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Take care and be careful: in memory of Bernard Stiegler

Friedrich Nietzsche during his lecture of the 6 February 1872 *on the Future of Our Educational Institutions* stated: 'Here, our philosophy must begin not with wonder but with dread'.¹ This statement was a motto at the 2017 Épineuil-le-Fleuriel summer academy (also known as *pharmacy.fr.*) This Academy was founded and made prominent by the eminent philosopher and the cultural critic Bernard Stiegler, who unfortunately left us in August. The motto was chosen by him not in order to scare students or intimidate them, but to make aware of the tragic tone of our age. This tragic age is associated with massive disruptions in the world of disorientation where coordinates of orientation are directed not towards objects, like some think today, but to disoriented temporal objects. Time which is 'out of joint' (in the sense of Hamlet) cannot be returned back, however we can always learn from what is disjoined or interrupted. Usually "the return teaches us to learn how to live comes already too late and it is in this lateness that the knowledge of how to live is forged as the (de)fault of living, and as its only question."²

This return also teaches us how to live by taking care. Today it is clear that if we continue carelessly to exploit the world it will certainly be destroyed. It also includes the increasing role of the art as taking care of matters, becoming involved in public *affaires* and becoming aware of the public consciousness in an attempt to restore the missing link, the symbolic connection which is lost. Stiegler's attitude towards the world which needs to be attended with the care is well expressed in his understanding of this question, which also includes the realm of art:

"An artist, any artist, has to do with [à faire] and to deal with [affaire] a public. Whatever his practice, he sculpts the social, as Joseph Beuys put it, with his tongue [langue] in his mouth from which he makes language [langue] as a symbolic milieu, or with his eye endowed with hands from which he makes a visibility woven by those organs of trans-individuation to which he adds clays, pigments, charcoal, paper, canvases, museums, and so on—all this contributing to the formation of what is called the public. In other words, this public is organologically overdetermined in its configuration. But today its attitudes are derived and in truth destroyed by the culture industries."³

The tragic and melancholic mood that embraced humanity in our days, which was predicted by Nietzsche and in our times announced by Bernard Stiegler calling for humanity to retain its abilities to dream of better times in order to escape being completely controlled by technologies, which otherwise will take total control over the population. The complexity includes the culture industry itself taking over because of its technologisation without taking into account the intention of the artist. Because technologies are records of human memory; if not to be attended they can take the control over the population easily. On a very optimistic note it encourages to think of the future which can/must be made according to new industrial models. What kind of image art can produce in order to make a shift or to 'act out' in the sense of Stiegler? And how this acting out will find the balance between the increasing technologisation and artistic intentions?

Following Derrida Stiegler understood and theorised the question of memory which is inseparable from the question of technology, the first technology being the writing (*écriture*) which in our times is the digital writing. With the increasing automation of the work memory is exteriorised to the degree that memory, the container of time, is resided outside of the brain while separating subjects further from the exterior world.⁴ It means that on the one hand there is an automatic imitation without awareness and on the other hand, there is a possibility of the conscious translation of what may be adopted from the process of automation. Stiegler problematized this ubiquitous event as "the pharmacy effect".⁵ A very complicated theory of the exosomatomized memory by Stiegler insists on memory's being completely separated from the brain, since from the very start of hominization memory was recorded in technics. In order to retain memory there should be a great attention to this question.

With the constant recycling of the recorded memory there is the proliferation of images, which is a part of the process of exteriorisation. Any work of art is the articulation of the exteriorised memory, where the model of imitation is absent and may only be discovered by internalising what is exteriorised. It should also be said that the exteriority/ interiority process is resisting a total industrialisation of memory. The abeyance produced by the exteriorisation which is necessarily results in industrialisation also produces (technical) objects, residues of memory which are not only having the exposure value for the unconscious imitation but also the reminiscence of the experience recuperated from the inheritance of the collective memory. Technical objects have historically assisted the cultural memory and in this sense

the human is inseparable from technics and understood as a form of exteriorization. This exteriorisation creates a relation between the missing dimension of time and the remnants of time. Remnants of time are recorded in technical mnemonic devices in which the interiority of the human being is exteriorised into tools and other forms of ‘organised inorganic matter’, i.e. technics, where the human is technics.⁶ It is also how we experience time: as technics we imitate time of experiencing memory resided in technical devices.

Far from playing with the technocratic world, which dominates today’s art and culture in general, Stiegler counts on human being as a powerful technics, which is the combination of what the Greek philosophy called *tekhnē* (art) and *epistēmē*.⁷ The pressure of technology may only be handled reasonably by our understanding of our skills to overcome the crisis, the skill inseparable from the artistic experience. Moreover art is always a combination of the individual experience necessarily articulating the collective memory, which is the condition of trans-individuation. The collective memory is stored in order to be passed to generations in technical objects from the earliest forms of writing to the most recent digital *emojis* and with digital technology as a new form of writing. Digital technology as a new form of writing is also what belongs to the order of automation, which mobilises all the technical objects for the engineering which ends in the loss of any form of knowledge. This loss at the same time orients towards knowledge which is hidden in technical objects. The question is how to produce autonomy from heteronomy, from the loss and gain. It is the question of ‘the battle for the intelligence’.⁸

Stiegler’s biography is already a reminder of a mythological combination of ‘battles for the intelligence’. His biography is in a very early age doing handy jobs in order to survive and to support his family, taking part in the 1968 student revolts, joining the French Communist party and leaving it shortly because of the disappointment, working as the owner of the bar in Toulouse, the prison sentence for the armed bank robbery, the involvement with philosophy in the prison, a friendship with Derrida and then the rise to the international fame first as an author of *Technics and Time* and then as a most influential intellectual critiquing dangers of the global digitalisation of the knowledge and possible resistance to it.

Stiegler’s philosophy is also powerful because of bringing a hope through the severe critique. His work insisting on the constituency of technics and revival of the ancient notion of *pharmacy* in order to show that how we have lost our knowledge of everyday life, knowing how to live, to work and to think, what he also termed ‘proletarianisation’ after Marx. The

current state of affairs should start taking into account the restoration of this loss in order to be able to do anything at all, what is possible in the society which is so far not totally controlled by the culture industry, as it was in Adorno's work. Because of the pharmacy effect the loss itself is the condition of the gain. The notion of 'grammatisation' borrowed from the work of linguistics (Sylvain Auroux) combined with Derrida's notion of difference powerfully demonstrated that these technics are available for re-structuring the lost knowledge. Therefore the disaster itself is the condition of escaping the disaster, like in the above mentioned notion of *the pharmacy effect*, which derives from Socrates via Plato's dialogues: the poison and remedy are necessary conditions for living, working and thinking. There should be no illusion about '*promesse de bonheur*' and our age of post-truth can teach us to become engaged with the world only by taking care of it.

Through the double negation and epochal doubling by the entropy and negentropy (negative entropy) Stiegler managed to bring into prominence this necessity of reading of Plato, Kant and Marx through the critical revision of Frankfurt school theory which would help to open-up the way to a new form of trans-individuation. He saw in the work of Adorno, Sohn Rethel, Marcuse as well Deleuze and Derrida (last two in their turn paid attention to philosopher Gilbert Simondon and palaeontologist André Leroi-Gourhan) the wide possibility of elaborating the notion that 'technics precede thought'. If we are not careful and ignore the necessity of constant learning, then we are doomed to lose all our bearings in the world which is already disoriented under the monstrous pressure of capitalism. He was also closely interested in the work of Russian thinkers such as Vladimir Vernadsky, Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin as he was interested in the wide ranging work from mathematics, physics, biology, palaeontology, linguistics and arts in order to problematize further the question of the entropy in terms of escaping damages which the Anthropocene age will bring including its danger for the noosphere and the noetic being.

Taking care before everything means the discovery of the link between generations.⁹ Stiegler not only wrote about this question, but he also created the number of institutions in order to realise his theories, apart from the above mentioned summer academy, the Institut de recherche et d'innovation (IRI), which he founded in 2006 at the Centre Georges-Pompidou (to give but one example) .His concepts addressing the question of memory, such as 'temporal industrial objects' and 'the tertiary retention' (the third memory) conjugated with the vital questions of the Anthropocene and entropic forces of thermodynamics on the one hand and the conflict of knowledge and information on the other are key notions which forms

the basics of the new philosophical theory of organology. Organology as a new ontology is the pioneering study of how to regain the knowledge of how to live/work/think for the population whose ‘montage consciousness’ is plugged into the automatization of the digital networks. Given that he was very critical of the culture industry, he was also full of positive energy and as I said, differently from Adorno he also paid more attention to the remedy side of our toxic age optimistically emphasising how we must work and do as much as possible in order to create new industrial models, theories and art.

Bernard was a very kind and extremely gentle person with illumination of intellectual depth and energy. He was very kind to me and our brief e-mail dialogues exchanging some ideas and a few occasional meetings and having wonderful conversations are the most important events in my life. Stiegler’s notion of ‘acting out’, which means shifting from one phase to another where both phases influence each other was very influential for me since my work is the combination of my art and philosophy allowing me to make decisions. Decision making is a step towards taking care and this kind of taking care is a new form of individuation.

He also was very carefully looking at my art work and reading my writing. I sent him a copy of my book, which came out this May.¹⁰ The last message just a week before his sudden tragic death said: “Dear Zeigam, Yes I received the book, thank you very much. I couldn’t read it at the moment, but I will do it of course, All the best, Bernard! ” .

London, September, 2020

Notes:

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche quoted in Daniel Ross, Mind Snatchers of Anthropocene: Can Aspects Dawn within the Gulag Architectonic?, online version:

https://www.academia.edu/34075666/Mind_Snatchers_of_the_Anthropocene_Can_Aspects_Dawn_within_the_Gulag_Architectonic_2017_

² Bernard Stiegler, ‘Nous entrons dans le revenir de Jacques Derrida’, *Corpus* 48 , pp. 64–66.1, 2005

³ Bernard Stiegler, The Tongue of the Eye: What “Art History” Means, in *Releasing the image: from Literature to New Media*, (eds.) Jacques Khalip and Robert Mitchell, Stanford University press, California, 2011, pp. 235-299

⁴ Until recent times memory was considered as the most difficult notion for its scientific explanation. Based on ideas derived from fiction and theory, scientists managed to provide the scientific model of

memory which exists outside the brain. For example, researchers from the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology have created a device that acts like a synapse in the living brain, storing information and gradually forgetting it when not accessed for a long time. Known as a second-order memristor, the new device is based on hafnium oxide and offers prospects for designing analog neurocomputers imitating the way a biological brain learns. See:

https://mipt.ru/english/news/mipt_physicists_create_device_for_imitating_biological_memory

⁵ Bernard Stiegler: *Technics and Time 3: Cinematic time and the Question of Malaise*, Stanford, California, 2011

⁶ Bernard Stiegler: *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, Stanford, California, 1994

⁷ This term 'technics' is spelled in the plural in Stiegler's work in order to underline that the human is the combination of technics, knowledge and desire.

⁸ Bernard Stiegler: *Technics and Time 3: Cinematic time and the Question of Malaise*, Stanford, California, 2011

⁹ Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, Stanford University Press, 2010

¹⁰ Zeigam Azizov: *The Time of the Image: A Philosophical Exploration of the Image in the work of Bernard Stiegler*, Herbert von Halem Verlag, Cologne, 2020