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The Politics of Spirit in Stiegler's Techno-Pharmacology

Abstract

The biography of a living philosopher is always of interest, as it gives rise to interpretations that seek the developmental necessity that has led to the publication of his or her latest ideas. This concept of development however is problematic, especially with a thinker such as Bernard Stiegler, whose work on technology is a sustained critique of the logic of dialectical necessity. And yet there remains a sense in which the totality of a philosopher's work is the essential question that concerns his or her expositors: and so the purpose of my paper is to present the evolution of a certain idea of reflexive freedom in Stiegler's Technics and Time, and to show how this is related to the concept of pharmacology which is developed in his most recent works, particularly What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology and For A New Critique of Political Economy. The central themes of my exposition are the originary technicity thesis set out in volume one of Technics and Time, the informatic reduction of memory whose effects are presented in volume two, and the configurations of time, community, and spirit that are the basis of Stiegler's latest work on the politics of prosthetic life. My paper will begin by examining concept of the pharmakon which is developed in Derrida's essay Plato's Pharmacy, as it is here that the idea of a medium that is simultaneously poisonous and therapeutic is developed in relation to the discursive affects of writing. I will then go on to look at Stiegler's attempt to reconfigure the 'orthographic economy' of deconstruction, particularly his account of the how the 'tertiary supports' of virtual and information technologies have transformed the experience of the real in the regime of biopolitical capitalism. Finally, I will argue that the appearance of the pharmakon as a matrix idea in his work, sharpens the aporia of technological society: for the impossibility of human culture's being reduced either to the disorientated life of industrial populism, or to idealist notions of reflexivity, is what, for Stiegler, offers the chance of a new politics of difference and autonomous desire.

The Politics of Spirit in Stiegler's Techno-Pharmacology

'What constativity of the *who* can still be envisaged - and what *must* be envisaged'

- Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 2

Introduction

The ancient Greek word *pharmakon*, as Derrida pointed out in his essay *Plato's Pharmacy*, has been passed down as a signifier with a number of different meanings: 'poison', 'drug', 'remedy', 'potion', 'philtre' etc. Derrida's reading of Plato in this essay is a sustained interrogation of the relationship between thinking and writing presented in the *Phaedrus*. He argues that the concept of *anamnesis* that Plato expounded as the spontaneous movement of thought within its own essential medium, is a fantasy, and that every act of knowing, memory, and recognition depends upon the supplementary economy of inscription. The spontaneity of thought can never free itself from the utilitarian economy the written word; and so its very possibility depends upon the tropes and metaphors through which writing seeks to determine the substance of the real. Thus, for Derrida, Plato's designation of writing as a *pharmakon* reveals the fundamental ambiguity that is held within the term; the 'poison' of writing is also the 'remedy' for its dissemination of difference and dissent, that is, the possibility of unforeseen affects of recognition and community (Derrida, 1981: 95-96). This question of the primordial ambiguity is taken up in Barnard Stiegler's later work, particularly *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology* and *For a New Critique of Political Economy*. In both of these books he seeks to develop the idea of the *pharmakon* beyond what he conceives as the 'orthographic economy' of Derrida's concept of the grammè: he attempts to show that the grammatization of the real (its constitution through processes of rupture, deferral, and dissemination) has become a function of the virtual and onto-technological programmes through which life, in its entirety, has been encoded. Stiegler's *pharmakon* therefore *is* the totality of the interfaces between the human and the technological; it *is* the antagonism between the toxic reduction of life to capitalized desire, and the expressive forms of cathexis (love, spirit) that have been made possible by the techno-hybridization of human beings.

My intention in what follows is to consider the 'new critique' of political economy that emerges from Stiegler's account of the *pharmakon*. In the introduction to *What Makes Life Worth Living* he remarks that:

The *pharmakon* is at once what *enables* care to be taken and that of which care must be taken - the sense that it is necessary *to pay attention*: its power is curative *to the immeasurable extent* . . . that it is also *destructive* (Stiegler, 2013: 4, author's italics).

The chance of interrupting the cycle of production-desire-consumption that determines the inequalities of the global economy depends therefore, on

developing a critique of the relationship between capital and the technological supplementation of human beings. The groundwork for this project dates from Stiegler's account of the originary relationship between technology and the constitution of the human in volume one of *Technics and Time*. In essence, his argument is that there is no 'first origin' of human beings that predates the deployment of tools: we become 'human' through the cognitive-*noetic* capacities that develop in relation to the manipulation of the first primitive instruments (napped stone tools and weapons). This relationship is what gives human beings to their fate; all that they have become, in terms of their control of nature, production of commodities, and capitalization of life, is achieved through technological systems whose effects remain potentially catastrophic. Technology is, from the beginning, pharmacological; its organizational structures determine a relative autonomy from the symbolic culture of human life, and, as such, retain the power to disrupt both the implicit order of nature and the sense of moral solidarity (Stiegler, 1998: 198-200). However, it is the experience of this disruption that also maintains the 'sublime possibility' of spirit; for as the technological programmes through which humanity is capitalized begin to be experienced as suffering and hopelessness, so the energy of the soul is provoked into acts of self-expression that disrupt the decadence of mass desire (Stiegler, 2011: 17-18).

The question that is addressed in Stiegler's later work therefore is that of the effectiveness of this pharmacological spirit. Or, to put it slightly differently, how can the unforeseen recuperation of a desire for the infinite (love, cathexis, community) become the basis of a regeneration of social, economic, and political life? In *For a New Critique of Political Economy* Stiegler maintains that the continued existence of the commodity form is dependent upon three related factors: the development of virtual and information technologies, the expansion of the knowledge economy, and the constant transformation and re-encoding of desire (Stiegler, 2010: 3-13). Human individuals, in other words, are differentiated through a system in which their capacity for *noesis* is reduced to almost nothing; the libidinal structure of the ego is channeled directly into the utilitarian cycle of production-consumption, and the capacity for reflective self-determination is all but lost. In section two therefore I will examine the pharmacology of this regime, or what we might call the economy of spirit that is also put into play by the networks of biopolitical capitalism. The transformative potential of this economy is to be found in the strange and provocative conjunction of Freud, Nietzsche, and Heidegger that is sketched in Stiegler's later writing. And so in the final section of the paper, I will show how the expansion of the technological *pharmakon* has led to a crisis in which the absolute limits of capitalization have been reached, and how the ensuing radicalization of being has transformed the affective freedom of the human soul.

Such an attempt to re-engage with the concept of spirit inevitably provokes certain 'Marxist' objections, in which the growing inequality between Third and First Worlds, the emergence vast underclasses in industrial democracies, and the resurgence of neo-colonial domination, are conceived as repeating the systemic decline that Marx identified as the historical tendency of capitalism (Marx, 1990: 927-930). These questions are, of course, entirely legitimate; for they express a demand to show what Stiegler's detour into the sublime

creativity of spirit might add to our understanding of the political economy of globalization. In what follows, I will show that his later work is, in essence, an attempt to sketch a universal fate that has arisen from what he calls the 'proletarianization' of human life (Stiegler, 2013: 15-17; Stiegler, 2010: 14-44). His claim is that the global economy is really the spread of a particular regime of technologically intensified desire, and that consequently we should understand the massive inequalities that are generated by international trade, as the outcome of pathologically disordered forms of libido. This desire constantly to consume more, to have more, and to be more is not confined to financial speculators or to the ranks of 'the bourgeoisie'; it has become *the* constitutive element of global exchange, the constantly recreated potential for thoughtless excess that has taken root in even every class and every economy. And so if we are to understand the political implications of globalization, and to retain a certain fidelity to Marx's critique of capital, we need to grasp the crises of subjectivity (spirit) that biopolitical capitalism has caused in industrial democracies, and the conflicts to which the forced exportation of this regime have given rise. In the sections that follow I will examine Stiegler's attempt to sketch the chance of a new politics of spirit that has emerged from the global pharmacology of the commodity form.

Culture, Technicity and the 'Default of Being'

I will begin by looking at the logic of Stiegler's originary technicity thesis as it is presented in section one of *Technics and Time, 1*, 'The Invention of the Human'. His argument is that if we relinquish the idea of human beings having been brought into existence by a unique act of divine creation, the responsibility of the speculative anthropologist becomes that of accounting for the emergence of *Homo sapiens* from the evolutionary mechanism of nature. We must begin not with speculations about the original essence of man (*à la* Rousseau), but with an analytical taxonomy of the species from which human beings are descended (Stiegler, 1998: 132). Stiegler's argument, which draws extensively on Leroi-Gourhan's *Gesture and Speech*, is that the evolution of the simians to which Darwin traced the origins of humanity, should be understood in relation to the material adaptations that arose from the use of tools. Over the course of time, the manipulation of sticks and stones in the forepaws of a certain pre-simian species, gave rise to modes of cooperative organization that proved advantageous in the evolutionary struggle. For Stiegler, the crucial effect of such habituated tool manipulation is the skeletal-physiological modifications that emerged in certain species: paws gradually developed into the proto hands and feet that eventually produced the upright carriage of the great apes (Stiegler, 1998: 139-145). What is crucial here is the development of the 'anterior field', or the specific orientation of simians towards interaction based on gestures, utterances, and facial expressions that arose from their technical coordination of practical activity (Leroi-Gourhan, 1993: 31-36). It is this simian culture that gave rise to the conflict and cooperation that determined the evolutionary history of the primate family; and so the success of the first hominid species, *Zinjanthropus*, was the outcome of their ability to utilize the brittle edge of flint stones in the collective organization of work, conflict, and exchange.

According to Stiegler *Zinjanthropus* is human - despite the fact that it lacked an articulate language. This idea of the inception of the human *before* language is crucial to Stiegler's account of originary technicity, and so we need carefully to examine the logic of his argument. The fashioning of tools (as hunting implements, weapons, inscriptive instruments) means that *Zinjanthropus*' temporal orientation is qualitatively different from all other species; for the manipulation of primitive instruments gives rise to a form of memory that is directly inscribed in the activity of collective life. The fashioning of flint, in other words, marks the emergence of a culture in which the manipulation of tools places each 'one' within a temporal continuum: to use a tool is to remember how it was made, how it has been deployed, and, crucially, how it can be modified (Stiegler, 1998: 150-54). This has certain 'Heideggerian' consequences: for according to Stiegler, the emergence of self-consciousness in relation to the technological support of the tool, is what gives rise to the temporal horizon of finitude that is constitutive of *Dasein*.

Zinjanthropus is the beginning of human history; it is the species through which culture emerges as a mediation of the sense of mortality that accompanies the instrumental power of the tool. This 'primal scene' however is given no theological or teleological significance in Stiegler's analysis: it simply begs the question of the relationship between 'organized inorganic matter' (nature), the neurological development of the human brain, and the evolution of the tool as mediator between self-consciousness and the plasticity of the world. Stiegler, in a way that recalls Nietzsche's account of the formation of man in *The Genealogy of Morals*, maintains that what happens at the beginning of human history opens up certain evolutionary possibilities, each of which gives rise to unforeseen configurations of power, resistance, and overcoming. And so his account of the evolution of *Zinjanthropus*, and of the emergence of *Neanthropus* as the species in which tool manipulation becomes the condition of cortical development, is presented as a possibility whose realization has come about through innumerable conflicts and adaptations in humanity's techno-social being (Nietzsche, 1990: 189-230; Stiegler, 1998: 192-96).

According to Stiegler, the emergence of *Homo sapiens* marks the point at which the organic structure of the brain is set and human society becomes essentially technological in its trajectory. It is Neanthropean sociality that opens the possibility of this transformation: for the instrumental handling of nature (*physis*) gives rise to the symbolic mediations of biological necessity, social life, and individual experience that are the most basic functions of culture. Thus, the originary technicity of human beings is what underlies the history of inscription through which 'ethnic community' is constituted in primitive societies. It is this process that Stiegler refers to as the 'epiphylogenetic' origin of memory: the re-transmission of a historical experience of community (cathexis, pathos) within technological programmes of exchange and integration (Stiegler, 1998: 175-177).

This relationship of humanity to the instruments of its evolution is traced in Stiegler's reading of the myth of Prometheus. According to the myth Zeus created all animal species as beings without essence, and left the job of distributing powers of speed, intelligence, and strength to Prometheus.

However, Prometheus was persuaded by his brother Epimetheus to allow him to complete the task of distributing powers to the different species. When Zeus returned, Epimetheus, who lacked his brother's intelligence, had forgotten to give humanity any defining attributes; and so human beings were thrown into the world naked and without the means of survival. The suffering of this 'forgotten species' moved Prometheus to steal the means of making fire from the gods, and to bestow the gift of this technology upon humanity. The fate bestowed by this 'gift' however is a tragic one (Hesiod, 2008: 37-40; Plato, 1961: 320-322). Promethean innovation, through which humanity is bound to the unforeseen effects of technology, is the perpetual imminence of disaster: and it is this which gives rise to the basic structure of 'being with' (sociality) that Stiegler calls *epimetheia*, or the anticipation of catastrophe that is touched with the hope that human spirit may yet be sufficient to save the day (Stiegler, 1998: 184). Thus, if there is a distinctively Stieglerian approach to technology, it is to register the ambivalence of its relationship to humanity's default of essence, that is, the simultaneously toxic and therapeutic supplementation of life which is the milieu of human freedom (Stiegler, 1998: 177-179; Stiegler, 2013: 1-5).

In the second volume of *Technics and Time*, Stiegler's concern with human freedom and community is focused on the fate of reflection (*noesis*) in the highly commodified information markets that have come to dominate the global economy. In the orthographic regime, whose techniques of inscription predate the virtual encoding of life, individual experience is constituted through a dialectical relationship between intuition, synthesis, and cultural memory. Thus, what is threatened in the informatic model of exchange is the end of what Hegel called *Bildung*, or the reflective aspect of a culture whose means of transmission, the letter, is the support of collective memory¹. In contemporary informatic societies this relationship to the past is increasingly threatened. For as events are dispersed through virtual technologies that determine their capital as news, information, risk, or financial opportunity, so the possibility of their being re-cast through dialectical reflection is all but erased. The 'tertiary supports' of experience (virtual machines) supply commentaries and images that allow no exegetical work: human beings experience the effects of global informatic exchange (wars, cultural and religious conflicts, social and economic dislocations) as the unfolding of a spontaneous history in which they figure only as complicit bystanders (Stiegler, 2009a: 118-122). To cite an example germane to Stiegler's concern with the intergenerational transmission of knowledge as *savior vivre*, the coverage of the student demonstrations in 2011 gave formulaic accounts of young middle class radicals with nothing better to do, rather than relating their protests to the consequences of austerity for the right to a philosophical or historical education (Stiegler, 2013: 132-133).

According to Heidegger, technological modernity reveals a weakness of humanity for thoughtless repetition; for even the events of 'Nietzschean' excess that supposedly threaten the substance of ethical life, reveal themselves as expressions of a desire that has been unable to penetrate to the origins of its egoity (Heidegger, 1991: 150-158). In his account of the industrialization of memory, Stiegler reconfigures this Heideggerian approach to the constitution of egoistic desire: for his theory of the externalizing power

of representative technologies points towards a displacement of Heidegger's fundamental ontology, and of the essentialist constructions (of 'man', 'spirit', and 'community') to which it has given rise. Thus, the prosthetic constitution of *Dasein* which Stiegler expounds in *Technics and Time* marks a transformation of the political problematic of modernity: for insofar as human self-consciousness is given through the technological instability of ethical life, the experience of non-identity (spirit) is always re-traced in the psychical individuation of the subject. As we will see, Steigler's latest work (2013: 109-110; 2010: 116-117) maintains that the chance of there being a reflective presence which is akin to the one Heidegger called *Dasein*, depends on media (virtual and communications technologies) whose affects are played out in the libidinal pulsions of life itself: love, difference, and mortality.

It is important to note at this point the debt that Stiegler's theory of the fate of orthographic culture owes to Gilbert Simondon's work on the evolution of technological objects. For Simondon the mode of existence of such objects is characterized by the process of 'concretization': the practical design of technological assemblages gives rise to new forms of synergy, coherence, and internal resonance whose *telos* is the progressive integration of external limitations and contingent environmental factors. The teleology that comes into being with these assemblages is enacted through the inventor: the individual through which the 'superabundant efficacy' of machines is realized in new assemblages and theoretical possibilities (Simondon quoted in Chabot, 2003: 15). The process of structural concretization therefore, carries the possibility of a 'we' that is constituted in the processes of synergy and coordination through which the technological environment develops. Indeed, Simondon's demand for a philosophy of technology is, in essence, a demand for a public awareness of the possibilities (of degradation and reconstitution) that have been opened by the evolution of technological objects. This is close to Stiegler's account of the relationship between cultural and technological programmes, insofar as Simondon's philosophy maintains that *noetic* possibilities arise from the constantly expanding functionality of machines. However, Stiegler's work has always insisted on a far more profound disturbance of human subjectivity by technological prosthesis than Simondon's work is able to acknowledge. In a recent article he claimed that Simondon's thought tends toward kind of 'mechanology' that seeks to 'situate the human conductor of an orchestra of cybernetic machines' (2009b: 54-55). There is, in other words, a metaphysical concept of 'pre-individuation' that haunts his account of technological systems, and which is the basis of a *noetic* community that should stand watch over the influence of machines on the order of human life.

Thus, if the developing relationship between capital and virtual technologies has given rise to experiences of corporeal displacement, psychical disorientation, and multiple connection that bear directly on humanity's mode of being in the world, then the originality of Stiegler's project lies in his reformulation of the experience of indeterminacy that is the essence of the Heideggerian concept of *Dasein*. In the following sections I will examine Stiegler's re-readings of Marx, Heidegger, Freud, and Derrida on the technological transformation of ethical life, and how his account of the

pharmakon configures the chance of 'quantum leap' beyond the economy of hopeless, entropic consumption (Stiegler, 2009b: 47-48).

The 'Who' and the 'What' of the Information Society

Let me begin with a conjecture that Stiegler presents in *Technics and Time, 2* as part of his exposition of the industrialization of memory (Stiegler, 2009a: 152-53). The conjecture is Marvin Minsky's, and is set out in his article 'The Future Merging of Science, Art, and Psychology'. Minsky's idea is that the development of cybernetics, information technology, and neuroscience has opened up a singular possibility: that in the near future it will be possible for the human brain to transmit its intentions outside of its organic milieu (the body), and to have them translated into actions performed in virtual environments or by robotic devices in the 'real world'. The relationship described here is fundamentally transgressive: for as the activity of the brain is channeled directly into media that process, interpret, and transmit its intentionality, so the will, desire, and affective satisfactions of the human organism are transformed by the artificial assemblage through which it acts (Minsky, 1993: 93-95). As the informatic power of the assemblage is increased, so the relationship between mind and machine, the 'who' and the 'what', becomes fluid; the machine anticipates 'organic' desire, and disseminates it across networks in which relations of domination and servitude never fully crystallize. Thus, the very nature of human intelligence is transformed: it is taken up in a technological system that is without organic restriction, and which gives rise to innovations that constantly transform humanity's experience of being in the world.

Minsky's conjecture was made in 1993, and it is now the case that the connection between the human and the technological has evolved in the direction he predicted. Information-processing technologies are capable of connecting directly with neurological centres of intention: for example, interfaces have been developed that allow human beings to steer robotic vehicles, and to act in virtual environments, through remote acts of will (Leeb *et al*, 2012). For Stiegler, the significance of these developments lies in the fact that the orthographic supplementation of self-consciousness, which had supported the constitution of culture as a place of symbolic recognition, is fundamentally altered. As we have seen, the account of industrialized memory presented in *Technics and Time, 2*, attempts to show that self-reflection is forestalled by the encoding performed by media whose influence on the constitution of 'free will' becomes practically instantaneous. The technologies through which events are staged 'for us', in other words, are invisible; they have become a global interface that has all but erased its presence as the condition of memory and subjectivity. However, what saves Stiegler's account of information technology from lapsing into the involution of Baudrillard's hyperreality thesis - where the information network comes to 'think us' ² - is his engagement with Heidegger's account of the experience of technological enframing.

The hope contained in Stiegler's work lies, I believe, close to Minsky's idea of prosthesis, in which humanity is responsible to emergent possibilities of freedom and community that arise from the experience of technological transformation. This hope is articulated through a particular reading of Heidegger's notion of *Dasein*, in which the experience of being in the world is conceived as originally prosthetic. The anxiety that for Heidegger constitutes *Dasein*'s ontological difference - the apprehension of its impending death - is conceived by Stiegler as the outcome of a reflexive awareness that is originally related to the practical supplementation of human life. The existential care that defines the experience of *Dasein* is a technological affect: humanity is thrown into a world in which its conflicts, responsibilities, and desires are simultaneous with the disorientation that technology brings to the symbolic milieu of culture. Thus, in Stiegler's account of the industrialization of memory the chance of human freedom is sustained within the networks of the information economy; the responsibilities of this freedom emerge from spheres of necessity, risk, and domination that arise from the scientific perfectibility of life. So, to return to the Marxist problematic that is implicit in Stiegler's thought: how are we to think the effect of this freedom on the total capitalization of the world?

According to Stiegler, life, for human beings, has become responsibility to the affects of their technological fate; and so they must seek something 'constative' in the remorseless technological transformation of their culture and individual being (2009a: 154). This, of course, has a Heideggerian ring to it, and Stiegler's reading of 'The Question Concerning Technology' is marked by a degree of sympathy for Heidegger's account of the techno-scientific enframing of *Dasein*. Despite this, the report on human freedom given in *Technics and Time, 2*, is a rejection of Heidegger's gesture towards the revitalization of *poiesis* that occurs through the regime of *Gestell*. In the end, Stiegler shares Derrida's suspicions about the economy of spirit that such a gesture is part of - an economy that solicits the violent return of essence (*Volk, Heimat, Kultur*) to the life of the nation. And yet there is a crucial difference between Derrida and Stiegler's readings of Heidegger; a difference that is constitutive of their respective positions on the exercise of political freedom within the networks of global capital.

The position Derrida sets out in *Of Spirit* is that Heidegger inherits the idea of *Geist* that emerges in his later writings, from the tragic determination of history presented in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. For Derrida, the Hegelian condensation of violence and death into the ethical life of the nation state takes place within an economy of orthographic culture: it brings with it the possibility of a mediation of life in which mutual recognition can defer the violence of essentialist cultures of race, nation, or religion. And so despite Derrida's originary critiques of Hegel's euro and phallocentrism, his account of Heidegger's writing on the technological fate of modernity implies that Hegelian spirit is marked by a certain reserve in relation to redemptive essentialisms of the kind to which Heidegger ultimately has recourse. For Derrida, in other words, there is a hesitation in the recuperative movement of Hegelian spirit, a hesitation that is marked by a play of *différance* that always returns to the crystallization of abstract freedom into determinate forms of justice, sexuality, nature, and the law (1990a: 251-277; 1990b: 235). It is

Derrida's contention that, in Heidegger's later work, the *grammè*, whose differentiating contingency his early thought had radicalized, is thrown into an ontology that precipitates the question of freedom beyond the *noetic* culture of ethical life (1991: 99-113). It is here that Stiegler identifies a 'Hegelian' residue in Derrida's reading of Heidegger; for his moral economy of *différance* assumes the persistence of an orthographic culture whose recuperative powers have been dispersed into the ontic programmes of the technological *pharmakon* (gene technologies, biomedical systems, virtual realities) (1998: 198-202).

So, where does this leave us in terms of the possibility of freedom, ethics, and community in the time of prosthetic memory? How are we to conceive this possibility after the appropriation of *Dasein* by the networks of biopolitical capitalism? For Stiegler, the economy of *différance* which opens the chance of politics and ethics should be understood as having been formed within specific technological programmes: the question of how I ought to respond to those who share my subjection to the regime of accelerated exchange, arises directly from that subjection as a form of technologically supplemented life. For Stiegler, the question of technological society should be approached through the experience of disorientation it produces: it is the question of a cultural mediation of time that returns through the dispersal and re-formation of 'prosthetic' human beings. Richard Beardsworth, in his article 'Thinking Technicity', maintains that the concept of spirit that is implicit in Stiegler's *Technics and Time*, should be conceived in terms of a Nietzschean model in which body, mind, and psyche are radically transformed through techno-scientific disseminations of energy (Beardsworth, 1998: 81-84). The 'culture of spirit' he takes to be the ethical horizon of Stiegler's thought, in other words, has a remorselessly futural orientation, which, for me, is at odds with the concept of epiphylogenetic memory developed throughout Stiegler's work on technics. Thus, if there is to be a politics of spirit that is effective within the networks of biopolitical production, this must come through recurrent, technologically transformed, traces of orthographic memory - for without such *noetic* reflection, the future is nothing more than the terminal crisis of mass desire (Stiegler, 2009a: 118-126; Virillio, 2006: 149-167).

Conclusion: Stiegler's Pharmacology

We have seen that the operative demand of information society is constantly to increase the speed at which social and economic exchange takes place. The application of this principle threatens the end of free reflection, as self-conscious human beings are taken into a system of techno-economic decadence in which individual desire is without memory or psychological connection (Stiegler, 2011: 1-13). It is this logic that transforms the being of *Dasein*, which is the improbable possibility of freedom that is distributed across the global networks of informatic exchange. *Dasein's* default of essence, in other words, is the chance of a certain concept of spirit, which lies close to the idea of transformative reflection that Derrida expounds in his readings of Heidegger and Marx. In *Technics and Time*, Stiegler elaborates this idea through the impossibility of pure informatic materialism: for the fact that the technological integration of *Dasein* can never be accomplished

without psychical disorientation, means that the experience of spirit, as *noesis*, always returns to the systemic organization of social life.

So, what kind of ethico-political agency could such a determination of spirit make possible within the systems of network society? It is this question that Stiegler addresses in his latest work, particularly *What Makes Life Living: On Pharmacology* and *For a New Critique of Political Economy*. The first of these begins with a reconfiguration of the originary technicity thesis, which presents the supplementation of human beings as a having a dual aspect in which their lack of essence is made good by a technological regime that is both toxic and therapeutic (Stiegler, 2013: 19-20). Stiegler, recalling Derrida's argument in *Plato's Pharmacy*, maintains that pure self-reflection of the soul (*anamnesis*) is impossible, as such reflection is always the outcome of techniques of transmission (writing, orthography) that constitute the grammatological economy of thinking (Derrida, 1993: 95-117). His version of Derrida's argument however, extends its scope beyond the technical affects of writing: for the virtual machines that have transformed both the objective structure and subjective experience of the real, have radically altered the temporality of reflection and desire through which the experience of the social is constituted. The soul of the individual is penetrated by a pharmacological regime in which its drives are remorselessly intensified by flows of information and aesthetic simulacra (Stiegler, 2013: 116). This concept of intensification is critical, as it marks the point of connection between the dynamics of memory Stiegler expounds in *Technics and Time*, and the fall in libidinal energy he presents in his later work as the determining limit of consumer capitalism. For given that the self (conceived as a psychical economy of drives, representations, and sublimations) is dispersed across competing regimes of techno-mediatic exchange, its power to integrate its desire into the symbolic order of recognition (culture) is all but destroyed. And yet the virtual technology that constitutes this highly capitalized form of individualism, is also the condition on which the experience of spirit, as the work of *noesis*, can return to the collective life of humanity (2013: 89).

Stiegler's reading of Freud's *Project for a Scientific Psychology* maintains that there is an implicit ethic of sublimation that runs through his account of the neurological foundation of consciousness: for it is the shaping of the libido through its attachment to goals that require the activity of judgement and intellect (art, literature, morality, love) that is the foundation of social cathexis (Freud, 1954: 389-92). Thus, the subjectivity of human beings is formed through sublimation: the individual becomes more than the immediacy of its drives through its power to integrate them into the symbolic order of the social (Stiegler, 2013: 62). From this Freudian perspective we should regard the prosthetic intensification of biological drives as radically disrupting the temporal unity of experience: for the possibility of care (for oneself and for others) is constantly short-circuited by the urge to consume what is here, now, and ready to hand. For Stiegler, there is something unbearable about this life, as it is stripped of the relationship to the infinite (the endlessly seductive idea, individual, or work of art) that is implicit in the human psychical apparatus. This technological disorientation is what marks the return of a certain possibility of spirit; for it is in the aporetic relationship between prosthetic desire and the discursive economy of ethical life, that the chance of reflexive

individuation is given (2013: 70). Thus, if we return to the vocabulary of *Technics and Time*, the crisis of experience that has afflicted *Dasein* is brought to a head by the constant rupturing of its essential temporality: for Stiegler, it is only insofar as it reaches an absolute extreme of disorientation within the networks of biopolitical capital, that it can give transformative expression to its 'overmortality' - life as the toxic gregariousness of work, sport, sex, and shopping (2013: 76-77; 2009b: 49).

There is a sense in which the matrix question that has emerged from Stiegler's work concerns the libidinal conflict between two forms of messianism: the celebration of universal prosthesis that has become known as post-humanism and the rejection of technicity that is embedded in all forms of religious fundamentalism (Stiegler, 2013: 106-109). The distribution of this conflict is highly complex, as the pharmacological effects of globalization (instantaneous connection, plasticity of somatic desire, virtual memory supports, digital dementia) have transformed conventional oppositions between East and West, Islam and Christianity. The experience of disorientation has become endemic in the technological transmission of life, and is the central concern of debates about the human soul that are both culturally disparate and implicitly cosmopolitan. Thus, there is a sense in which it is the encounters between western technocracy and the value rapports of Asian cultures (from Islamic fundamentalism to Chinese market socialism) that constitute the horizon of Stiegler's 'new critique' of political economy (Stiegler, 2013: 89-90). The question of what constitutes a 'life worth living' is constantly intensified by the contretemps between absolute decadence and sacrificial obligation: it becomes a spectre that haunts the operational logic of growth and consumption through which the loss libidinal energy has reached crisis point in western capitalist societies. If there is to be a new cosmopolitanism therefore, this must take the form of a diachronic exchange among spiritual ideals that have been distributed and intensified through the expansion of global-techno-informatic capitalism. Or, to put it in the register Stiegler has developed in his later writings, the present catastrophe of speculative capital demands that we work towards an 'economy of contribution' in which labour would be freed from the logic of '*ratio*' (the proletarianized infinite of production-consumption-production) to become constitutive of a sphere of exchange in which '*otium*' (the labour of spirit) emerges as the global-universal good of prosthetic humanity (2013: 59-61; 2010: 65-66) ³. For it is only with the constant re-thinking of such a transitional space, which is itself pharmacological, that the future of the world is conceivable.

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End Notes

¹ It is important to note that Hegel determines a fundamental opposition between spirit and technology as early as the *System of Ethical Life*, where he presents 'the machine' as the outcome of processes of utilitarian abstraction, through which human labour is reduced to restless activity without reflection (Hegel, 1979: 116-117).

² See especially 'The Mental Diaspora of the Networks', in *The Intelligence of Evil, or, the Lucidity Pact*.

³ See point 7 of the manifesto of *Ars Industrialis*, the association for the promotion of an industrial politics of spirit that was jointly founded by Stiegler (<http://arsindustrialis.org/node/1472>).
