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The Memory of Things: Technology and “Production Somnambulism”

The products and artefacts we use every day seem simply given. Their production remains hidden from our view (“production somnambulism” paraphrasing Langdon Winner), with advertising only emphasizing their presence. The expression “memory of things” points to those hidden processes giving rise to artefacts, to the networks, relations, works, and human beings implied in them. The memory of things must be recovered, not just for the sake of knowledge, but also to put in evidence power inequalities and injustices involved in their production. But, how the production of things can be put in evidence, become present in their very appearance of things? Is it possible made perceptible the production of a thing? Is it possible remembering with things? In the presentation I will try to answer, or at least offer ways for answering, these questions. First, I will present the theoretical framework, based on Winner’s “politics of technology”, Verbeek’s “ethics of technology”, and Bergson’s notions of memory and image. Second, I will analyse some cases (moral bias in the production of algorithms and hidden censure of social networks). Third, I will ask questions to discuss possible solutions from design, advertising, education, etc. Finally, with the notion of “memory of things” I want to offer a descriptive-normative framework merging postphenomenological and critical constructivism perspectives.