The most patent symptom of the 2008 crisis was the financial element; there was talk of the capitalist crisis, the economic crisis, the bank system crisis and so forth. People sat back thinking that they were dependent on an economic system over which they had no say and which, for the most part, significantly influenced their existence. As part of the contribution below, I will generalise this idea by introducing the concept of life-modes: these are not simply the economic and financial aspects of our existence which are out of our reach, but everything, on a more deep-rooted level, which determines all behavioural expectations which shape our social lives. As a result, there is a feeling of deprivation, paradoxically reinforced by the importance of democratic rights: as independent representatives, we can decide on anything except that which affects us the most, hence, our life-modes. The financial crisis was simply the symptom of a much larger phenomenon, the deprivation of the individual’s existence. Bernard Stiegler, in this book, refers to this as the automatic society. I will examine
how liberal ethics governing individual rights actively contributes to this process.

Looking at contemporary philosophical activities within the field of moral and political philosophy with a little perspective, I cannot help but think about this phrase quoted by a young Marx, included in a letter to his friend, Ruge from 1843, defining philosophical activities as 'the uncompromising criticism of all existing states'—which can also be translated as: 'ruthless' criticism ('die rücksichtslose Kritik alles Bestehenden'). Of all existing states! Marx was not simply thinking about the violation of the rights of humans, issues with racism or discrimination, or distributive injustices; he was thinking of criticism which could be applied to the entire world, its state or progress—a world judged for what it is, inclusive of all its components.

I asked myself: what has happened to this activity of criticism? Who now is carrying it out? Who is able to create a prescriptive viewpoint able to cover 'all existing states', hence the world? Without a doubt, the Pope. He is the only one able to cover, employing a prescriptive viewpoint, all the aspects of terrestrial life—as he demonstrated at the start of the summer of 2015, when he wrote, for the first time in the history of the Church, an encyclical on ecology. As for the rest, it is clear that philosophy has, on a whole, abandoned this activity of criticism, which means philosophy, specifically moral and political philosophy has given up on the world. It has given up via the division and splitting up of the activity of criticism. Rather than looking at the world as a whole, ethics has divided it into subject fields: bioethics, medical ethics, ethics governing disability, ethics governing the end of life, environmental ethics, animal ethics, ethics governing research, ethics governing nanotechnologies, business ethics, family ethics, sexual ethics, ethics governing civil servants, ethics governing soldiers, ethics governing citizens, ethics governing psychoanalysis, ethics governing capitalism, work ethics, social ethics, economic ethics, business ethics, ethics governing food, religious ethics, ethics governing games, ethics governing tourism, ethics governing education—there are even ethics governing money creation, protection of the sea and

school canteens ... This is the pathway modern ethics has chosen in order to remove itself from the world: dividing it, splitting it, blowing it apart, grinding it up—literally analysing it. Ethics has become analytical. This is the safest way of eliminating all basic questioning of the world itself, and to allow governing systemic powers to progress without obstacles. Modern ethics is in fact based on exactly the opposite of the general criticism envisaged by the young Marx, and has almost become a supportive accomplice of existing reality, an accomplice of the system.

The separation and division into specific fields promotes undisputed propagation of the system and the publication of the Pope's encyclical on ecology demonstrates this: with the message, 'rücksichtslos' (ruthless), from the well-known encyclical, Republican candidate, Jeb Bush, at the 2016 presidential election, stated: 'I hope I'm not going to get castigated for saying this by my priest back home, but I don't get economic policy from my bishops or my cardinals or my pope .... But I think religion ought to be about making us better as people and less about things that pick up on the political realm.' Ethics is primarily considered as supporting the establishment of the person, and consequently, must not be combined with management of the world.

Critical power associated with ethics remains marginal, within strictly limited fields. In our context, criticism truly means: monitoring everything in terms of the Rights of Man, checking liberal ethics of individual rights are respected, generally speaking, so that wrong-doings are avoided, that discrimination is avoided and private lives respected. This is what our committees, statutes, regulations, ethics institutions of all types, abundant in our advanced societies, oversee; however, in reality, they now no longer have the power to criticise. In the medical field for example, we are concerned about patient consent even in the case of the most minor therapies (respect for independence which is the basis of liberal ethics); however, it is not possible to criticise the global dehumanisation of medicine within our hospitals. Another example: with risk management, we rave about the precautionary principle to avoid significant or

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1 The expression features in a letter to Ruge from September 1843 (Marx, Briefe aus den Deutsch-Französischen Jahrbüchern, MEW 1, 544), www.kulturekritik.com


3 This is the reason why supporters of this strict division of work do not see any contradiction in using the Papal message relative to issues such as abortion, as it involves philosophy coming into play in the life of the person.
unreasonable damage, but it has more to do with permitting an overall techno-scientific device. The precautionary principle is not about criticising technological influence on the world, but improving it.

However, it is the field of automation within our social environment which provides the most striking picture of this general resignation of ethics. Ever since we have been conversing with telephone pre-recorded voices, ever since we obey the beep alert of our seatbelt ordering us to put it on, we have become accustomed to an environment populated with machines; ever since we started managing our personal, work and intellectual lives, as well as our daily and administrative life using a computer, this logarithmic environment has become second nature. Admittedly, from an ethical point of view, every time something new comes onto the market, we are concerned about the safety of the new invention and commissions are created to guarantee the confidentiality of our private lives, ensuring the safety of end users is not endangered. But here is the issue: as ethical guidelines increase, we cannot deal with the fundamental ethical issue, whether the world we desire is really one populated with robots; is this the life-mode we truly want, a life-mode where we interact with programmed brains? If this really is the society we want, it is a society where we abandon the most vulnerable—the elderly, children, those who are ill—for machines, as we no longer have the time to deal with them. So we have a spectacular illustration of the ethical paradox according to which we live: upholding respect for the ethics of individual rights, we are faced with a world which is perhaps ethically deetable, certainly socially pathological. This paradox also appears tragic where it presents technological development as inevitable.

This marks my starting point and my first theory on contemporary societies: liberal individualist ethics and all institutions which uphold and support such ethics (statutes, committees, commissions, standards, regulations, declarations), focused on avoiding damage, constitute the most important immaterial factor underpinning the material propagation of our societies. Far from being a tool used to criticise or question the system, liberal ethics promotes, improves and guarantees its propagation. In my opinion, this is a fundamental point, which is not considered as part of general social theory: the objective complicity between liberal ethics and system propagation. Once again, we are way off the ‘ruthless criticism of all existing states’ of which the young Marx dreamt.

This is what makes contemporary ethics a genuine paradoxical operator: it favours individual access to a whole host of individual rights before enabling us to experience the world according to our respective preferences, making us simultaneously strangers to a world in which we should be living. The development of rights therefore goes hand-in-hand with ethical neutralisation of the world; the division of ethics promotes the blind and silent propagation of a world which ethics has abandoned. Two things—ethics restricted to individual rights and the influence of systems on individuals—are reciprocally reinforced every day, and it is not by chance that historically they share the same origins. At the time of the American and French revolutions, they appeared to be a perfect match, made for each other, just like the divorce procedure for lawyers. To the extent that, presently, we can clearly see that an individual’s victory is in reality the system’s victory, the system shaped the individual in its image and to its advantage. The effective globalisation of inhuman systems aligns with the universality proclaimed by human rights.

My second theory is based upon this statement: if liberal ethics are the fundamental, most important immaterial factor for the material propagation of our societies, and if this material propagation takes place unnoticed by social players, this means that whilst we fully respect the ethics underpinning individual rights, we are creating a world which can be completely deetable in terms of our social life; a world which is ethical, however socially pathological. For example, we could have a perfectly just world in the Rawlsian sense, however deetable in terms of our social life. As I said, the increasing automation of our social environment can take place whilst fully respecting liberal ethics, Rawlsian or other; but would a world where the majority of social interactions take place with machines and robots not be a deetable one?

In other words, respect for liberal ethics is compatible with undesirable life-modes, life-modes which nonetheless impose themselves and which we are unable to oppose. The situation is therefore paradoxical: as democratic individuals we are deemed to be free and independent, however, at the same time, we are unable to guide that which we consider the most important, hence life-modes. Life-modes are what affect us the most
as they represent areas of contact with society: integration into society means integrating into the life-modes imposed on us. Social integration is synonymous with life-mode integration. Yet, individualist ethics strips us of life-modes.

There is a causal relationship between the two phenomena: it is because we are focusing exclusively on the ethics underpinning individual rights that life-modes are imposed on us unknowingly; this is my theory on the immaterial factor of material propagation of life-modes. Such dispossession of life-modes originates from the liberal dogma relative to the separation of the public and the private. If we are unable to speak of such life-modes and their influence, it is because we keep the private and public spheres strictly separate. The public sphere, as clearly seen with John Rawls, is governed by a principle of neutrality which prevents the public, deliberate imposition of the concept of good. Yet, the life-modes which do not intentionally impose themselves, are global, for the collective, the public; our individual choices cannot influence them. Global ethics, world ethics as a whole, no longer exist, as ethics itself is restricted, shrinking away fast to make room for ethics relative to individual rights and politics, and relative to correct dissemination. Liberal ethics has therefore lost the power to offer the general criticism of which the young Marx ardently spoke, to the extent that ethics regarding individual rights objectively serves as an accomplice to the blind propagation of the system, which takes place without individuals being aware. In the name of respect for individual freedom and pluralism of convictions, liberalism, in reality, becomes an accomplice devoted to life-modes which are unilaterally imposed. This represents a new form of positivism, a positivism which tolerates everything—everything to ensure respect for minor ethics underpinning individual rights.

In order to establish my diagnosis, I am using a concept which, up to the present day, has not been employed to denote a specific concept relative to a social science theory: the concept of life-modes. ‘Life-mode’, until now, has not been used in reference to an object defined within literature, and therefore, I believe, it is absolutely key when establishing a critical theory of society.

I provide here, for the first time, a place for the label ‘life-mode’ within the field of social philosophy, applied to behavioural expectations durably imposed on players by the system. I actually refer to players who work, who are efficient, those who are assessed, those we expect to be able to operate within our technological environment, those who behave rationally to fulfil an objective, and those who conform to the roles imposed, the consumption modes, to be treated, liked or educated and so on. These are the expectations which are objectively imposed, hence which are regardless of the preferences of players. I am making a distinction between life-modes and lifestyles which represent a way of subjectively developing these objective life-modes. For example, one can choose slow-food rather than fast-food, living simply rather than opting for consumerism. Lifestyles represent individual life choices within an objective context not dependent on individual choices. This is why we must characterise life-modes as behavioural expectations: they do not determine the players but they constrain them or mould them to durably act in one way or another, whilst leaving them with a certain amount of room for manoeuvre. Life-modes represent the part of the system experienced by players, the area of contact via which social integration is guaranteed; to integrate into society, you must adopt these life-modes. That which is established is not always done so by players, but the life-modes themselves mechanically depend on the system, which is why they slip away from the reach of players, despite the aforementioned claim of being democratic.

The consequence is both paradoxical and long-lasting, as it means that democratic freedom actually conceives a world which we put up with without having chosen any of its relative parts; a world which we create by exercising our freedom, a world which imposes on us like an iron cage. Our democratic rights come back and hit us like a Möbius strip, a life-mode tyranny (Hunyadi 2015). This has been completely ignored by the classical liberalism of Locke all the way through to Rawls. To this oversight, I will add the conviction that it is structurally impossible to tackle, primarily because of the dogma governing separation of the public and private spheres, upon which it is based.

Amongst other things, this means that political liberalism condemns us to a kind of democratic schizophrenia, which is simply alienation via life-modes: whilst society promotes individual rights so that everybody can satisfy his own preferences, individuals are forced to face a future full of undesired life-modes.
In the words of Spinoza: individual-liberal ethics, and the entire host of institutions which support such, bestow an effect of transcendence, an effect of removal of power from individuals. They are an objective mechanism via which individuals create their own spider's web, and they do this by passively subscribing, as the objective life-modes created have the power to create effects of happiness which almost mechanically result in consent and, therefore, the support of individuals. For example, we adore technological products. This is exactly the reason why, in passing, capitalism which stimulates our life-modes, can be described as intelligent: it is able to fulfill the structure of desires it has itself engendered, it is able to satisfy the preferences it has itself produced.

In essence, individual-liberal ethics reinforces the conditions overseeing the propagation of a system which itself creates the current life-modes. On the one hand, it does so by bringing together individuals in their individuality by establishing, and permanently repairing, individual rights and freedom, an establishment which becomes the only shared ethical reference; on the other hand, it produces a legitimatisation effect (which can be seen via the secret deployment of life-modes), which most surely prevents any political dictatorship from relating to a previous normative reference. Thus, the spider's web also closes in on itself.

At present, the major challenge is overcoming this paradox and the resulting democratic schizophrenia. This is the ethical emergency we face: reclaiming the life-modes. This ethical challenge is also and necessarily a political challenge too. I have demonstrated that the present ethical paradox—a life-mode where ethics is omnipresent but which is incapable of passing the life-modes themselves—is fuelled by liberal ethics and the public/private division, which enables the system to muscle its way through, without any obstacles. Amongst other things, this means that an individual response to life-modes that the system imposes will be vain and unreal, helping the system en route to a triumphant victory. Choosing a marginal life undoubtedly falls under moral heroism, but does not have any effect on the life-mode system. This is why only the establishment of a political institution, hence a common, is up to the challenge. Without an institution of this type, it cannot be tackled, and all indignation will be labelled a vain imprecation; the system will continue to propagate and extend the conditions underpinning its domination. Such an institution must oversee common action, a place where common desire can be established, focused on the world and not on individual principles which currently defend all ethics committees. Within the present individualist desert, we must not be scared to voluntarily promote the establishment of such a place, to fulfill such a purpose. It is urgent: we cannot wait for the emergence, based upon present political procedures which govern the democratic world, of a consensus on the need for an institution to assess these life-modes; obtaining such a consensus is fictional, given the current powers. We contend with the shutout inertia of the system and the rate of passive subscription of individuals to the system under which they go along, least of all forgetting the active subscription of those who draw the benefits. We should not be scared though, with our fight, to upturn the democratic period, the long period of procedures, negotiations and deals, to get straight to the urgent matter: to create, on a European scale, for example, a type of Life-Mode Parliament, a melting pot for common action which will enable the redirection of system logic, which does not solely focus on itself.

Naturally, in my book, La Tyrannie des modes de vie, I speak of the difficulties associated with such an institution and I do not, in any circumstance, wish to underestimate them. Two spring to mind immediately, which I will turn to now:

1. Life-modes often imperceptibly change owing to, for example, discoveries or inventions which are initially invisible in the eyes of the public and with long-term effects which can even be unknown to the experts. Consequently, the first major difficulty involves making known to the public developments which are naturally invisible or imperceptible, and to be able to reasonably assess their impact on life-modes. This involves significant work on awareness, diffusion and reproduction of information, which is made more difficult where knowledge is divided and innovations involve a high level of technical expertise (for example, financial regulations, technological progress and legal modifications, where the technical nature may be inversely proportional to the social impact).

2. Once the Information is known, the second great difficulty is being able to politicise the impact, to establish a shared challenge worthy of
study and debate in the eyes of the social players themselves; the difficulty is heightened by the fact that players of innovations have an interest in limiting public discussions to simple technical issues (Bensaude-Vincent and Browaefs 2011). To create a shared challenge, discussions then must be extended beyond the strictly technical sphere, to mobilise players on impacts in terms of life-modes, therefore, essentially, the view of the world and humankind.

Without a doubt, these are serious difficulties. Nevertheless, we have the power of virtual tools such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook (products emblematic of our life-modes!), which should also be taken into consideration as perhaps they may mollify the difficulties quoted above. The speed, fluidity and volume of information exchange they provide make them potentially the most important of democratic tools; the possibilities they offer should be explored and taken into consideration, particularly the organisation of their dissemination and reproduction of information (see point 1—above). Additionally, other than the publication of information, these virtual tools enable transnational mobilisation, which was unknown before their invention, as many contemporary examples already demonstrate. The challenge is to organise political action with regards to issues of life-modes, turning it into a shared challenge (point 2—above).

Since the Arab Spring, the relationships between politics (insurrectional and non-insurrectional) and virtual tools—democracy 2.0—have been the subject of many works of scholarship, without forgetting that they have also entered the realms of democratic administration such as political communication (as can be seen during electoral campaigns).

So, why is this life-mode parliament not a virtual parliament? These themes are, I repeat, explorative, however the guiding ambition is all too clear: it is about turning around current life-mode developments to combat the way these life-modes develop. As it happens, the internet represents a development which has transformed our life-modes without anybody explicitly setting out to do this, yet (ironically) it has become, unknowingly, a dynamic of democratic recovery.

The most significant difficulty, to do with principle and not of a technical nature, resides in the fact itself of establishing a common institution. I am, therefore, convinced that we have no choice: if we accept the diagnosis where our life-modes slip away from us; if we accept the assessment according to which they slip away from us because our liberal ethics have deserted the world; if we also accept that we are left powerless faced with such a situation owing to the exclusive respect we give to these individual rights, the neutrality of the state and, peculiarly, the resulting strict division between public/private; we must therefore admit that only a common institution can enable us to escape the present democratic paradox. As part of the organisation of this renewed democracy, this common institution adds a further level to our traditional, liberal institutions—and here we encounter the principle difficulty: it forces us to revisit the major liberal division between public/private, re-establishing, in terms of life-modes, the primacy of the common, even if it means adjusting individual freedom to fit this new hierarchy of values.

Today, the most frequent criticism to such an institution is what we could call dictatorship of the common. As part of our liberal spirit, the perspective of democratic recovery of life-modes stirs the spectre of communism and of the dictatorship of a collectivised life-mode. That does not need to be the case. In essence, a critical theory on life-modes does not have to include the discovery of an ideally good life-mode which must impose itself on everybody. The objective is not to identify the perfect life-mode which provides a magic combination of collective wellbeing and individual flourishing. It is not about imposing a life-mode on everybody, but to stop the system from blindly propagating itself, without providing the opportunity to question the consequences we face. We can take life-modes as they are, but with an attempt to refocus them, rather than creating the perfect life-mode. Once again, life-modes affect us the most: it is therefore only right that we provide ourselves with the proper institutional means to be able to criticise them. Why is there not a place of criticism where we can raise issues on subjects such as, for example, the trend marketing of assets, the increasing automation of our social environment, the extension of assessment

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4 Discover an important report at: http://prefixsmmm.hypotheses.org/902. For a specific study on the political use of information and communications technology, see Najar (2013); Galabov and Sayah (2012).
across all fields of social life? The objective will therefore be to repatriate
the systemic subjects across the normative area of social players, rather
than losing them to the blind propagation of the system and putting up
with them as the ineluctable future. It is, therefore, not about imposing
a common life-mode for everybody but reflecting on those that are
imposed on us.

By way of conclusion, I would like to add a further element for
thought on this subject. The idea of a common institution may appear
less out of place if it is associated with a principle of political organisa-
tion which is just as old as democratic constitutionalism itself, hence
bicameral, rather than the unrealistic fantasy of a self-governing society.
Most democratic societies are aware of this two-level system, or of a
second chamber, elected using different methods, and which serves to
check possible misguided ways of the first. This ‘power which stopped
the power’ was exactly what Montesquieu admired about the English
Constitution. This was also Général de Gaulle’s original idea,⁵ to estab-
lish a senate which represented the ‘living powers of the Nation’ (not
political parties), which in the end was not retained but which, nonethe-
less, survived within the Economic, Social and Environmental Council
(the council which de Gaulle wanted to merge with the senate).⁶ Here,
I would simply like to suggest that the idea of a common institution is
not, per se, opposed to the democratic plan; rather, it adds to it, com-
pleting it, as the guiding idea is to provide social players with a larger
democratic playing field.

With the establishment of a common institution, it would not be a
question of revisiting the democratic benefits which we hold dear and
justifiable: it is more to do with allowing democracy to access a higher
level within this democratic period, where the establishment in question,
this life-mode parliament, specifically represents the democratic recovery
of social life-modes by society itself. The order of business will solely in-
clude that which is likely to durably affect our life-modes; the issue of what
is likely to affect our life-modes is, naturally, also a debated subject. The

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⁶ Environmental competence was added in 2008.