The Desire Called Neganthropology

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a preliminary investigation of Bernard Stiegler as a utopian thinker in the context of a diminished presence of utopian thinking in the twenty-first century. It proposes a reading of Stiegler's philosophy aimed at contributing to its revival by tracing the aporetic interplay between impossibility, contingency, and necessity in his conceptual framework. The first section situates Stiegler as a utopian thinker, exploring the implications of his thesis of originary technicity. The second section explains how the aporia of utopian critique is deployed by Stiegler in an *enabling* way through his reconceptualization of prescriptive politics within the frameworks of pharmacology and general organology. The third section considers how the two most pressing challenges of the twenty-first century—the technological and ecological crises—are exacerbated by capitalism's drive-based economy, and how, in Stiegler's view, the only way to overcome the deadlock of this conjoined crisis is by rekindling the desire called neganthropology. The conclusion offers a brief assessment of Stiegler's pharmacological figuration of utopia, evaluating how his insistence on imagining a different capitalist political economy holds up in practical terms against the challenge of the ecological crisis in the age of the Anthropocene.

KEYWORDS Bernard Stiegler, utopianism, the neganthropocene, postcapitalism, climate change

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Introduction

One of the most salient features of contemporary critical discourse, particularly that focused on the theme of liberty and justice, engages with the aporia in which we are only able to think within the condition of possibility that gives rise to our thinking. However, the crisis we face today is so immense that it compels us to think beyond the very condition of possibility of thinking as such. Such an aporia poses the challenge of bringing about the emergence of the new through an act of self-transcendence in a manner not unlike Baron Münchausen, who miraculously pulls himself out of the swamp by his own hair.

We might draw on Fredric Jameson's idea and describe the propensity to carry out this impossible task as "the desire called Utopia."[1] Yet, as Jameson notes, the past few decades have witnessed "the waning of the utopian idea" ("Politics" 36). The reason is not difficult to comprehend. The suspicion of the utopian idea has been prompted by a series of failed attempts to establish really existing communist regimes in the twentieth century. The dismal outcomes of these utopian experiments in the last century have cast serious doubt on the feasibility and desirability of utopian thinking, particularly in light of the oppressive totalitarian regimes that emerged from such attempts. This is manifested in the skepticism of grand narratives and the rejection of teleological thinking, which can be found not only in various postmodernism-inflected theories but also in the minds of many ex-communists who were either humbled or embarrassed by the betrayal of their belief. To prevent the catastrophic failure of utopianism from ever happening again, a growing consensus cautions against Promethean excessiveness in utopian thinking. This has led to the demise of the desire for systematic transformation, and, as a result, discussions of an alternative world or a radically different social order are consistently frowned upon. Instead of a Promethean overhaul, there is a call for moderation, with an emphasis on incremental reforms and pragmatic solutions that work within the existing systems.

Alain Badiou has designated this general trend toward moderation as the contemporary crisis of negation ("Crisis" 234-35). On the political front, instead of

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[1] The subtitle of Jameson's book *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* alludes to the chapter "The Desire Called Marx" in Jean-François Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy* (or "The Desire Named Marx" in Iain Hamilton Grant's translation). Eleanor Kaufman, in turn, offers another variation of this expression in "The Desire Called Mao," and the present paper introduces yet another permutation.

pursuing yet another utopian project, more and more people start asking: why not just make do with small and local improvements *within the existing system*—e.g., through democratic debate and peaceful demonstration? The most ardent supporters of this approach contend that, yes, our system has its many flaws—poverty and other instances of social injustice still persist, and yet it is much preferable to killing millions of people. Rather than engaging in a utopian project to strive for *the best*, we should settle for *the least bad* option—much like democracy, which, in a quote often attributed to Winston Churchill, is "the worst form of government, except for all the others." Instead of fighting *for* the ideal, we should focus on fighting *against* catastrophe. In this political climate, caution and moderation become the guiding principles of politics, and the question of practice is conceived only in terms of local struggle, or what Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek dismiss as "folk politics," that reacts to concerns of temporal and spatial immediacy at the expense of any long-term structural analysis (354). Ray Brassier describes the consequences of this diminished utopian aspiration, noting that:

> This scaling down of political ambition by those who espouse the ideals of justice and emancipation is perhaps the most notable consequence of the collapse of communism as a Promethean project. The best we can hope for, apparently, is to create local enclaves of equality and justice. But the idea of *remaking* the world according to the ideals of equality and justice is routinely denounced as a dangerous totalitarian fantasy. (469)

Here, I do not wish to stage an opposition, as Williams and Srnicek do, between moderate folk politics on the one hand and Promethean grand politics on the other. However, it is crucial to take their critique seriously, for it serves as an important reminder of the impotence of our age to conceive of an immanent exception—that is, an outside within the existing order—that can give rise to the establishment of a new normativity. There is, of course, nothing wrong with small-scale politics. Rather, the problem lies in its naturalization. The prevailing sense that the existing economic system and political regime are not the best but as good as we can get inculcates an attitude of resignation, which, fostered by the global dominance of neoliberal ideology and the conservative revolution it initiates, then transforms into the mantra of TINA, an acronym for "There Is No Alternative." As we gradually become accustomed to this atmosphere of resignation, this structure of feeling becomes naturalized into fact. Thus, the problem is not folk politics per se, but rather the risk of its falling prey to the prevailing sense of resignation, an assumption that maintains the status quo and blocks our path to imagining an

alternative future. This colonization of political imagination has led cultural theorist Mark Fisher to characterize the present crisis of negation as "capitalist realism" because neoliberal capitalism has today subsumed "the horizon of the thinkable" so much so that in Hollywood cinema, as Jameson and Slavoj Žižek observe, it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism (Fisher 8).

The suspicion of grand political narrative is not to be dismissed either. There are, indeed, lessons to be gleaned from past mistakes: for one, the complexity of social reality, with its infinite nuances, cannot be straitjacketed into a linear development of history; for another, excessive confidence in the possibility of remaking the world overnight not only overlooks the human and material costs that a revolutionary disruption would entail but also underestimates the resilience of capitalism to absorb, accommodate, and evolve alongside ongoing crises.[2] These two issues, concerning the problem of telos and of revolutionary optimism, have significantly handicapped the cultivation of the utopian imagination and contributed to "the waning of the utopian idea" in the twenty-first century.

One of the most notable symptoms of this diminishing of utopian desire is the cancellation of the future. This symptom can be seen in the transition from Herbert Marcuse's Great Refusal in the 1960s to the Great Resignation in the 2020s, as demonstrated by the phenomenon of the Lie-Flat Movement that has become widespread in many Asian countries. The reality of growing inequality, beneath the neoliberal veneer of economic progress and prosperity, has crushed the younger generation into settling for the present *as it is*. What else can they hope for if their options are limited to those between "the worst" totalitarianism and "the least bad" liberal democracy? Ironically, the punk motto "No Future" is making a comeback; this time, however, not with vengeance but rather with "reflexive impotence": "They know things are bad, but more than that, they know they can't do anything about it. But that 'knowledge,' that reflexivity, is not a passive observation of an already existing state of affairs. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy" (Fisher 21). In contrast to the rebelliousness conveyed by the punk slogan, the "No Future" sentiment today expresses a defeatist acquiescence. This acquiescence stems from the curtailing of imagination and the dampening of desire, ultimately leading to

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[2] David Harvey, for example, has argued against such a revolutionary illusion: "Capital, right now, may be too deeply implicated in the reproduction of daily life to fail. . . . The kind of fantasy that revolutionaries might once have had—which was that capitalism could be destroyed and burned down overnight and that something quite different could immediately be built upon the ashes—is impossible today. . . . It is in this sense that we might say that capital appears to be now too big to fail" (12-13). However, it is one thing to argue against the utopian fantasy where a revolution topples capitalism and changes everything overnight, emphasizing instead the gradual and evolving nature of a revolutionary process. It is quite another to suggest that capitalism has today become too big to fail.

the cancellation of the future.

The term "utopia" thus becomes highly controversial and politically charged, carrying opposing connotations depending on one's position on the political spectrum. For the left, "utopia" symbolizes a vision of a just and egalitarian society, whereas the right associates the term with totalitarianism and the danger of illusory fanaticism. Given the deadlock generated by these conflicting perspectives, it is essential to move beyond the paralyzing oscillation between the Scylla of utopian voluntarism and the Charybdis of impassive fatalism. This dichotomy represents a perilous choice between unrealistic idealism and resigned acceptance, neither of which can address the profound challenges of our time. To confront the systemic injustice and structural inequality that have rendered life unlivable, we must cultivate a new utopian imagination and design a new methodology for the twenty-first century. To be sure, the desire for utopia does not guarantee its eventuation, but it is still necessary to continually postulate utopian ideas. Without this desire to envision an alternative future, Jameson argues, there can be no effective practical political program to counter the debilitating effects of globalization: "This clearly does not mean that, even if we succeed in reviving utopia itself, the outlines of a new and effective practical politics for the era of globalization will at once become visible; but only that we will never come to one without it" ("Politics" 36).

In the face of such a challenge, an adequate response demands nothing less than a restructuring of our understanding of critique to incorporate the meanings ascribed to it by both Kant and Marx. Critique has to be Kantian, as it needs to investigate the conditions of possibility for the present situation; it must be Marxian at the same time, for it cannot afford to remain satisfied with mere diagnosis and must instead summon up the courage to propose a solution by answering the Leninist question: *What is to be done?* It is at this point that critique finds itself crossing the threshold into the domain of utopian thinking, the fundamental operation of which involves first dissecting the problems of the present and then establishing a new normativity by superimposing a vision of the future on the existing order of things. In addition to synthesizing both Kantian and Marxian senses of critique, *we must not overlook the fact that the aporia of immanent transcendence forbids the occupation of an external transcendental point of view*, thus compounding the difficulties inherent in the practice of utopian critique. It is the contention of this paper that if utopian thinking is to remain relevant for the twenty-first century, it must address all the stipulations outlined above.

This paper offers a preliminary investigation of Bernard Stiegler's philosophy as a means of addressing this challenge. It is organized into three sections. The first section situates Stiegler as a utopian thinker, exploring the implications of his

thesis of originary technicity. The second section explains how the aporia of utopian critique is deployed by Stiegler in an *enabling* way through his reconceptualization of prescriptive politics within the frameworks of pharmacology and general organology. The third section considers how the two most pressing challenges of the twenty-first century—the technological and ecological crises—are exacerbated by capitalism's drive-based economy, and how, in Stiegler's view, the only way to overcome the deadlock of this conjoined crisis is not by way of posthumanism's nature-culture continuum nor new materialism's affirmation of non-human agency;[3] rather it is by rekindling the desire called neganthropology that we can launch a new critique of political economy and effectuate a bifurcation from the entropic/anthropic becoming (*devenir*) into the negentropic/neganthropic future (*avenir*). The conclusion offers a brief assessment of Stiegler's pharmacological figuration of utopia, evaluating how his insistence on imagining a different capitalist political economy holds up in practical terms against the challenge of the ecological crisis in the age of the Anthropocene.

Bernard Stiegler as a Utopian Thinker

> *Who or what is the inhuman-being? It is the one incapable of promising. . . . The inhuman-being is incapable of responding to what does not yet exist.*
>
> *--Stiegler,* What Makes Life

Although Stiegler's published works offer limited explicit treatment of the theme of utopia, it is nonetheless possible to consider Stiegler as a thinker of utopia. Many of his key concepts, such as protention, consistence, quasi-causality, neganthropy, mystagogy, and others, align well with the utopian tradition, exhibiting a utopian resonance not unlike that found in the works of Ernst Bloch and Badiou.[4]

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[3] For Stiegler's critique of posthumanism, see *What Makes Life* 112. To the best of my knowledge, Stiegler does not directly engage with the discourse of new materialism. We can infer from his writing that he is not opposed to granting agential power to the nonhuman entities, as he does with technicity. However, Stiegler often describes himself as a spiritual materialist (*Philosophizing* 90; *Acting* 32), emphasizing the importance of the idealist legacy, which stands at odds with the general trend in new materialism.

[4] For a comparison between Stiegler and Bloch, see Forrest. Admittedly, Stiegler has issued several criticisms of Badiou, specifically regarding Badiou's lack of engagement with the ecological question (*Age* 279-80). However, it is also important to note that Stiegler endorses Badiou's politics of truth as outlined in *Ethics* ("Technics of Decision" 161). Generally speaking, both Stiegler and Badiou are committed, in their distinct ways, to reconceptualizing a politics of prescription in an attempt to resuscitate the utopian desire that has lain dormant under the neoliberal regime for the last forty years.

The convergence of these concepts, along with their intersecting development, provides a new critique of political economy and paves the way for his conceptualization of the Neganthropocene as an epoch that reclaims its right to the future, thereby signaling a utopian alternative to the ideology of TINA (Stiegler, *For a New Critique* 101-04, 122-24).

It is important to bear in mind that Stiegler's utopian critique is not couched in the language of alienation, as his thesis of originary technicity precludes the postulation of an original state of plentitude to return to. For Stiegler, there is no other world except the one we now inhabit; however, there is *another plane* within this world that facilitates the collective formation of desire. This plane, which Stiegler calls consistence, harbors desire that has the structure of promise. Desire is motivated by ends *not yet existing* but nevertheless *consisting*; it allows human beings to orient themselves toward the improbable and project a shared horizon of a common future.[5] On this view, it is apt to describe Stiegler as a philosopher of desire because it is by focusing on desire and its joint articulation with the aforementioned concepts that we can approach Stiegler as a singular kind of utopian philosopher.[6]

This utopian connection has been previously noted by Joff P. N. Bradley and David R. Kennedy, who have edited a volume on Stiegler as a philosopher of education, with a particular emphasis on the utopian dimension in his thought (335). Benoît Dillet also recognizes the unique way in which Stiegler weaves together tertiary retention (the externalized memory of past experiences) and tertiary protention (the anticipation of future possibilities) to underscore the transformative capacity of desire, which is comparable, in Dillet's view, to Jameson's theorization of utopia (97-98). Likewise, Claire Colebrook situates Stiegler as a thinker caught between two conflicting tendencies—one emphasizing the pharmacological approach of thinking in terms of composition rather than opposition, and the other leaning toward the therapeutical approach of offering a determinate solution based

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[5] The idea of consistence derives from Edmund Husserl's *eidos*, but its lineage can also be traced back to Plato's idea of forms. Unlike Plato, who perceives the forms as separate from this world, Husserl conceives of the *eidos* as existing both inside and outside this world, constituting an immanent exception to the existing world (Stiegler, "Teleologics" 34). Stiegler further refines this idea by drawing on Aristotle's tripartite distinction between modes of existence: the vegetative soul (subsistence), the sensory soul (existence), and the intellective soul (consistence), enriching his conceptualization of consistence in relation to human being and desire (Stiegler, *Acting* 13). The use of the word "horizon" in this context is significant; it departs from the typical connotation of imposing a predetermined uniform design from without. Instead, as Daniel Ross notes, "these expectations are not *identical* between individuals but *converge* towards a future in which it is possible to believe together" ("Technics, Time" 122).

[6] See Hansen, "Bernard Stiegler." Hansen has also referred to Stiegler as a "philosopher of desire," but the usage of this appellation in the present work differs from Hansen's. Here the term is employed primarily to situate Stiegler's philosophy within the broader lineage of utopian thought.

on a committed imperative to distinguish good and evil (214). Although Colebrook does not explicitly use the term "utopia" in her article, the subtitle "Bernard Stiegler's Project of Revolution and Redemption" is suggestive of a strong affinity to utopian thinking.

Each of these commentators offers a reading of Stiegler to shed new light on possible theoretical figurations of utopianism. The present paper intends to further explore the potential of this utopian orientation, engaging with issues closely related to those raised by Colebrook, namely, the aporetic interplay between impossibility, contingency, and necessity in Stiegler's philosophy. Unlike Colebrook, however, my analysis will devote more attention to necessity, as it is, among the three, the most maligned, least understood, and yet absolutely indispensable with respect to the question of utopia. Before delving into the question concerning these three logical modalities, it is important to first understand the foundation of Stiegler's philosophical project as a form of utopian thinking.

The Constitutivity of Technics

Stiegler's major philosophical intervention lies in exposing Western philosophy's long-standing forgetting of technics. In the preface to the first volume of *Technics and Time,* Stiegler asserts, "[t]he object of this work is technics, apprehended as the horizon of all possibility to come and of all possibility of a future. . . . [A]t its very origin and up until now, philosophy has repressed technics as an object of thought. Technics is the unthought" (ix). This statement not only serves as the cornerstone of Stiegler's philosophical project but also establishes a strong connection between Stiegler's project and the utopian tradition. Since the utopian project inevitably involves waging a temporal war to reclaim the right to the future, Stiegler's insight into technics becomes pivotal, for it enhances our understanding of the constitutive role of technics in shaping our collective visions and concurrently anchors his work firmly within the discourse of utopian thought.

Two additional observations can be made regarding the primacy accorded to technics. First, the constitutive nature of technics implies a rejection of the instrumentalist point of view, which posits human beings as the unambiguous inventors of technical instruments in the sole service of human purposes. Second, the technical condition of possibility must not be confused with technical determinism; the latter implies that technics unilaterally dictates the course of human history, leaving no room for human autonomy. Stiegler charts a course between these two extremes. By rejecting the instrumental understanding of technics, he gives technics its rightful due in shaping the ways psychic individuals and social institutions evolve throughout human history. By acknowledging the technical condition of

possibility without elevating it into determination in the last instance, he places the constitutive force of technics at the heart of a new politics, founded not on the opposition of autonomy and heteronomy but rather on their pharmacological composition. With this broad outline in mind, we can tentatively conclude that, for Stiegler, technics defines a field of possibilities that configures the way we live, think, desire, and act, without negating the human potential to orient these possibilities toward an affirmative end.

To further unpack the significance of Stiegler's treatise on technics, we should now turn to his discussion of the invention of the human. Specifically, we will examine how the three logical modalities—the impossible, the contingent, and the necessary—are mapped onto the thesis of the default of origin and the two moments that comprise what Stiegler refers to as "the doubly epochal redoubling."

Drawing on the work of André Leroi-Gourhan, Stiegler points out that the dawn of hominization commenced when "the human invents himself in the technical by inventing the tool—by becoming exteriorized techno-logically" (*Technics and Time* 141).[7] Expanding on this idea, Stiegler explains that "technics consists in the *organization of inorganic matter*, leading in return to the *organological reorganization of cerebral organic matter*, which in its turn organologically modifies the play of the somatic organs, giving rise to a new form of life" (*The Neganthropocene* 42). The continuous co-evolution of the interior and the exterior explains why human beings are fundamentally temporal beings, generated through the diachronic unfolding of this co-evolutionary process, with identity arising at moments of synchronic metastability. This means that, from the outset, human beings are born incomplete, without essence, and subject to the continuous process of technical exteriorization which constitutes a rupture in mankind's evolutionary trajectory, as it affects the development of their sensory organs, neuropsychological processes, and motor systems. This rupture frees man from both genetic destiny and epigenetic constraints; it enables epiphylogenetic evolution—that is, the "pursuit of life by means other than those of life"—and allows for artificial selection in place of natural selection (Stiegler, *Technics and Time* 144). This also means that human beings as technical forms of life are constantly *called into question* with each new technical development, and there is always tension within and time-lag during the co-evolutionary process.

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[7] Stiegler later adopts the term "exosomatization," in reference to the works of Alfred Lotka and Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, to signal an intellectual transition from the earlier concept of "exteriorization" (*Neganthropocene* 217-18). While there are subtle differences between these two terms, in the context of the present study, it suffices to note that both articulate the idea of human beings as technical forms of life beyond biological organogenesis.

Grammatization and Proletarianization

There is one particular type of technics, mnemotechnics, which is noteworthy in the epiphylogenetic evolution of mankind, for it is responsible for making them noetic beings. Mnemotechnics, or hypomnesic tertiary retention, becomes possible as a result of grammatization. According to Sylvain Auroux, grammatization constitutes a process of formalization and discretization through which temporal phenomena (e.g., speech) are spatialized—that is, broken into discrete, uniform alphabetic elements—in the mnemonic object (e.g., writing). Stiegler builds upon Auroux's idea and expands it to include not only literal grammatization but also mechanical grammatization (the formalization of gestural flows in the nineteenth century), analogue grammatization (the formalization of perceptual flows in the twentieth century), and digital grammatization (the formalization of attentional flows in the twenty-first century) (Stiegler, *What Makes Life* 49). The significance of grammatization lies in its ability to reproduce knowledge exactly, thereby preserving the past in a reactivable form and enabling its transmission to later generations.

Take writing as an example: the accumulation and dissemination of shared experiences across time through literal grammatization make it possible for customs to be written into law, and then for people to engage in discussion, debate, critique, and interpretation of law in public space. Thus, the exact reproduction of writing creates a *res publica*—a space for reflection and deliberation, selection and decision on both individual and collective levels. Within this *res publica,* each access to the written inscription of law is not a repetition of the same nor a mere retrieval of information but a repetition of *différance* that gives rise to noetic differentiation (Stiegler, *Neganthropocene* 250-51).

However, Stiegler notes, "[g]rammatization is *irreducibly* pharmacological," embodying a dual tendency to act either as remedy or poison (*For a New Critique* 42). Grammatization can either intensify the process of individuation, as illustrated in the example of writing mentioned above, or undermine it through the process of proletarianization. The term "proletarianization" immediately brings to mind Marx's proletariat as a propertyless class. Stiegler's use of the term departs from this Marxian framework and grants it a more expansive sense, denoting the loss of knowledge made possible by the process of grammatization.[8] It is in this broader context that Plato, rather than Marx, is considered the first thinker of proletarianization, as he was the first to engage with the pharmacological nature of writing in *Phaedrus.*

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[8] For an in-depth elaboration of the concept of proletarianization, see Dillet 81-83.

For Stiegler, each successive stage of grammatization in history brings with it distinctive possibilities of proletarianization. Therefore, it is important to investigate the history of grammatization in order to offer a diagnosis of the present. To further elaborate on this point, consider the writing example once more, this time focusing instead on the toxic tendency of the pharmacological duality. The inscription of law into written language can lose its "diachronic dynamism" and become "*dead words*" when "caught in the meshes of disciplinary and synchronic power," as Ross explains ("From 'Dare to Think!'" 469). Similarly, the grammatization of muscular flows during the industrial revolution inscribes the workers' knowledge into the machine, resulting in the workers' loss of practical know-how (the loss of *savoir-faire*). Likewise, the grammatization of the sensible by the audio-visual technologies in consumerist capitalism deprives consumers of the art of living (the loss of *savoir-vivre*) through the liquidation of desire and the harnessing of libidinal energy into a drive-based marketing strategy that promotes branded lifestyles and prioritizes immediate satisfaction. This progressive loss of knowledge ultimately leads to the condition of generalized proletarianization in today's computational technologies, which exacerbate the control of the retentional system to an even greater extent by reducing everything to calculation. Generalized proletarianization heralds an epoch where conceptual and theoretical thinking is rendered useless (the loss of *savoirs théoriques*), as famously announced by Chris Anderson in his 2008 paper "The End of Theory."

Several insights derived from Stiegler's discussion of constitutive technics can be further elaborated:

1. Since technical exteriorization lies at the origin of hominization, Stiegler's account refutes the utopian vision of originary plentitude as in the Rousseauian myth of the natural man existing outside of technicity. According to Stiegler's philosophical anthropology, man's default position is non-interiority, signifying the *impossibility* of a self-positing being. As Stiegler puts it, "at the origin there is only an originary default of origin, and man, without qualities, only exists by default: he becomes" (*Acting* 16). Consequently, the inquiry into whether human beings are innately good or evil becomes meaningless, though this does not negate the significance of judgements or decisions concerning the question of good and evil, as we will discuss later.

2. Humanity's fate of originary technicity constantly *calls into question* the process of individuation, a concept Stiegler borrows from Gilbert Simondon. By way of individuation, Stiegler proposes a processual understanding of humans as temporal existences mediated by the technical condition of the epoch. Unlike the metaphysics of subjectivity, individuation is construed as a dynamic

process irreducible to a constant state of autonomy. Paradoxically, it is not unrelated to the question of autonomy either. Since the idea of an alternative future intrinsic to utopian thinking necessitates maintaining the category of autonomous will in one way or another, Stiegler cannot wholly dismiss the question of autonomy. Instead, he asserts that the manner in which individual autonomy is exercised is always *relative to* the technical heteronomy with which it is composed. In short, if Stiegler affirms autonomy, what is affirmed is never autonomy as opposed to heteronomy, but relative autonomy mediated by its technical condition of possibility.

3. The motor, psycho-somatic, and neurological development of humans is not organic but *organological*, not natural but *artificial*; it is always already conditioned by technicity, which presupposes the existence of social and cultural systems. These three elements—psychosomatic organs, social organs, and technical organs—participate in each other's formation in a transductive manner. Transduction is a process "wherein the terms of the relation are constituted by the relation itself, each of these terms being unable to exist without the other, while nevertheless being irreducible to one another" (Stiegler, "Literate Natives" 214). This organological perspective thus emphasizes the constitutive role of technicity in the development of psychosomatic organs and social organs, and allows Stiegler to avoid the trap of the classical humanist assumption that posits reason as man's innate faculty.

4. For Stiegler, thinking is fundamentally technical. We think through a system of grammatized tertiary retention (e.g., literal, analogue, digital), which preserves the past and facilitates the inter-generational transmission of knowledge and memory. In other words, the retentional system constitutes a pre-individual fund that precedes and awaits each individual before their arrival in the world, providing them with the means to navigate the world.[9] "This does not mean," Stiegler reminds us, "that human knowledge should be reduced to what is retained by the material retentions: human knowledge is also, and in an essential way, human desire. . . . What makes the human a knowledgeable being is that he is desiring, with phantasms and imaginations" (*Philosophizing* 63). Tertiary retention then conditions the formation of

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[9] Stiegler builds on Simondon's idea of the pre-individual to refer to "the already-there": a past not directly experienced but enduring through the support of hypomnesic tertiary retention. In this way, the pre-individual "already-there" co-exists with the living, leading to two potential outcomes: (1) psychic individuals and social organizations may access the pre-individual in their own singular ways, paving the way for the emergence of new futures; (2) the standardization of modes of access to the pre-individual, as found in consumerist capitalism, can result in the foreclosure of the future.

knowledge without determining it, as desire also opens up protentional possibilities for the noetic soul.

Doubly Epochal Redoubling

> *Humankind not only subsists, but exists, and this means that it transforms itself. But this transformation presupposes a consistence, that is, a* telos, *thus a desire.*
>
> --Stiegler, "Teleologics of the Snail"

The account of originary technicity and the history of grammatization outlined in the first section suggest that proletarianization, or the loss of knowledge, results from the toxic development in the process of individuation. This does not mean, however, that proletarianization is inevitable. The manifestation of today's digital *pharmakon* does not determine the only way digital grammatization can unfold historically. If each successive epoch of grammatization requires its own historical analysis, this is because no transcendental law prescribes the course of the grammatization process. "Our epoch," Stiegler points out, "is characterized by the fact that it is the economic system dominated by fictitious capital that imposes a technical system the evolutions of which it presents as ineluctable. . . . But in reality such arrangements are historical, and *perfectly contingent*—what is more, they are *profoundly toxic*" (Stiegler, *For a New Critique* 123; emphasis added).

Stiegler claims that our epoch is profoundly toxic and contingently so. This is so due to the ever-widening gap between the pace of technological advancements and the rate at which psychic individuals and social organizations can adopt these changes. The disjunction introduces a technological shock, destabilizing the metastable milieu formed through the transductive exchange among the three interconnected organological systems in the previous epoch. It should be noted that such a technological shock is not uncommon and even remains indispensable for the evolution of human civilization. In the past, this initial shock was typically accompanied by a second moment that achieved a metastable balance and advanced the new organological arrangement between the three terms. This second moment re-establishes a normativity in response to what Georges Canguilhem calls "the infidelity of the milieu" initiated by the technological shock (Stiegler, *What Makes Life* 28-31). However, there is something unprecedented in the crisis confronting us today: in the age of generalized digitalization and its regime of algorithmic governmentality, we are facing a situation where the initial technological shock has become

so profound that it actively prevents the occurrence of the second moment.[10]

Stiegler introduces the neologism "doubly epochal redoubling" to describe the continuous process of shock and adoption. In its phenomenological sense, an *epokhē* constitutes a suspension, such as the interruption of a given system of knowledge or the behavioral program around which a culture is united. In its historical sense, it refers to the formation of an era marked by its distinctive worldviews, belief systems, behavioral programs, and other positively constituted knowledges collectively known as culture. Stiegler weaves both connotations into the neologism: a doubly epochal redoubling is a spiraling process involving a first moment of suspension in the form of shock or disruption, followed by a second moment that superimposes a new law onto the epochal technological shock, forming a new historical epoch. Typically, disruption is followed by the establishment of a new associated milieu between the psychic, the social, and the technical systems; civilization then evolves to accommodate diachronic development in alignment with the technological condition of its time, without letting the development devolve into unchecked, disastrous acceleration (Stiegler, *Age* 14).

What is unprecedented in the crisis we face today is that we find ourselves mired in a prolonged state of generalized proletarianization "without return," where there is no second moment to counteract the toxicity of today's digital *pharmakon* (Stiegler, *Automatic* 28). For instance, the problem with big data is that it only incites the first *epokhē* without provoking the second moment of an epochal redoubling. The *res publica*—a space for reflection and deliberation, selection and decision, as noted above in the discussion of writing—is foreclosed in the current arrangement of digital technologies that dispenses with reflectivity and imposes on society a regime of automated understanding and decision-making (Stiegler, *Age* 42). That is why Anderson's proclamation concerning the death of theory raises no eyebrows, for it merely reinforces the prevailing dogma of computational thinking, urging people to distrust theoretical analysis, hypothetical reasoning, or any type of hermeneutic activity. These approaches are dismissed as not objective enough, hence prone to partiality and bias. Moreover, the slowness and patience required by these modes of reasoning are ill-suited to respond to the information flow in the real-time connectivity of digital reticular networks. As a result, the space for reflection and deliberation, selection and decision—that is, the space for critique and politics—has significantly shrunk, if not been entirely suppressed (Stiegler, *Automatic* 48-55).

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[10] For further reading on the subject of algorithmic governmentality, see Rouvroy and Berns; also see Stiegler's discussion in *Automatic* 58, 137.

Automatic for the People: The Becoming Ratio of Reason

The delegation of decision-making capacity to machines not only offloads one's responsibility but also dissolves the function of reason into mere *ratio*. Take, for example, the phenomenon of the ChatGPT craze after its public launch on Nov. 30, 2022. Trained by a deep learning neural network architecture called Transformer, ChatGPT is a large natural language model that generates responses based on the statistical likelihood of what should come next in a sequence of text. In a manner somewhat resembling what Stiegler would have said about ChatGPT, Noam Chomsky has argued in a *New York Times* opinion column that ChatGPT and other generative AI programs of its kind "are stuck in a prehuman or nonhuman phase of cognitive evolution" due to their inability to go beyond description and prediction and to offer explanations based on causal, counterfactual, and hypothetical reasoning. Furthermore, true intelligence, Chomsky emphasizes, must be able to tackle moral issues. When posed controversial questions, ChatGPT "exhibits something like the banality of evil: plagiarism and apathy and obviation." The standard response, built in GPT-3.5 and 4.0 as of April 2023, states that "[a]s an AI language model, I don't have personal opinions or beliefs, nor do I have the capacity to concur or disagree with a statement in the way that humans do." This effectively shifts the burden of responsibility to its human creators who, as we know, are unable to penetrate the black box of the system's deep learning mechanism and can only intervene at the output stage to filter out potentially offensive or politically incorrect responses automatically generated by ChatGPT. To add another turn of the screw, ChatGPT's responses are only an approximation of its training data (i.e., the human knowledge recorded on the web), and therefore its output only reproduces, through "lossy compression," the values and biases of human knowledge of the world (Chiang).

As Gilles Châtelet has also noted, in a world where everything is judged according to its statistical probability, we are invited to "live and think like pigs" within a technocratic utopia that effectively eradicates the need for discussion and, with it, any conflict and disagreement.[11] This technocratic utopia—in the manner Žižek describes capitalism's tendency to offer us "a series of products deprived of their malignant property: coffee without caffeine, cream without fat, beer without alcohol"—is *a world without world*, or, what Badiou calls an "atonic world," which is a flat and saturated world with no decision or exception (*Logics* 420-21).

For Stiegler, the assault on knowledge and critical thinking by data-intensive computing is rooted in the belief that everything can be reduced to probabilistic

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[11] See Châtelet, especially chapters 4 and 5.

calculation. The danger of this computational epistemology lies in the quantification of desire into calculable entities. When desire is subject to calculation, it degrades into drive. Consider, for example, Google Ads, which purports to satisfy each user's singular desire by offering targeted ads based on data-driven profiling. This process converts the improbable objects of desire into algorithmic product recommendations that can be acted upon immediately through purchase and consumption, assuming sufficient purchasing power. We have previously noted that the idea of utopia inevitably calls up the desire to reclaim the right to the future. In this sense, the utopian project wages a temporal war against that which denies the possibility of an improbable future. This is precisely what Stiegler has in mind when he contrasts desire and drive:

> [D]rive is an anti-teleology, since drive is driven towards immediate satisfaction, to minimize delay; drive is impatient, it does not wait. . . . The object of desire is very different from the object of drive. The latter is finite, structurally so . . . whereas an object of desire is desirable precisely because it cannot be consumed: it is infinite, and infinitely greater than I am, it is absolutely beyond me and I cannot imagine I could exhaust it. ("Technics, Media" 337)

Drive kills time and exhausts itself in sterile repetition of consumption. Desire, in contrast, projects the improbable. The improbable is that which does not exist and yet, without it, no existence is worth living. Ideality such as justice constitutes the plane of consistence (a *telos*) and "concerns a process of *return*" that counterbalances the crisis of "no return" suffered by today's generalized proletarianization. As Stiegler suggests, "[t]hat which *con-sists* therefore does not cease to return as *in-sistence*, legacy of prior generations and responsibility of a heritage" (*Acting* 32). On this view, accounts of failed revolutions are not destined to be standardized into a defeatist narrative conforming to the ideology of TINA. Instead, the failure of previous revolutions along with their unrealized hopes can "return as *in-sistence*" and provoke, in the manner of Epimetheus, who commits a blunder and learns only *after the fact* (*après coup*), a rethinking of how "the desire called utopia" can take shape in the twenty-first century, consequently "*reconfiguring the retentions inherited from the earlier epoch into so many new kinds of protention*" (Stiegler, *Age* 13).[12]

Since there is no desire without *telos*, it becomes imperative to understand how Stiegler's reconceptualization of *telos* steers clear of the pitfalls of traditional

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[12] For Stiegler's discussion of the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus, see the section "Prometheus' Liver" in *Technics and Time*.

teleological thinking. Stiegler is acutely aware of how much the idea has been subject to ridicule in contemporary theory. He rejects a version of the teleological conception of utopia, one in which the intellectual, the philosopher, or the avant-garde occupies the position of the subject-supposed-to-know, prescribing the ideal course of action through detailed instructions from a transcendental vantage point. As he notes, "this *telos*, so ridiculed in the era of rationalization and the disenchantment of the world (in the second half of the 20th century), is structurally devious" ("Teleologics" 35-36). It can either be appropriated for instrumentalist purposes, elevating the *telos* into an iron law of history to legitimize the despotic rule of a totalitarian regime; or it can serve as an ideal, motivating desire to carve out an immanent exception within the existing order. But how exactly is the latter option to be achieved? The challenge lies in understanding how *telos* can motivate beyond what already exists without falling into the trap of transcendentalism. This leads to an essential question: how to conceive "teleology without theologizing" (Stiegler, "Technics, Media" 339).[13]

To answer this question, it is crucial to note that Stiegler's utopian critique is not expressed through the logic of alienation, according to which ideality is something lost and to be found again. Stiegler operates instead with another logic: ideality is something passed down through mnemotechnics and *reinvented* through singular acts of remembering. Following Plato, Stiegler posits ideality, such as justice and virtue, as a form of *anamnesis,* the memory of truth, or the recollection of knowledge that already exists within the soul. But unlike Plato, Stiegler does not oppose *anamnesis* to *hypomnesis*. For him, this opposition between *anamnesis* and *hypomnesis* has been overcome by the fact—or rather the fate—of man's originary technicity, by virtue of which successive mnemotechnics (*hypomnesis*) are brought into being and become the media for the preservation and transmission of *anamnesis*. *Anamnesis* thus constitutes the pre-individual "already-there," on the basis of which historical individuals and communities can orient themselves in the world. More importantly, each access to the pre-individual via hypomnesic tertiary retention is not merely a passive reception of information; it also involves active interpretation and translation, such that each recall is a return or repetition with *différance,* rather than a mere retrieval of the past (Stiegler, "Persephone" 88-96).

This dialogical play between the transmission of past knowledge and the formation of new knowledge constitutes what can be termed *a neganthropic process* that actively resists anthropic decomposition. When thought is preserved and

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[13] This aspect of Stiegler's thinking about *telos*, desire, or the structure of promise in general can be fruitfully compared with Badiou's thinking of event and truth, which Quentin Meillassoux aptly describes as Badiou's "irreligious eschatology" (10).

passed down, it forms a legacy that coexists with the living present. This legacy, however, is neither dead nor fixed; instead, it provides resources for regeneration. And this is how the singular comes to pass: the singular is not something wholly novel nor created *ex nihilo*, but something both indebted to and deviating from the pre-individual fund. The singular, in other words, is a re-iteration that differs and defers, thereby resisting anthropic exhaustion. That is why, Stiegler argues, "*anamnesis is the good way of practicing hypomnesis*" (*Philosophizing* 61). Learning to practice the grammatized instrument—be it writing or digital media—in ways that draw on the pre-individual legacy and contribute to the flourishing of noetic *différance* is a matter of care, that is, a matter of *preserving anamnesis anew*.

Anamnesis, from this point of view, is a peculiar kind of remembrance—not the remembrance of things past but *the remembrance of a future not yet existing*. This future-oriented remembrance constitutes a *telos* that motivates the desire to institute social organizations adequate to its time, that is, capable of metastabilizing the organological relationship of programs across psychic, social, and technological domains, in turn introducing the second moment in the dynamic of doubly epochal redoubling. In this sense, Stiegler is not opposed to the formalized standardization inherent to the process of grammatization. What truly matters is for each generation to learn to live a life *worthy* of its own specific form of grammatization, that is, its specific technical condition of possibility (Stiegler, *Philosophizing* 88; Stiegler, "We Have to Become" 142).

What Makes Life Worth Living?

The question of worthiness then serves as a political categorical imperative for Stiegler and allows us to propose a Stieglerian alternative to the Leninist question: *What is to be done?* "Political knowledge," Stiegler contends, "must know how to take care of pharmacological knowledge" ("Literate Natives" 218). If the crisis confronting us today is profoundly toxic and contingently so, it then behooves us to deliberate on a new industrial politics and design a new contributory economy that could effectuate a bifurcation from the anthropic becoming of computational thinking's reduction of everything to probabilities and *into a neganthropic future* where the psychosomatic, the socio-cultural, and the technological would constitute a new associated milieu that makes life worth living again. That is to say, if the first moment of doubly epochal redoubling is *historically contingent,* the second moment is *politically necessary* as it refuses to let a historically contingent formation run its toxic course and calls for the organological institution of a new normativity fully attuned to the spirit of the pharmacological critique. By reframing the Leninist question around worthiness, Stiegler acknowledges the power (*puissance*) of

technics as enabling both individual and socio-cultural developments, while simultaneously asserting the imperative to invent a new public power (*pouvoir*) to orient the development of digital *pharmakon* toward a neganthropic end. As Stiegler claims, "the question is to know if we can predict and, if possible, orient the evolution of technics, that is, of power (*puissance*). What power (*pouvoir*) do we have over power (*puissance*)? If this question is not new, it comes to us in an entirely original way in contemporary technics" (*Technics and Time* 21). That is why he considers it an imperative to prescribe a therapeutics which, however, does not elevate necessity over contingency and impossibility. Instead, Stiegler implicates all three in a transductive relation and limits the function of the public power to the exclusive goal of fostering diversity without imposing a predetermined path.

This brings us to a pertinent question raised by Chun-yen Chen in her critical review of *The Neganthropocene*. Chen points out that Stiegler's treatment of digitality leans toward a negative evaluation, and argues that Stiegler does not make room for digital tertiary retention to act as a transductive partner in contemporary organology (224-25). It is important not to mistake Stiegler's critique of digitality in its current manifestation for a wholesale denial of the potential role it can play to create the optimal conditions for a bifurcation into the Neganthropocene. For instance, in his discussion of Maryanne Wolfe, the central question posed by Stiegler is not the opposition between the reading brain and the digital brain. Instead, the question for Stiegler is what must be preserved in the digital brain that characterizes the reading brain (*"Die Aufklärung"* 35). Put differently, the question for Stiegler is not whether digital grammatization is better or worse than other forms of grammatization, but whether it can encourage a similar dialogical process that we have seen with writing and establish a new digital *res publica,* that is, a new normativity or a new public power founded on a curative neganthropic circuit between the psychic, the collective, and the technological: "To say there is a privilege of the letter is not to say that literal tertiary retention is superior to other forms: it means that *each regime of tertiary retention is specific, and as such requires a privilege,* that is, a specific *law*, constituting a juridical regime and establishing a right" (Stiegler, *Neganthropocene* 242).

Even though Stiegler does not foresee a positive direction in today's digital *pharmakon*, he frequently acknowledges the enormous neganthropic potential that digital technologies harbor within: "Does digital grammatization still enable such a law to in fact become a therapeutics and not a generalized toxicity? I believe that it does. . . . But this is a question above all of political economy and not just of ethics" ("Literate Natives" 223). To unleash the neganthropic potential of digital

technologies, a reconsideration of political economy is required: thinking politics in terms of dialogical composition between tendencies rather than dialectical opposition between competing forces; thinking economy as long-term investments, not only in the macro-economic system but also in the libidinal economy of desire.

Ultimately, Chen wants to know why the digital tertiary retention, with its large dataset and high-speed computing power, plays no role except the toxic one in Stiegler's philosophy, a stance that somehow betrays his own pharmacological approach. To this, we might reply that Stiegler never denounces data, information, calculation, or computational thinking as such (Stiegler, "*Die Aufklärung*" 30). He reminds us that these elements only become curative when put in the service of a neganthropic end, which has no pre-determined figure and is measured only by the criterion of whether or not they contribute to the proliferation of noetic diversity. Such is the goal of contributory research: "Contributory research . . . is largely based on the contributory potential of reticular digital technologies. . . . [T]his involves distinguishing fields of calculable data that algorithms can compute in order to aid collective decision-making from non-calculable data and non-computable subjects of deliberation" (Stiegler et al. 130).[14] That said, Chen, along with Hansen, does raise a valid criticism about an unresolved tension in Stiegler's account, concerning how digital technologies, especially those operating beneath the threshold of consciousness and perception, can be mobilized for neganthropic purposes (Chen 220-21, 224-25; Hansen, *Feed-Forward* 78-79).

The Desire Called Neganthropology

> *Neganthropology aims to establish what the Anthropocene should become, 'transvaluated' by the Neganthropocene, thereby opening both a new epistemic era for noetic forms*

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[14] Here we can refer to Stiegler's idea of a hermeneutic web as "a publication space for digital tertiary retention dedicated to the formation of a new noetic and political community founded on the categorical imperative of reversing the overwhelmingly entropic process borne by the current computational system" (Stiegler, *Neganthropocene* 253). This idea has been further developed by Harry Halpin and Yuk Hui into a distinct model of a deliberative social network, a model that stands in stark contrast to today's social networks, such as Facebook. Essentially, a hermeneutic web aims to construct a dialogical space within a digital milieu, where the diachronic progression of practitioners' noetic development can be traced and enhanced through its transductive relation with the digital platform. Notably, data analysis is not absent, only that it is no longer constrained by capitalist logic and has been repurposed to assist the practitioners within the hermeneutic web. In this context, data analysis, instead of serving behavior modulation as in today's automatic society, transforms itself into a means for dis-automatization and a digital basis for reclaiming the capacity for critical thinking and deep attention. See also Stiegler, et al.; Halpin and Hui; Hui 89-90.

of life (against the de-noetization currently underway)
and the possibility of a contributory economy founded
on this new epistēmē, *in turn generating new forms of*
knowledge—of how to live, do and conceive—starting from
a quasi-causal (and non-'dialectical') reversal of what has
proven itself to be absolute non-knowledge.

--Stiegler, Neganthropocene

According to Stiegler, the advent of the thermodynamic machine fundamentally changes the way the cosmos is conceived. Previously construed in terms of identity and equilibrium, the cosmos now becomes subject to a processuality inscribed in the second law of thermodynamics. In physics, the thermodynamic concept of entropy refers to an irreversible course of energy loss in a closed system. In the field of life sciences, Erwin Schrödinger coined the term negative entropy (or negentropy) to describe the tendency of living organisms to defer the entropic process from reaching its maximum state (i.e., death) by utilizing environmental resources (Stiegler, *Neganthropocene* 39-40). The application of the thermodynamic concept across various knowledge domains extends entropy's explanatory scope into non-physical and non-biological realms. In this context, Stiegler introduces the anthropy/neganthropy pair to supplement the entropy/negentropy counterpart in physics and biology. Through this new pairing, Stiegler emphasizes that the question of energy dissipation must be understood not only in physical and biological terms but also in relation to libidinal energy (*Neganthropocene* 92).

Stiegler regards the organic (or endosomatic) organogenesis of living organisms as a negentropic tendency in their struggle against entropic decomposition, which he refers to as vital *différance*. Distinguished from other living organisms, human beings, as technical forms of life, are unique in their capacity to organize themselves against both the entropic process of becoming and its anthropic equivalent (*devenir*) through organological (or exosomatic) organogenesis. This dual resistance characterizes a *neganthropic* future (*avenir*), the essential feature of which is not confined to vital *différance* but also extends to noetic *différance*. Noetic *différance* is neganthropic in that it struggles against the anthropy inherent in computational thinking, an anthropy that is manifested in an endless cycle of combination and recombination of data induced by the algorithm's recursive function in a self-referential closed system. The anthropic character of today's information-driven economy in this sense resembles the entropic becoming in nature, leading to the loss of noodiversity (the reduction of everything to calculation) and the

dissipation of libidinal energy (the reduction of desire to drive) (Stiegler, *Negan-thropocene* 133-35, 253).

As Stiegler notes, the crisis initiated by the epochal technological shock coincides with another crisis in climate change. He observes a correspondence between these two crises: the unprecedented loss of biodiversity since the start of the industrial revolution runs parallel to an equally rapid decline in cultural diversity during the same period. Although seemingly different in nature, both crises are inextricably linked. What is common to both is that their pernicious developments have been spurred by the reign of global capitalism, along with disenchantment and nihilism that accompany it. For this reason, Stiegler does not view the ecological crisis as merely a geological issue, and he rejects geo-engineering as a viable solution to the crisis of the Anthropocene (*Neganthropocene* 37). Nor does Stiegler fully agree with Jeremy Rifkin that finding a clean and renewable energy (such as hydrogen) to replace the use of fossil fuel will suffice to help the recovery of the earth and humanity ("Care" 112-16). In Stiegler's view, both crises emerge as the consequence of a decline of the spirit—the liquidation of desire, the deprivation of protention, and the destruction of the plane of consistence—in hyper-industrial capitalism. Therefore, the real question is "not that of the relinquishment of fossil fuels but rather the relinquishment of a drive-driven economy and the reconstitution of a libidinal economy" ("Care" 114).

For Stiegler, the stakes are high because capitalism has reached its limit, as evidenced by generalized proletarianization (the loss of noodiversity) and the devastation of the biosphere (the loss of biodiversity). Confronted with these twin crises, Stiegler does not shy away from employing militant rhetoric to underscore the urgency of the situation. His frequent use of war-related language notwithstanding, Stiegler's militancy is conditioned by a more fundamental pharmacological critique. This critique demands attention to the composition between tendencies rather than a commitment to the annihilation of the enemy. Stiegler believes that the real enemy is not capitalism per se, but rather the tendency in today's drive-based hyper-industrial capitalism that ruins time (*What Makes Life* 89). To avert capitalism's self-destruction, he argues, it is imperative to bifurcate into the Neganthropocene, an epoch that would foster *différance* across vital and noetic planes, encompassing vital differentiation on the bio-physical level and promoting linguistic, cultural, and epistemological differentiation on the noetic level.

The Neganthropocene is not the overcoming of entropy/anthropy but rather its deferral, persisting "within universal [entropic/anthropic] becoming but *against the current*" (Stiegler, *Age* 306). This perhaps explains why Stiegler's utopian desire appears more restrained than one might initially expect, as it does not

envision a transition from capitalism to postcapitalism. While Stiegler is open to the possibility of a non-capitalist society in the long run, he does not regard a post-capitalist order as a viable option at this moment (*Age* 295). To understand Stiegler's reluctance to conceive a clear rupture from capitalism, Colebrook and Dillet draw our attention to the intractability of immanent transcendence. As Colebrook puts it, "the grammatization . . . that generates the culture industries today is also what enables the complexity and collectivity of a transindividual archive" (214). That is why capitalism can be denounced but not easily surpassed, for "we do not know the end of capitalism because we only live in an associated milieu and cannot see past our current organization of individuation" (Dillet 93).

Despite the explanations offered by Colebrook and Dillet, an unresolved tension lingers: their clarifications, while valid from the pharmacological and organological perspectives, do not satisfactorily reconcile the claim that desire aims at the improbable with the opposing assertion that today there exists no "credible" alternative to capitalism (Stiegler, *Re-Enchantment* 6). The gap between these two conflicting positions prompts us to question whether measuring the likelihood or credibility of the improbable implies that the improbable has been rendered probable, that is, calculable. Moreover, from the point of view of calculation, isn't the improbable precisely that which is not credible? In other words, within the current regime of capitalist realism, doesn't the very nature of the improbable inevitably lead to its being considered *impossible*? "From the point of view of probabilities," Stiegler admits, "*justice is totally impossible*—and in any case it doesn't exist and will never exist" ("Rational Theory" 181-82; emphasis added). But, he immediately adds that the ideal of justice is also a necessary postulation, a condition that makes life worth living. If what Stiegler says about justice evinces the nature of desire and its structure of promise, should the same structure not be explored in relation to the desire for a postcapitalist utopia that does not yet exist but nonetheless *consists*? Consequently, we are left wondering why the structure of promise appears to preclude a postcapitalist imagination in advance.

Stiegler defends himself by claiming that "[t]his is not . . . a matter of finding some alternative to capitalism: it is a matter of finding an alternative to anthropy, and of doing so through an economy of neganthropy" ("New Conflict" 95). The problem with Stiegler's defense is that anthropy is intimately tied up with capitalism's passage to limits, so much so that it becomes almost synonymous with capitalism in Stiegler's own account. For example, when it comes to capitalism, we are offered a diagnosis pointing to its ever-deepening process of proletarianization: the loss of *savoir-faire*, the loss of *savoir-vivre*, and the loss of *savoirs théoriques*. Given the intertwining relationship between anthropy and capitalism, it remains

unclear why Stiegler insists on a bifurcation *within* capitalism rather than away *from* capitalism.

Here, Stiegler seems to be caught in three intertwined constraints: the first personal, the second philosophical, and the last political:

> If you are a normal rational individual, you are very pessimistic. But if you philosophize, you must be neither pessimistic nor optimistic: you must describe the field of possibilities, that is all. That's why I was saying a moment ago that this is not the same thing as a political therapy: in politics you can be optimistic, but from the point of view of pharmacological critique you must be neither pessimistic or optimistic. ("Rational Theory" 180)

Aside from his personal inclination toward pessimism, Stiegler's position also oscillates between a philosophical commitment to pharmacology and a political commitment to therapeutics. On the one hand, he enjoins us to describe the field of possibilities from the pharmacological perspective. On the other hand, the optimism required for a political therapy to prevent the digital *pharmakon* from lapsing into a drive-driven economy must be tempered by the spirit of pharmacological critique, as epitomized by the aforementioned assertion that "[p]olitical knowledge must know how to take care of pharmacological knowledge." Put differently, what is rendered necessary in Stiegler's political therapy cannot afford to be a determinate vision of the future; the most it can hope for is to establish a public power to ensure that the dialogical play between tendency and counter-tendency is not reified into the dialectical opposition between competing ideologies, thus sustaining the transductive circulation between three logical modalities.

The yoking together of these conflicting commitments somehow channels Stiegler's neganthropic desire into an articulation of a new capitalist political economy that explores capitalism's untapped neganthropic potential rather than an articulation of a postcapitalist order which might appear too determinate and dialectical to conform to the ethos of pharmacological critique.[15] This stance, judicious as it may be, runs up against an urgency that seems far too pressing to be

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[15] This double bind receives a different articulation in the following: on the one hand, Stiegler asserts that "no one could respond to [whether capitalism will be replaced by socialism or communism] today; a tremendous amount of work needs to be done theoretically and practically as well, and this work does not yet exist" ("Rational Theory" 184); on the other hand, he argues that being political entails the task of "posing the question of the *effort* that must be made in a situation of not-knowing, and that constitutes the task of elaborating the psycho-social doubling up of the epochal redoubling" (*Decadence* 54-55). In other words, we find ourselves in an impossible situation where we must undertake theoretical and practical work before committing to a political position, yet simultaneously we must commit to that position before carrying out the task of elaboration in the situation of not-knowing.

accommodated by Stiegler's compositional politics. As Dipesh Chakrabarty observes, struggles against capitalism often assume "an open and indefinite calendar," whereas climate change confronts humanity with "a finite and definite calendar" (12-13). Waiting for capitalism to evolve into a responsible and more sustainable form—a process that might gradually morph into a non-capitalist alternative—is a project that could take decades to see through. In the meantime, humanity, along with other nonhuman forms of life, is threatened by the devastating consequences of climate change. Reports from the IPCC and other organizations warn that time is running out and that we are nearing the point of no return; to mitigate the catastrophic consequences of climate change, *immediate* and *drastic* actions are required. It is unclear, however, how this could be achieved within the new capitalist framework Stiegler outlines, even if we agree with his analysis that the question of energy has to be understood in an expanded sense, inclusive of libidinal energy. As Stiegler's long-time translator and collaborator in the Internation Collective, Ross acknowledges the importance of Stiegler's thinking yet highlights the limitation of his proposal:

> It is one thing to say that the rapidly self-destructive character of this situation absolutely necessitates overcoming it; it is another thing again to say that one can conceive an alternative macropolitical and macroeconomic model that could feasibly be installed in the timeframe called for by the IPCC for addressing just the climate crisis alone (and what we are confronting is really a convergence of systemic crises). Even though I think the work that lies behind this critique and this elaboration of the economy of contribution model is an important and genuinely transformational response to our situation, nevertheless it is not clear to me exactly how this economic model and the political and administrative institutions it requires can be applied at the scale of nations or the biosphere, even theoretically, let alone getting it done. ("Technics" 129)

Conclusion

At the center of Stiegler's utopian project lies a quasi-causal conversion that turns the contingency of the epochal technological shock into the necessity of a new normativity capable of maintaining the emergent organological arrangement between the psycho-social and the technological systems in a generative tension. Stiegler owes the concept of quasi-causality to Gilles Deleuze who uses Joë Bousquet as an exemplar of a unique figure of will that elevates an accidental defect into the necessity of becoming the writer he is (Stiegler, *Decadence* 160; Stiegler,

Neganthropocene 56-57, 205, 253). This transformation of contingency to necessity is captured in a famous line by Bousquet: "My wound existed before me, I was born to embody it" (qtd. in Deleuze 148).

Stiegler's mobilization of this Deleuzian concept to his own end facilitates the passage from contingency to necessity under the general condition of originary technicity. Within this framework, contingency and necessity do not stand opposed to each other but rather form a transductive pair, mediated by the fact/fate of man's originary technicity. However, whether the quasi-causal conversion can still serve as an adequate response when the technological crisis is doubled up by an environmental crisis is an issue worth pondering. Stiegler tries to address these two questions through a single lens (the economy of desire), within a single framework (contributory research), and on a single scale (the global). While there is no denying that taking care of the libidinal economy might in the long run help mitigate the detrimental effects of both technological and environmental crises and eventually implement a different social-economic paradigm, it is also important to recognize their differences, especially in the ways their impacts on humanity are manifested. In contrast to the technological shock, which operates in a slow, continuous, and often imperceptible fashion, aiming at behavioral modulation through psycho-technologies, the impact of climate change comes at us fast and furious, in all its majestic indifference to human existence. Climate change thus registers a planetary-scale *wound*, as described by Chakrabarty, a wound humanity is *unable* to embody, and therefore demands a separate analysis beyond the analytics of desire and the scope of the global.[16]

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[16] My engagement with Chakrabarty is prompted by Chiou Yen-bin's talk on the influence of Chakrabarty's planetary turn on both humanist and posthumanist thinking.

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