

Le Peer to Peer: Vers un Nouveau Modèle de Civilisation Peer to Peer: Towards a New Model of Civilization

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English Summary

This article presents and summarizes a hypothesis about the birth and emergence of a new social formation, called "peer to peer," which has profound implications for the transformation of our current form of market economy.

Peer to peer is the intersubjective dynamic at work in distributed systems, i.e., a type of network that goes beyond decentralization, because hubs are no longer obligatory, thereby giving an unprecedented amount of control to the agents involved. Such peer to peer dynamics are associated with a series of important processes:

- Peer production, as a third mode of production, where decisions do not arise from market allocation or corporate management, but arise from the free cooperation of producers. It is mostly associated with the production of free and open source software, but is expanding to the totality of the immaterial sphere and even beyond.
- Peer governance, as the new methods of governance that are being experimented with in these kinds of projects.
- Universal common property regimes: the resulting use value is not sold on the marketplace for its exchange value, but is freely available to those who need it.

The precise characteristics of peer to peer (P2P) processes are described (such as its holoptism, anti-credentialism, etc.), and it is carefully distinguished from other modes of production and governance such as reciprocity-based gift economies, markets, etc. P2P is identified as a modern form of 'Communal Shareholding,' following a comparison with anthropological models of intersubjectivity, i.e., the relational models proposed by Fiske.¹

The fourfold intersubjective typology of Alan Page Fiske distinguishes:

- 1) Equality Matching, where individuals make sure that reciprocity occurs, and that was the basis of the tribal gift economies, and where the key question was 'to belong or not to belong.'
- 2) Authority Ranking, where individuals are ranked according to priority, which was the basis of agriculture-based feudal-type civilizations.
- 3) Market Pricing, where goods and services are exchanged according to a pricing mechanism, the basis of the capitalist economies.
- 4) Communal Shareholding, whereby resources are held in common, each contributes according to willingness and ability.

¹ Fiske, A. P. (1993). *Structures of social life*. New York: Free Press.



In the last part, we look into the possibilities of expansion for this new social formation, which holds great promise for a reform of our polity towards more participation. I conclude the article with an examination of the integrative nature of P2P.

Michel Bauwens has played a major role in the digital revolution of his home country Belgium, where he is known as an internet pioneer. He created two dotcom companies, was (eBusiness) strategic director for the telecommunications company Belgacom, and 'European Manager of Thought Leadership' for the U.S. webconsultancy MarchFIRST. He co-produced the 3-hour TV documentary 'TechnoCalyps: the metaphysics of technology and the end of man', and co-edited two French-language books on the 'Anthropology of Digital Society', and was editor in chief of the Flemish digital magazine Wave. He now lives in Chiang Mai, Thailand, where he created the Foundation for P2P Alternatives (P2PFoundation.net). He taught the Anthropology of Digital Society for postgraduate students at ICHEC/St. Louis in Brussels, Belgium and related courses to Payap University and Chiang Mai University in Thailand. He can be contacted at michelsub2003@yahoo.com