkable study on its own and

a useful supplement to the more generalized analyses provided by Shirky and Stiegler. *Mashed Up* is structured in three parts: a theoretical discussion of music and the way its production and consumption are organized in societies; an empirical examination—consisting mostly of Sinnreich’s analysis of interviews—of the effects of mashup practices on the organization of aesthetic production and consumption; and a prognosis of these changes in a closing section. Sinnreich’s thesis is a careful one that attends to the contemporary moment as a time of transition. What we might observe in mashup practices is the “rush to colonize the growing gray area” between sets of binaries that organized aesthetic production—especially musical production—in modernity.

These binaries depend, first, on the social importance of regulating music in the first place. Sinnreich opens with what may be his most startling argument, an analysis of Socrates’s statements on music in *The Republic*, which may appear to readers of Plato like a series of seemingly esoteric riffs on Dorian and Phrygian harmonies. But Sinnreich draws out an appropriate premise, “that musical aesthetics reflect and influence sociopolitical structures, and that innovative or challenging aesthetics pose a consequent threat to powerful institutions” (16). Sinnreich fills out this initial observation by creating a detailed matrix

through which musical regulation and resistance to that regulation may be analyzed, with legal, ideological, and commercial “sites of institutional power” and “targets of communal power,” on the one side, and musical aesthetics, praxes, and technologies occupying the “site of communal power” and “target of institutional power” (31). Where these power relations are played out, musical innovation occurs: “[T]he opposing forces of musical regulation and resistance combine to alter the very codes and practices under dispute” (31).

If the interplay of such power relations were the whole story, of course, one would expect rapid and constant innovation. As Sinnreich notes, however, our ideas and practices of both producing and consuming music have retained a notable constancy throughout the modern period. The explanation can be found in what Sinnreich calls the “modern discursive framework,” which “serves as a kind of cement, binding together ideas and assumptions about how music operates, and what it means,” and, by so doing, “encourages us to view and hear music in certain ways, and precludes us from viewing it and hearing it in other ways” (40). *Mashed Up* then sets out the structure of the modern framework in a series of binaries: art/craft, artist/audience, original/copy, performance/composition, figure/ground, and materials/tools. In describing the

social function of these binaries, Sinnreich is most at home in the distinction between being-provided-for and contribution, where the modern framework stabilizes the function of scarce musical production and passive musical consumption. The artist/audience binary, for example, interfered with “art’s traditional function as the repository of a shared cultural lexicon,” thereby “erecting high barriers to cultural participation” and serving as an “obvious parallel” with “the production/consumption binary” (66). Disrupting the stability of these binaries, for Sinnreich, is what he calls *configurable culture*—the convergence of communication technology and culture that, among other properties, makes all cultural production storable, editable, and customizable (in short, *reconfigurable*) on a single platform. The study’s task is to work through the effects of this cultural emergence on the modern framework.

In the second section of *Mashed Up*, Sinnreich examines these changes by presenting and analyzing interviews with mashup artists, musicians, and music industry members. Each chapter addresses one of the binaries established in the first section. The interviews are themselves fascinating, and Sinnreich’s interpretations of their meaning are astute and well qualified. If two themes emerge throughout, they are, first, that the beliefs and

practices of practitioners are in a state of transition from the modern framework and, second, that new values immanent to mashup practices are emerging. What is appearing, in other words, is an intermediate space, the gray area, between the binary oppositions. It is itself undergoing a process of definition. On the originality/copy binary, for example, Sinnreich states that “[d]espite the many shades of gray emerging between the poles of the modern framework’s original/copy binary, stylistic originality remains a vital concern for many configurable musicians” (146). Those markers include criteria like “selection and arrangement of source material, temporal and spatial arrangement of sonic materials, transformative technique, and overarching compositional and organizational sensibility” (146). On the performance/composition binary, the interviews similarly demonstrate that the “distinction . . . has become nearly impossible to identify” (158), while DJs nevertheless either develop “taxonomic criteria” or “claim to encompass the entire musical labor cycle” (158). Sinnreich’s target throughout this section is the limiting and limited legal frameworks to which such rich and complex production processes are often submitted.

Whereas the second section contains Sinnreich’s primary examination of mashup practices, the third section moves to assessment:

it seeks to determine whether and to what extent the dialectical action between regulation and resistance may transform cultural understandings and practices of music. Sinnreich presents a measured analysis of the complexity of this field, addressing the way mashup practices depart from and enter into traditional institutional relationships and categories. The final chapter develops five “premises” for the “cultural logic of configurability” (196). These include a “reorientation of the relationship between the individual and the collective” (196); a “newly flexible workforce that both bears the burden and the benefits of free agency” (198); a reorganization of the public and the private (199–200); the emergence of “recursive [rather than linear] modes of narration, analysis, and other epistemological processes” (202); and a “fifth general principle” called DJ Consciousness. The last premise constitutes the subjectivity of configurable culture, shaped and interacting with the other conditions; it is a consciousness that recognizes itself as sharing in a collective marginalization “by principles of aesthetic exceptionalism, the division of musical labor, and the proprietization of expression that characterized the modern framework,” but also a consciousness that recognizes forms of “embracing self-ness and other-ness through reconfiguring and reimagining our cultural environments” (203). It is a

consciousness confronting itself in novel ways, awash in “a new fluidity,” in which we “confront our public selves through the monitor of a surveillance camera or a Facebook profile editor” while having the “ability to retrieve, reconfigure, and redistribute such information, and in so doing, to participate in the production of shared meaning” (204).

Mashed Up is certainly among the most detailed and thoughtful of any current work on particular sites of open source culture. If Sinnreich is careful to draw from his analysis a gray area and a series of potentialities (which is to say, Sinnreich insists on the transitional character of our understandings and practices of music), the book itself might be seen as similarly transitional in its discursive positioning. By establishing the dialectical forces as a matter of regulation and resistance, Sinnreich almost necessarily falls back on the contestations between configurable culture and a legal apparatus of intellectual property. Certainly, his subject matter *requires* that these contestations be part of the discussion; in music, perhaps more so than in other areas of contribution, the legal disputes are front and center. Yet the clash between restrictive (and outmoded) legal concepts and resistant cultural practices has been the primary way of framing these disputes in open source discourse, and it comes at

some cost. Specifically, the practices of the culture tend to take on an almost heroic appearance, where the power that impinges on them is extrinsic, as is the power they exercise. Foucault described one of his main objectives as “discovering why the West has insisted for so long on seeing the power it exercises as juridical and negative rather than as technical and positive.”⁵ Framing the contest between regulation and resistance almost inevitably replays this problem. At the same time, Sinnreich departs significantly from the by now expected struggle between music industry copyright lawyers and DJs. He does so by outlining, in more detail and with more insight than most, the emerging power relations *within* configurable culture, whether understood as developing aesthetic criteria that supplant the modern framework or as the premises for a new cultural logic. In this way, *Mashed Up* moves beyond the stasis of the copyright and intellectual property battles, even if it falls back into them for rhetorical purposes. If the mashup artists are themselves colonizing the gray areas between the binaries of the discursive framework, Sinnreich’s own text might be said to stake its position in the binary between the “juridical and negative” and the “technical and positive.” DJ Consciousness, in this sense, seems to designate *both* a romantic subject resisting an external power *and* the

conflicted subject that Stiegler describes, poised between the crumbling solidarity of the industrial moment and the reunion of labor in a digital domain. Given the current configuration of legal restrictions and emergent cultural forms, this may be the only transitional position to occupy responsibly.

The need to address that configuration may also be why the question of the second clause in Adorno and Horkheimer’s proclamation is probably unanswerable at this time. The three texts considered here all posit open source culture as at the very least a set of practices with the potential for democratizing the political or reshaping the economic through increased participation or contribution establishing an alternative to the present. That participation would present such an appearance is owing, in no small part, to the condition of being-provided-for that characterized the industrial economy and its state partner. When placed against the backdrop of being-provided-for as a form of passivity, and passive consumption in particular, contribution no doubt appears in a positive light. But contribution has many vectors. The way we contribute to the media sphere is just one. It may be tempting, then, to assume a mantle of Adornian gloom. Given the seamless coemergence of these forms of contribution—from the mashup to the 401(k), from free and open source practices to neoliberal

finance and the collapse of the welfare state—one might simply offer a quasi reversal of the maxim, the axiomatic quality of production remaining constant but the direction of its strategies inverted: “Everyone may contribute so that none may escape.” But this, too, would oversimplify the complexity of the emerging forms and practices. The three texts here accomplish something dramatic by presenting the complexity of this field of objects and relationship, indeed, by introducing new objects and relationships into that field. The task for criticism going forward will be to wrangle with that complexity.

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NOTES

1. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cummings (New York: Continuum, 1997), 123 (originally published 1944).
2. Foundation Center, http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/statistics/gm_growth.html. For a detailed description of the links between growth in the nonprofit sector, Fordism, and the rise of neoliberal economic policy, see Peter Dobkin Hall, “A Historical Overview of Philanthropy, Voluntary Associations, and Nonprofit Organizations in the United States, 1600–2000,” in *The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook*, ed. Walter W. Powell and Richard Steinberg, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 32–65.
3. Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Language: From the New Economy to the War Economy*, trans. Gregory Conti (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2008), 19–21; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text. For a discussion of the issues in Wisconsin, see Michael Cooper and Katherine Q. Seele, “Wisconsin Leads Way as Workers Fight State Cuts,” *New York Times*, 18 February 2011; and Charles Lane, “For Wisconsin Unions, a Telling Concession,” *Washington Post*, PostPartisan Blog, http://voices.washingtonpost.com/postpartisan/2011/02/on_wisconsin.html.
4. Tiziana Terranova, “Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy,” *Social Text* 18, no. 2 (2000): 33–58.
5. Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshal, John Mepham, and Kate Sopher (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 109–33, quotation on 121.