

## **Degrowth, Commons and convivial Technology.**

Many people criticize both the growth and the concept of degrowth, that is why they talk about “alter-growth” (Christian Arnsperger for example) or “misgrowth” (Bernard Stiegler, for example). But, defending the degrowth, Serge Latouche uses the word “a-growth”... So, words about degrowth are uncertain. It is important to notice that there is, in France but probably also everywhere, a violent debate between theorists of the degrowth and the critics of the growth.

Why criticizing growth is not enough to support the degrowth? One of the main differences between the theorists of the degrowth and the eco-socialists, is not only about the “ecological interests of class” (according to an expression of Stéphane Lavignotte), but also because they have different philosophies of technology. Without going so far as to say that degrowth is a bourgeois concept, we think that it is important not to confuse degrowth with the (bourgeois) idea of a “return to nature”. The real question, the one who reconciles *sustainability* and *equity*, is to know which idea of the *common*, and more exactly which idea of the *common industrial milieu*, hides behind this concept of degrowth. In fact, at the time of galloping urbanization, our milieu is and will remain industrial.

The theorists of degrowth often quote Karl Polanyi, but they forget to specify that according to him: “the congenital weakness of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century society does not come from the fact that it was industrial, but from the fact that it was a market society” (*The Great Transformation*, tr. fr., p. 339). Against a widely spread criticism, we want to show that degrowth and industrial progress are not antonyms. In order to do so, it will be necessary to emphasize a new idea of progress which opposes the increasing regression of the industrial consumerism: “there is no assured progress as long as culture, on one hand, and the production of objects, on the other hand, remain independent one from another” (G.Simondon, *Imagination et invention*, p. 164). Moreover, the father of the concept of disgrowth (*décroissance*) (André Gorz, alias Michel Bosquet in 1972) was a big amateur of technologies – if they are “opened” on “conviviality” – and he has never brought into conflict degrowth and technological progress. On the contrary, the actors of degrowth extend and renew the criticisms developed by Jacques Ellul against the “technical system”, but while Ellul considered the binomial science-technique as autonomous, Ariès and Latouche consider that the problem comes rather from their association with economy - what the latter calls the

“megagmachine”. Our analysis is different : what formerly we called “progress”, was built, to speak as Bertrand Gille, on the basis of a maladjustment between technical system, economic system and social systems. Yet, there will be human progress only if we work to adjust them. It requires to transform the “technical system” (Ellul) into "technical milieu associated" (Simondon) or “convivial technology” (Illich, Gorz, etc.). Our philosophic thesis will consist in saying that it is only through a full understanding of the concept of “*milieu*” that we can understand that degrowth is not only necessary but also desirable. And what we call a “full understanding” of this concept aims at unifying its various acceptances : political milieu (*meson*), economic milieu (*oikos*), ecological milieu (*environment*) and technological milieu (*medium*).

One of the slogans of degrowth is the famous “*Less is more*”. This slogan is primarily that of a designer, and we would like to show, through the history of design, how it could support growth rather than the reverse. Meanwhile, contrary to those who claim that degrowth necessary follows new technologies, this paper will condemn the lies of the “dematerialization” and cloud, because the new dominant technology feeds the ecological disaster and unsustainable consumerism.

But design as digital technology can be as well the source of the problem as an element of its solution. So, at present the movement arising from the *Open Design*, reinvent in its own way not only the product, but production itself : a new co-production where industry does not accompany obsolescence, or consumerism, or individualism. A new relationship in the industrial-common good thus appears, as the projects of *Open Source Ecology* give evidence of it. It does not mean that technology will save the world : we will condemn the ideology of “technological solutionism” (according to the expression of E.Morozov). But we will explain that overtaking the ideology of the growth means to reinvent our relation with the “technical milieu”. This new relation with the “Technical milieu associated” could be named “technological democracy”, and this one is an essential requisite for a sustainable degrowth.

**Keywords :**

misgrowth, commons, technical milieu, convivial technology, technological democracy.