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## Issue No. 17 2009 — Bernard Stiegler and the Question of Technics

### Culture Industry Redux: Stiegler and Derrida on Technics and Cultural Politics

By Robert Sinnerbrink

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In the conclusion to his landmark 1996 study, *Derrida and the Political*, Richard Beardsworth outlines “two possible futures” for Derridean deconstruction. The first he describes as a “left-wing Derrideanism,” which would foreground “Derrida’s analysis of originary technicity,” and develop the supplementary logic of the trace “in terms of the mediations between [the] human and the technical” (*Derrida and the Political* 156). Such a future has been powerfully realised in the work of Bernard Stiegler, notably in his massive multi-volume work *Technics and Time* (1994-2001), of which only volumes one and two have so far been translated into English. [2] The second possible future for deconstruction, what Beardsworth dubs “right-wing Derrideanism,” is perhaps more familiar. The latter, Beardsworth suggests, would pursue “Derrida’s untying of the aporia of time from both logic and technics,” and argue that it is the gift of time that remains to be thought; such a path would enact a messianic promise that requires a Derridean mobilization of religious discourse, and a “passive” orientation towards the advent of the future, of the incalculable “to-come” (*Derrida and the Political* 156). [3] Although Beardsworth then immediately qualifies this apparent opposition, stating that there is here, in fact, “no answer and no choice” (156), that what we have, rather, is an aporetic dynamic between the one and the other, there is nonetheless a clear sense in which his book – one that carefully situates Derrida’s thought within the history of philosophical reflection on the political from Kant and Hegel to Marx and Heidegger – affirms the “Left-Derridean” path while critically questioning its “Right-Derridean” counterpart.

Beardsworth’s gesture is symptomatic of a certain “hesitancy,” as he remarks, regarding Derrida’s thinking of the nexus between the historical, the political, and the technical. One might have expected a more explicit acknowledgement, for example, of Derrida’s own speculative remarks concerning the history of Hegelianism, whose endlessly doubled, two-track rhythm – from Right to Left and back again, without closure or resolution, a performative undoing of the claims of totalising dialectic – is indicative of the movement of *différance*, as Derrida might say, within Hegelian metaphysics. Hegel is, after all, for Derrida, both the last metaphysician of the book and the first thinker of writing; Hegelian dialectic is both the culmination of the metaphysics of presence and the moment of its nascent self-deconstruction (*Derrida, Of Grammatology* 24-26; *Positions* 77-79). This Hegelian dynamic is broken only by Marx; indeed, modern thought, as so many exorcisms of Hegelian *Geist*, remains haunted by Marx’s uncanny spectre (*Derrida Spectres of Marx*). This, I suggest, is the underlying motif of the apparent opposition Beardsworth proposes and then disavows between a “Left-” and “Right-Derrideanism”: how far one acknowledges the spirit, the uncanny spectral power, of Marxist thought in relation to the task or promise of deconstruction in respect of politics, time, and technics.

Given Stiegler’s remarkable outpouring of books since 2001, and his prominent internet and institutional activism (see the website for *Ars Industrialis*, of which Stiegler was a co-founder), it is striking that the English-language critical reception of his work has only recently begun to gather momentum. [4] The following essay thus seeks to further the critical reception of Stiegler’s philosophy of technology by situating his work within the legacy of critical theory (broadly understood) and deconstruction (broadly understood). To this end, I shall reflect on what Beardsworth described as the twinned futures of deconstruction, focussing, in particular, on the “Left-Derrideanism” developed in Stiegler’s radical

re-thinking of the problem of technics, and on his related call for a "politics of memory" as a critical response to debilitating effects of global techno-capitalism. In doing so, I want to develop and extend Beardsworth's helpful insight by suggesting that Stiegler's transformation of Heidegger and Derrida retrieves and renews the interrupted Frankfurt school tradition of *culture industry critique*. Stiegler's "Left-Derrideanism," I argue, reinvigorates the project of a "cultural politics" that would take place in the intersection between culture, technics, and politics. In this respect, Stiegler's critical thinking on the problem of technics – what we might call his culture industry *redux* – points to a number of important practical cultural responses to the debilitating malaise that increasingly afflicts politics in liberal capitalist democracies.

## 1. From Culture Industry to Global Teletechnologies

Stiegler notes in the first volume of *Technics and Time: The Fault of Epimetheus* (1998) that there is an important history of attempts to think the relationship between technics, time, and experience. Heidegger, for Stiegler, is the most important thinker to have explored the question of technics, while the anthropological, historical, ethnographical, and psychological dimensions of the relationship between technicity and humanity have been extensively elaborated in the work of Bertrand Gille, Andre Leroi-Gourhan, and Gilbert Simondon (*T&T1* 2). What do we make, then, of the relationship between culture and technology? Here we need to consider the important Marxist/critical theory perspective on technics and modernity, stretching from Walter Benjamin's reflections on art and technical reproducibility, Adorno and Horkheimer's stark analyses of the culture industry, to Herbert Marcuse's "Heideggerian" theorisation of the dialectic between techno-scientific rationality and political domination (*T&T1* 1). These analyses, in turn, shape Jürgen Habermas's influential 1968 text "Technics and Science as 'Ideology'," which examines the dichotomy between "purposive-rational activity" and "symbolically mediated interaction," and proposes a critique of the pernicious dominance of purposive-rational activity over communicative action (*T&T1* 11). I shall begin, then, by sketching a brief genealogy of recent critical thinking on technics, culture, and politics, focusing on Heidegger's and Habermas's respective approaches, before turning to Stiegler's critical diagnosis of the maladies afflicting our technocultural age. I conclude by suggesting, very briefly, what a Stieglerian "cultural politics of memory" might entail.

In their classic text, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer developed a powerful, if frequently misunderstood, critique of the commodification of culture in modernity. Their central thesis concerning the relationship between culture and technics is to be found in their famous chapter on the "Culture Industry." Under conditions of generalised commodity exchange, Adorno and Horkheimer claim, all aspects of cultural practice, technique, and meaning-making – whether high or low, elite or popular – become subsumed within the industrial system of production, exchange, and consumption. This commodification of culture results in a general homogenisation of cultural artefacts, an instrumentalisation of autonomous art, and the penetration of processes of *reification* to the very roots of our psychic and social formation as individuated subjects. With the intersection of the commodity form, instrumental rationality, and processes of reification, individuals increasingly experience themselves as exchangeable "things" within a social arena dominated by principles of market exchange. On the side of consumption, moreover, the loss of autonomous art through commodification, and increasing convergence of art, advertising, and marketing, results in a condition of universal spectacle and narcissistic consumerism that increasingly precipitates regressive forms of failure to achieve ego independence. Autonomous subjectivity, in short, is dissolved and replaced by commodified forms of "pseudo-individuality." Adorno and Horkheimer locate the source of this dissolution of the individual in the dominance of abstract forms of instrumental rationality in modernity. According to their bleak diagnosis, the only "saving power," so to speak, against total reification is to be found within the threatened sphere of autonomous art, whose "negative presentation" of freedom, albeit at the level of aesthetic form, is the only glimmer of an autonomy that remains foreclosed in social reality.

For all of their focus on the pernicious effects of the culture industry, one can argue that Adorno and Horkheimer fall foul of Heidegger's critique of the ontologically reductive, instrumentalist-anthropological account of technics.

According to Heidegger, the subject-object model of instrumental reason cannot think the essence of technics; that is, of modernity as an epoch of technological en-framing, the disclosure of beings (including human beings) as a totality of calculable resources ("Question Concerning Technology"). For technics, Heidegger claims, names the way that Being and beings are ontologically revealed or disclosed in modernity. Human existence [*Dasein*] is destinally thrown into the contingent historical clearing of Being within which, in the epoch of global technics, beings increasingly show up as nothing more than calculable resources. This technological revealing of Being, however, also opens up the possibility of an experience of what Heidegger later called *das Ereignis* or the "event of appropriation": the historically singular event of mutual appropriation between human beings, beings, and Being that enables a meaningful world to open up. It is precisely this inherent ambivalence of technics – encompassing both the threat of a total reduction of beings to calculable resources, and the "saving power" of a more poetic, world-gathering mode of dwelling – that leaves open the possibility of alternative (non-totalising) forms of world-disclosure, notably through art and novel forms of cultural practice (cf. Stiegler, *T&T1* 6-9).

From this Heideggerian perspective, the Frankfurt school analysis of the "culture industry" remains caught within the prevailing instrumental-anthropological understanding of technology. In focusing on the question of means and ends, this approach obscures, indeed forgets, the question concerning the essence of technics in modernity (which Heidegger will reflect upon and analyse as *en-framing* [*Ge-stell*], the forcible revealing of beings solely as resources). This anthropological approach to technology, which stretches from Aristotle to Habermas, presupposes the technical revealing of world. It does not address, however, how such a revealing of world as resource makes possible precisely the instrumentalisation of reason, the processes of societal and cultural rationalisation, indeed of psychological and social "reification" so powerfully analysed within the Frankfurt school tradition of critical theory.

Such an approach, moreover, fails to think how technics and subjectivity have not only an external relationship (one of instrumental means to attain a chosen end) but rather an *internal or intrinsic* one. Fully-formed autonomous subjectivity does not just confront technology as a readymade set of instruments. Rather, technology itself participates in the formation and individuation of the human, in the development of diverse historical and cultural forms of humanisation, or what Stiegler calls, in *Technics and Time, 1*, the process of "*epiphylogenesis*" (175-179): the co-evolution of the human and the technical whereby the human is able to evolve "through means other than life." The adventure of the human begins once we become dependent upon the "organised inorganic matter" (namely technics) that makes possible, so Stiegler will argue, our historical experience of time, memory, and consciousness.

From the critical theory perspective, Jürgen Habermas's analysis of the ideological dimensions of scientific rationalisation, and the dialectic between technological development and socio-political domination, nonetheless represents an important (Marxist) "offshoot" of the philosophical genealogy of technics (*T&T1* 10). Habermas follows Marcuse's theses on technology and power; namely that what originally emerged in modernity as a power to liberate humankind from its debilitating dependence upon nature is now inverted into a means of social and political domination (*T&T1* 10). As Weber famously theorised, technology is the fruit of processes of rationalisation, which have extended the principles of calculation, planning, and rational decision-making across all levels of society and culture (*T&T1* 11). Habermas transforms this thesis on rationalisation into a massive extension of "purposive-rational activity," which is linked, by way of justification, to "the institutionalisation of technical and scientific progress" (*T&T1* 11). Rationality in the form of purposive-rational activity, Habermas argues, becomes increasingly dominant over reason understood as "communicative action," which must nonetheless be presupposed as a condition of any kind of linguistic exchange and social interaction. The forms of political domination that emerge from the extension of purposive-rational activity, moreover, are legitimated by means of the principle of scientific and technical progress. Hence they do not even appear to be forms of domination at all. The promise of Enlightenment emancipation through reason, in short, has been inverted into the threat of social and political domination by techno-scientific means.

As Stiegler points out, Habermas goes on to reject Marcuse's allegedly

"Heideggerian" thesis concerning the need for a science that would be "in dialogue with nature," arguing that such a conception remains "utopian" (T&T1 11). The history of technics, rather, represents an extension of forms of purposive-rational activity that have become "objectified" through the development of complex technical systems. Habermas's well-known alternative is to contrast "symbolically mediated interaction" – that is, *communicative action* based upon intersubjectively acknowledged social norms – to "purposive-rational activity," whose empirically grounded technical rules are embodied in rationalised forms of work and technical systems. Indeed, for Habermas, human historical and social development can be tracked according to the dialectic between purposive-rational activity and communicative action (T&T1 11). Whereas so-called "traditional" societies maintain the authority of communicative action (whether through religious, mythical, or metaphysico-political means), modern societies elevate techno-scientific rationality to the primary legitimating discourse, one that now threatens to "colonise" the shared normativity of social-cultural lifeworld and thus undermine the basis and legitimacy of communicative rationality. Modern technocracy, Habermas maintains, is born of the coalescing of the sciences and technics, which leads to the increasing dominance of techno-scientific over communicative forms of rationality (T&T1 12). Indeed, the modern technocratic state is no longer concerned with communicative action or critical reflection upon purposive-rational activity; it is concerned instead with administering the most efficient, instrumentally rational, and technical solutions to social, economic, and political problems. Communicative action is thus superseded by purposive-rational activity, which means that intersubjective forms of communication – and so processes of individuation, socialisation, and politicisation – begin to be distorted or even damaged. Hence Habermas's critical argument that we must emancipate communicative reason from its instrumentalisation; we must liberate "communication from its technicisation," which, as Stiegler notes, is a repetition of a traditional and decidedly "metaphysical" theme – namely the antagonism between *logos* and *techne* (T&T1 12).

As Stiegler observes, there is a striking parallel here between Heidegger and Habermas on the question of technics. They both recognise that technics, "which appears to be a power in the service of humanity, becomes autonomous from the instance it empowers" (T&T1 13). Although technics ought to be "an act on the part of humanity," it ends up undermining the very autonomy of human communication, decision-making, individuation, and rational action that it was supposed to enhance and extend. At the same time, Habermas and Heidegger differ sharply on the nature of this paradoxical character of modern technology, analysing it in profoundly different ways. For Stiegler it is important to note both this convergence and divergence in their respective approaches to technics (T&T1 13). The convergence consists in their both regarding "the technicisation of language as a denaturation" (T&T1 13). Human beings are both bearers of speech (the speech of being) and bearers of tools (whose equipmental nexus defines the shared meaningfulness of the world in which we exist); yet these two aspects are difficult to reconcile, at least in the modern world, without one instance "proper" to our nature seemingly usurping the other.

Thus Heidegger, for example, moves away from his earlier analysis (in *Being and Time*) of the way "technical" comportment towards beings remains our primary mode of access to the world, advocating in his later work a poetic saying of Being and a reflective withdrawal from the "danger" posed by technological en-framing. Habermas, for his part, insists upon the contrast between instrumental purposive-rational activity, articulated in technical systems, and non-instrumental communicative action, which must be liberated from its inappropriate "technicisation."

The divergence consists in Habermas's endorsement of what Heidegger, in "The Question Concerning Technology," described as the "instrumental-anthropological" interpretation of technics (317). It is not enough, Heidegger maintains, to consider technology as a "means" requiring greater communicative action or intersubjective agreement as to its deployment, or greater public discourse concerning its legitimate and illegitimate uses (for example, in biogenetics). Rather, the very question of the relationship between the human and the technical needs to be rethought, since even Habermas agrees that technology is no longer entirely under human rational or social control. Hence, Stiegler argues, we need to "forge another relationship to technics"; one that

would enable us to rethink "the bond originally formed by, and between, humanity, technics, and language" (*T&T1* 13).

Nonetheless, even though Habermas and Heidegger agree on considering the "technicisation of language" as a perversion of our nature (whether as communicatively rational agents or as poetic shepherds of Being), there is nonetheless a radicality in Heidegger's thinking of technology that moves beyond the "ends-means" account of technics characterising the Frankfurt school culture industry critique. For Heidegger's confrontation with the relationship between Being and technics opens up what is for Stiegler the more pressing question of *technics and time*. This question opens up a number of related themes: the acceleration of time and of technical development; the decoupling of technical from cultural development; the impact of such temporal dislocation upon forms of intersubjective communication; the correlated threat to processes of psychic (subjective) and collective (socio-cultural) individuation, the intertwined processes by which we become individuated beings embedded within a shared form of life; the transformation of our very experience of the "taking place" of time and of space; their dematerialisation and virtualisation thanks to "real-time" media technologies, and the pervasive audiovisual mediation of individual and collective forms of experience – all of these developments are essential manifestations, for Stiegler, of the fundamental question of technics and time.

How does Stiegler confront this question? The difficulty with both Heideggerian and Habermasian approaches to technics, he argues, is that they both fail to think the essential co-emergence and co-dependency of technics and the human. To do so more adequately, Stiegler proceeds to confront the Heideggerian analytic of existence with the Greek myths of Epimetheus and Prometheus, which, he argues, both express in striking fashion the fundamental interdependency between the human and the technical. They are myths of the *default of origin*, of the essential lack defining the human, whose originary incompleteness is such that our existence is always already supplemented by technical prosthesis; they express what Stiegler calls the "originary technicity" that constitutes, he claims, the only way to adequately think through the question of technics, the human, and time. Heidegger and Habermas, by contrast, remain committed to the essential distinction and even opposition between the human and the technical. They consequently separate communication or language from technicity, and hence share a common fault, one that defines philosophical reflection on technics from Plato to Heidegger and Habermas: namely, a forgetting of our originary "prosthetic" nature as human beings; an ignorance of the way technicity opens up, rather than simply threatens, the adventure of human individuation and collective co-existence.

This is where the originality of Stiegler's project of thinking the relationship between technics, culture, and politics becomes apparent. Even Heidegger does not really think the essence of technics, according to Stiegler, because Heidegger maintains that technics, even as horizon of world-disclosure, ultimately remains opposed to time, to (authentic) temporalisation. For the phenomenological experience of authentic temporality, at least according to Heidegger's *Being and Time*, requires a radical withdrawal from, or breakdown of, our habitual immersion in the everyday world of practical comportments within a shared equipmental whole. For Stiegler, however, everyday equipment or ready-to-hand beings available for use should be understood, rather, as the enabling condition – rather than ontic obstruction – of our phenomenological experience of temporality, above all our authentic appropriation of finitude or comportment towards death (*T&T1* 4-10; "Technics of Decision" 154-166).

In this sense, Stiegler transforms Heidegger's thesis in *Being and Time*, infusing it with elements from his later thought: our temporal comportment towards the finitude of our existence, what Heidegger calls our being-toward-death, is made possible precisely through technical supplements, exteriorised forms of memory, and prosthetic forms of meaning (including language). For it is precisely through these "mnemotechnical supplements" that we can at all gain access to the "having-been" [*das Gewesene*], that is, the historically disclosed possibilities of past forms of life that must be taken over and appropriated anew by each generation. Indeed, technical artefacts, material supplements, and inherited forms of technique, meaning, and practice (culture and language) are precisely what enable us to experience a "past we have never lived." For the world into which we are thrown, whose possibilities we both inherit and must somehow



appropriate, is not of our own making. The language I speak, the gestures and norms that I learn, the technique that shapes my thought, action, and bodily comportment; all of these elements enable me to inherit a world in which I can individuate myself as part of a community that also individuates itself in time and history. And for this to be possible we must recognise the central role of technics in making possible the inheritance and transmission of meaning – language, technique, culture – across generations inhabiting distinct, even temporally and spatially distant, social-historical worlds.

As Stiegler remarks, if Life is the conquest of mobility, then technics, as a “process of externalisation,” can be defined as the “pursuit of life by means other than life” (*T&T1* 17). Drawing on the work of Gilbert Simondon, in particular his analysis of psychic and collective individuation – the processes by which an individuated “I” emerges in relation to a collective, which in turn is individuated and transformed by the various individuals of which it is composed – Stiegler aims to show how the concept of “trans-duction” enables us to think the “originarily techno-logical” constitution of temporality, that is, the co-dependent emergence of the human and the technical (*T&T1* 18). Technics, for Stiegler, therefore does not represent the reduction or destruction of temporality but rather its originary condition of possibility. It is what makes possible the shared inheritance of past possibilities – through language, technique, and culture – that we reactivate through futural projection in order to individuate ourselves in relation to our shared community.

At the same time, Stiegler argues that the question of technics today encompasses not only the dangers to psychic individuation posed by the “culture industries,” but also the threat posed to the possibility of alternative forms of technologically mediated, collective individuation. The simultaneous synchronisation of consciousnesses across the globe via media teletechnologies increases the tendency towards the “massification” and homogenisation of cultural forms of meaning. The tendency towards homogenisation threatens to damage or destroy the available possibilities for the original and transformative exercise of our intellectual, affective, and aesthetic capacities, thus resulting in a progressive loss of our shared human capacity for psychic (subjective) and collective (socio-cultural) individuation (“Le désir asphyxié, ou comment l’industrie culturelle détruit l’individu”). Given this threat to the possibility of successful psychic and collective individuation, Stiegler argues – much as Adorno and Heidegger before him – that we need a new *cultural politics of memory*: practices of art, communication, creation and resistance that would keep open and promote, both individually and collectively, the ethical and political desire for a meaningful future.

### **Stiegler contra Derrida: Politics of Memory and/or Messianic Ethics?**

Stiegler significantly advances our understanding of the question of technics by moving beyond the later Heidegger’s rather aporetic gesturing towards the simultaneous “danger” and “saving power” of modern technology. This gesture is frequently reiterated in contemporary “Heideggerian” analyses of technology that often conclude with a reverential recitation of Hölderlin’s by now rather laboured refrain (“Wo das Gefahr ist/Wächst das Rettende auch”), while at the same time celebrating various marginal practices such as bushwalking, feasting, and festivals as practical responses to the threats posed by modern technics. [5]

Stiegler avoids this quietistic *Holzweg* by recasting the question of technics in *anthropological* terms (such that technics is understood as co-extensive with the human), while at the same time treating this anthropologising gesture *deconstructively* (that is, by linking “originarily technics” with the “default of origin” defining the human). Indeed, according to Stiegler, Heidegger has not thought through the question of technics thoroughly enough. Rather, we need to inquire further than Heidegger did into the *aporia of origin*; the “default of origin” that defines the emergence of the human (in other words, our constitutive dependence upon prostheses or supplements that make possible our experience of temporal-historical existence).

This is where Derrida’s *différance*, the logic of supplementarity or “prosthesis of origin,” becomes decisive for Stiegler’s thinking of technics. In an extraordinary passage from *Of Grammatology*, Derrida explicitly links *différance* with the

history of life. *Différance* (the trace or the supplement), Derrida contends, has to be thought as the *pro-gramme*; as that which encompasses the genetic inscription of life, the process of hominisation, the co-development of technics and humanity (*Of Grammatology* 84). Adopting Derrida's remark on *différance* and life (mediated via Leroi-Gourhan), Stiegler takes technics to inaugurate the adventure of the human. One thinks here of the famous scene in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), where the adventure of the emergence of the human is depicted precisely as the default of origin, the co-emergence of hominisation and tool use. Here the gesture of the hand grasping bone as tool, but also as weapon, marks the violence at the origin of humanity. Indeed, hominisation, in *2001*, begins with one proto-human murdering another with the bone/tool; an originary violence that is then sublimated via the historical development of technics (Kubrick's balletic jump-cut from bone/tool to the spaceship/pen – itself a brilliant filmic presentation of the compositional relation between humanity and technicity).

In any event, Derrida does not go on to elaborate this striking equation of *différance* and the history of life, which is precisely where Stiegler's transformation of Derrida begins. [6] Life as the movement of *différance*, of the inscription of life, marks the supplementary relation between human and non-human, between organic and inorganic life. Indeed, human evolution involves the development of (human) life by means other than life, that is to say by technics; it unfolds as a co-evolution of the human and the technical, a *transindividuation* involving the human adoption of technics and the technical transformation of the human.

The tension between Derrida and Stiegler on the relationship between technics, the image, and *différance* can be readily discerned in their fascinating book of televised interviews, *Echographies of Television* (2002). The key question here, according to Richard Beardsworth, concerns the differences between Derrida and Stiegler on "the relation between determination and the future" ("Towards a Critical Culture of the Image"). Put very simply, do contemporary teletechnologies open up a new determination of individuation, one requiring a new politics of memory or even alternative form of technics? Or do they enjoin a new messianic ethics that would eschew such a politics of memory, avoiding the imposition of a "political will" – even in respect of the market – all in the name of keeping futurity open?

Derrida repeatedly states in *Echographies of Television* that *différance* cannot be reduced to technics. Contemporary teletechnologies do not represent, he argues, a break with the order of *arche*-writing but rather another version of the differential economy of traces or marks (the paradoxical differing/deferring movement of traces that both makes possible, and at the same time undermines, the operations of signification we are familiar with in both speech and writing). Since the image, even the analogico-digital image, is also a form of *arche*-writing, there is always the possibility of a critical relationship with it thanks to the irreducibility of the image – or technical inscription more generally – to the movement of *différance*. The Derridean response to contemporary teletechnologies is thus to enjoin a messianic ethics of openness or of the promise; an injunction to keep futurity open, to refrain from a calculative politics or praxis that would risk foreclosing the incalculable and unforeseeable arrival of the radically Other. This amounts to entertaining the spectre of Marx, tarrying with it, as it were, without, however, committing oneself to the Marxist prioritisation of the technical-economic instance over its correlated socio-cultural-historical aspects. Derrida thus remains with the spirit of Marx, its spectral hauntings, rather than embracing more explicitly Marx's inversion of the relationship between the economic-technical (base) and the socio-cultural-ideological (superstructure).

Here we have, in a nutshell, the tension between Left- and Right-Derrideanisms that Beardsworth suggested as the possible futures of deconstructive ethics and politics: Derrida refuses, or at least problematises, the "Marxist" gesture of prioritising the materialist inscription of *différance*, of time and technics, that would enjoin a radical (cultural) politics. Stiegler, by contrast, affirms just this move, this materialist reinscription of difference, and thus fully endorses its political consequences; its material inscription or historical realisation through technically mediated forms of cultural-political practice. Stiegler, for his part, therefore repeatedly challenges both Derrida's insistence on the continuity

between contemporary teletechnologies and other kinds of technical inscription, and Derrida's refusal to equate the logic of *différance* or the trace with the history of (material but also "spiritual") supplements.

Now Stiegler's unorthodox interpretation of the movement of *différance* as comprising a "history of supplements" has been criticised (by Geoffrey Bennington and Ben Roberts, for example) on precisely this issue: namely, for conflating the *quasi-transcendental* character of *différance* as a condition of the inscription of meaning with the *empirical history* of supplements as providing the material conditions of our access to meaning, indeed to temporality, as phenomenologically experienced (Bennington, "Emergencies" 190; Roberts, "Stiegler Reading Derrida" 14). [7] According to his critics (Beardsworth, Hansen, Roberts), the result of what we might call Stiegler's "deconstructive materialism" – his "Marxist" materialist reinscription of the logic of *différance* into the history of technical supplements – is to thereby remove the gap that marks the relationship between technics and consciousness, and thus to deny the possibility of a critical distance from the image-regime of modern technics.

Now, it is true that, for Stiegler, technical inscription is what conditions the constitution of (temporalising) consciousness. Consciousness, he argues, is essentially "cinematographic": the temporal syntheses constituting intentional consciousness involve the selection of "tertiary retentions" – inherited forms of "tertiary memory" stored within the mnemotechnical archive of culture – that then shape the kinds of secondary retentions (individual recollections) that in turn "contaminate" the primary retentions constituting the "lived experience" of my own temporalising consciousness (see Crogan's "Essential Viewing" for a fine-grained analysis of Stiegler's argument). But this phenomenological analysis of the technical conditions of the temporalisation of consciousness does not mean that technics "determines" consciousness any more than any other conditioning instance (for example, language). It means, rather, that the *finitude* of human beings is intimately linked with the originary character of technicity, which does not mean, however, that consciousness, indeed embodied consciousness, is therefore simply determined by the logic or imperatives of technics. For the relationship between consciousness and technics, Stiegler argues, is not one of transcendental conditioning or of linear causality but rather one of compositional co-existence. For this reason, Stiegler circumvents the charge of "techno-determinism" or the obliteration of agency and invention with respect to technics, since the development or becoming of the technical is always already a co-development with, or co-becoming of, the human.

Nonetheless, Stiegler does claim that the industrially standardised and synchronised selection of tertiary retentions – via global teletechnologies – significantly contributes to the destruction of viable forms of futural projection. The result is a profound "colonisation" of temporalising consciousness, or what he calls the *industrialisation of memory* – Stiegler's version of the culture-industry induced reification of autonomous subjectivity. Since the individuation of consciousness is threatened by the industrialisation of memory wrought by the "consciousness industries," Stiegler calls for a *politics of memory* that will foster a much-needed rejuvenation of our sense of time; of free time, of time to think and to take care – the cultivation of what he calls a new *otium* of the people. Such a cultural ethics and politics of memory would entail an ethical and political questioning of the pernicious effects of the prevailing audiovisual system and a politicisation of the global image economy. It would enact an ethically, politically, and culturally driven will to reverse – if necessary via political (including state-based) intervention – the industrialisation of consciousness within the "attention economy," which is also a libidinal economy, of global techno-capitalism (see Stiegler "Within the Limits of Capitalism, Economizing Means Taking Care").

This is the other major focal point of disagreement between Stiegler and Derrida, which Beardsworth, interestingly, does not really address. Derrida rejects Stiegler's equation of the market with domination: the equation of the market economy and its ever expanding need for new markets, that is, new forms of consumption, with the forms of social disenfranchisement, psychic immiseration, and destruction of futurity that, for Stiegler, constitute the real danger of global techno-capitalism. It is not just alienated labour, for Stiegler, but alienated individuation – what he calls *disindividuation* as the destruction of the possibility of an individual and collective future – that constitutes the real threat posed by the historical convergence of global capitalism and global techno-culture



(Stiegler, "The Disaffected Individual"). Derrida, by contrast, points to the *chance* of the market, its openness and contingency, its historical link with democracy, thus inadvertently echoing the Fukuyamaist reconciliationists that his *Specters of Marx* otherwise impugns.

Stiegler, on the other hand, remains committed not only to the spirit (or ghost) but to the praxis of Marxism: we need a new political will, direct cultural and political interventions in the market, including state-based intervention. For the logic of the market in its historical conjunction with technocratic development has become increasingly opposed to the possibility of individual and collective individuation. Global techno-capitalism relies upon the economic and social reduction of individuals and communities to a stock of "attention resources" for the purposes of stimulating consumption, hence driving forward production. Its consumer products also aim to psychically and culturally compensate individuals and communities for the destruction of autonomy we experience in the mode of increasing psychic and social disenfranchisement. We therefore need a new politics of memory, Stiegler argues, that would contribute to reversing the most destructive effects of the market on the technocultural conditions that make possible a flourishing of diverse forms of life.

What form should such a "politics of memory" take? Let me suggest here three aspects of a Stieglerian cultural politics of memory, which is also a cultural politics of the future:

1) *The role of art in undoing and transforming processes of synchronisation and de-individuation within contemporary technoculture* (in particular, the possibilities of cinema and new media technologies against the hegemony of "Hollywood-isation" and the culture-industry commodification of teletechnologies);

2) *The cultivation of new forms of collective individuation through the pluralisation of non-commercial forms of interactive community and the autonomous production of cultural meaning* (e.g. self-organising community and activist groups, internet intellectual commons movements, non-market driven educational and cultural practices, and so forth);

3) *The repoliticisation of, and critical resistance towards, the economic imperatives that drive excessive-addictive consumption within "hyperindustrialised societies"* (those which produce desires in order to stimulate consumption and hence drive production towards affective, experiential, and cognitive domains (Rifkin's "cognitive capitalism"). [8]

It is clear that such a Stieglerian "cultural politics of memory," aiming at renewing forms of collective individuation and the desire for futurity, faces enormous challenges. Nonetheless, Stiegler's wager is that a critical relationship with technics and the image is not only possible but necessary if we are to keep open a future in which individuation can flourish. While agreeing with Derrida on the need for a critical relationship with the contemporary image-regime, Stiegler argues that we need more than Derrida's "liberal-enlightenment" emphasis on education and critical reflection to foster autonomous consumer choices that would counteract the market imperatives of global techno-culture. Indeed, for Stiegler, Derrida's recourse to the traditional liberal schema that opposes autonomous consumer subjects and the neutral imperatives of the market is in fact part of the problem. Renewing but also transforming the earlier Frankfurt school culture-industry critique, Stiegler argues that the market imperatives driving global techno-culture now increasingly operate at the level of the experiential; they encompass the technical conditions and processes of psychic and collective individuation that make possible the constitution of willing, desiring subjects. Derrida's recourse to autonomous agency as a countervailing force against market imperatives, for Stiegler, thus begs the question concerning the dangers of global techno-capitalism: its capacity to colonise consciousness through the capture of attention, the industrialisation of memory, and the homogenisation of individual experience. For these reasons, Stiegler concludes – thereby adopting and renewing the culture industry critique – that the promise of futurity within our world depends upon the cultural politics of memory.

He is the author of *Understanding Hegelianism* (Acumen, 2007), co-editor of *Critique Today* (Brill, 2006), and has published numerous articles on critical theory, social philosophy, European philosophy, aesthetics, and philosophy of film.

## Endnotes

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2. Three volumes were published during this period with two further volumes promised. The first volume, *La technique et le temps. Tome 1: La faute d'Epiméthée* (1994) was translated by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins in 1998; the second volume, *La technique et le temps. Tome 2: La désorientation*, (1996) has just appeared in translation (by Stephen Barker, 2009). The third volume, *La technique et le temps. Tome 3: Le temps du cinéma et la question du mal-être* (2001), is yet to be translated.  
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3. It is another question whether Beardsworth's characterization of this "right-wing Derrideanism" is convincing. This is particularly relevant considering Derrida's late work on deconstruction and religion in the years following the publication of Beardsworth's study.  
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4. See the *Ars Industrialis* website: <http://www.arsindustrialis.org/>. For recent critical work on Stiegler see the essays by Patrick Crogan (2006), Ben Roberts (2007), and Daniel Ross (2007).  
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5. See, for example, Hubert Dreyfus's essay, "Heidegger on the Connection Between Nihilism, Art, Technology, and Politics" (1993).  
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6. While Derrida does not go on to develop this thought of originary prosthetics some of his followers have elaborated it in interesting directions. See David Wills, *Prosthesis* (1995) and *Dorsality* (2008).  
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7. As Beardsworth notes, Stiegler's *Le technique et le temps* undertakes a "rewriting of the divide between the transcendental and the empirical" in the very form of the text, the first part being devoted to the history of technics (Gille and Simondon), and the second to the "chiasmus" between "an anthropology which wishes to be transcendental" (Rousseau) and a "paleontological anthropology" (Leroi-Gourhan's critique of Rousseau). Stiegler then turns, in the third part, to a philosophical reading of the Greek myth of Epimetheus, Prometheus's brother, whose de-fault symbolizes the originary incompleteness of the human and our essential relationship to technical prosthesis. Stiegler then draws upon this reading of the myth of Epimetheus in order to examine Heidegger's "originary forgetting of technicity," despite the latter's profound thinking of the question of technics "at the 'end' of metaphysics." As Beardsworth remarks, however, despite Stiegler's rewriting of the transcendental/empirical divide, his project is not immune "from falling itself into the metaphysical traps of empiricism" ("Towards a Genealogy of Matter").  
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8. See, for example, Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labour Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era* (2004).  
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