The Reality Of Real Time

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Abstract *According to Bernard Stiegler the technological contrivances that rule our world have set in motion dangerous developments. Although Stiegler is not a technophobe, he believes that the technological devices that are constructed around real time (live broadcasting, mobile phone communications, digital photography, etc.) introduce a new relation to time that jeopardises the cohesion of society. They erase the delay of time that is essential to it and thereby wipe away the singular, which is a crucial element in the construction of the social.*
This essay examines the nature of this argument and queries its factual basis. It does this by first exploring the technological or prosthetic nature of Dasein *by referring to Heidegger's definition of Dasein as ec-static time. After this short exposition, the essay shows how Stiegler strengthens this pre-prosthetic nature of time that can be found in Heidegger into a time which is fully fledged prosthetic or fundamentally constituted by the technological devices that exteriorise it. The second part of the essay focuses on Stiegler's hesitations and even contradictory statements regarding the contemporary production of time. Sometimes he presents real time as a factual accomplishment, sometimes he is more careful and characterises it to be merely a tendency; there are passages in which he proclaims the end of history, and other ones in which he presents that end as a fiction and a warning. The comments on the rather dramatic and evocative pages Stiegler inserts in* La technique et le temps 1, *together with ideas and comments of Maurice Blanchot and Richard Beardsworth, serve as a bridge to discuss the philosophical importance of an ambiguity in the actuality of real time.*

Keywords real time, technology, origin by default, prosthesis, end of history, aporia, Heidegger's Dasein, Derrida's differance, Deleuze's ideas

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Our writing materials cooperate with our thoughts[1]

Friedrich Nietzsche

Anybody who has recently attended a big music concert and is old enough to go back in time twenty years or so, will admit that today's concert experience has radically changed. Big screens allow the viewers to see what happens on stage in every detail and from every angle. Certainly this is of great value for the people standing in the back and not being able to see the stage. But the screen does not only serve these people; it also absorbs the attention of the people in front of the stage. The eye of the camera is so powerful that people almost unconsciously abandon the preference to see with their own eyes. Does this technological innovation in which the delay between the event, the recording of it and the reception of the recording is almost reduced to

zero, change the experience in a fundamental way? Do real time technologies change the way we relate to the world, not only in a practical, but also in an essential way?

The relation of man and technology is one of the central topics in the work of the French philosopher Bernard Stiegler. In contrast to the technophobe attitude embraced by traditional philosophy, Stiegler stresses the constitutive role of technology in the ever-continuing process of the creation of man's essence. However, with respect to real time technologies his stance is less positive. Stiegler even warns of the metaphysical danger hidden inside these technologies, although he takes care to cloak this criticism in allegories, 'as if' arguments and questions.

We would like to investigate why Stiegler is so afraid of real time technologies and why his utterances with respect to this subject are so ambiguous. In order to answer the first question we will sketch the Heideggerian and Derridean background of Stiegler's idea of the technologically constituted human and the way in which he appropriates this philosophical heritage. The second question will be dealt with by analysing and comparing several text passages. For there are passages in which Stiegler speaks about real time as a factual accomplishment and others in which he characterises real time as a mere tendency; off and on he proclaims the end of history and warns of or fictionalises the end of history. Finally we will try to substantiate the philosophical need for this literary ambiguity.

STIEGLER'S READING OF HEIDEGGER AND DERRIDA

Dasein is Differance

In the first volume of *Technics and Time* Stiegler dedicates a whole chapter to Martin Heidegger, and more specifically to Heidegger's revolutionary idea that *Dasein* or human existence insofar as it understands being, is essentially temporal. Let us briefly recapitulate the main features of this idea.[2]

Dasein is in a double way in time. On the one hand, *Dasein* is fundamentally to-the-world. This means that the world is already there for the *Dasein*.[3] The *Dasein* is thrown into a world or a past that precedes it and from which it inherits. Strictly speaking though, this past is not the *Dasein*'s past because it has not lived it. The past is outside of the *Dasein* and will only become its past retroactively, or to use one of Stiegler's favourite words, 'afterwards' ('*après coup*'[4]). At the same time however, the *Dasein* is nothing other than this past because its actuality only exists in reference to the past. It consequently must assume that which it is not[5] or which it is no longer, and this it can only do by means of a prosthesis.

On the other hand, *Dasein* is also being-toward-death. It is constituted by the anticipation of its future end, which will of course always remain undetermined or unknown in a strict sense. This implies that *Dasein* is what

2. This recapitulation is mainly based on a passage in David Wills, 'Tech*ne*ology or the Discourse of Speed' in Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra (eds), *The prosthetic impulse: from a posthuman present to a biocultural future*, Cambridge, MA., MIT Press, 2006, pp237-263.

3. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (trans), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998, p231: '*Dasein* is essentially in-the-world; this means that the world is already there for *Dasein*'.

4. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, op. cit., p30.

5. Ibid., p232.

it is not yet; it is to-be; it is what it will be; it is becoming or deferment.[6] Being-toward-death thus implies a firm knowledge of an indeterminacy, of an end which withdraws itself, which cannot be managed. The experience I can have of the death of others cannot fill this gap since the knowledge of my death can only pass through my own experience of it. This means that my end must remain hidden in order to be mine.[7]

Since it is what it is not or what it is not yet, *Dasein* cannot be grasped in both temporal senses. It is retro-jected or pro-jected into something with which it cannot coincide, but which it is nonetheless. It is thus a temporality that is always characterised by a fundamental difference or delay, as well as by a never-accomplished deferment.[8] This is the reason why Stiegler characterises *Dasein* as *differance* in the Derridean sense[9] - in its relation to the past and the future, *Dasein* is continuously changing such that its identity is constantly postponed or deferred - or as prosthetic in his own words.[10] The instruments that the *Dasein* uses to relate to the past and the future are as much grown together with its nature - or the lack of it - as lenses with the eyes.

Technology as man's origin by default

The same idea of man being born without an essence that defines him, Stiegler finds in the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus, but in contrast to Heidegger's *Dasein*, this myth stresses the importance of technology in filling up this lack of essence or origin. The myth goes as follows: the gods assign Prometheus and Epimetheus the task of equipping all living beings with one or more qualities or gifts. Epimetheus distributes the gifts so that every being is sufficiently (but not completely) protected against other beings and against the elements. A bird, for example, receives wings to flee and feathers to protect itself against cold and water, while the turtle is allotted a shield into which it can withdraw itself. However, when all the gifts are distributed, Epimetheus realises he has forgotten man; man is 'naked and shoeless, and had neither bed nor arms of defence'.[11] In order to solve this problem, Prometheus steals the gift of technical knowledge from Hephaistus and Athena and gives it to man by way of compensation.

According to Stiegler, this means that technology is man's non-original origin or origin by default; it allows man to individuate, and this individuation can never be wound up or closed; on the contrary, it always implies a radical openness and exteriority, which animals lack.

Differance is technological

Now that it is clear that, firstly, the temporal *Dasein* can only be itself by projecting itself outside itself, by exteriorising itself and secondly, that man's origin is technologically mediated, it needs to be explained how man's temporality is fundamentally technological. It will be shown that this idea

6. Ibid., p216: '*Dasein* is becoming: it is to be its not-yet'.

7. Ibid., p6: 'Its death is what it cannot know, and to this extent, death gives « mineness » its excess'.

8. Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida & the Political*, London/New York, Routledge, 1996, p100: 'Time is the (self-)deferment of time'; Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, op. cit., p215.

9. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, op. cit., p216: 'the improbability of *Dasein* itself, its indeterminacy, that is, its absolute *difference*'.

10. Ibid., p234: '*Dasein*, essentially factical, is pros-thetic'.

11. Plato, *Protagoras*, Benjamin Jowett, op. cit., Rockville, Serenity, 2009, 321d-322e.

12. Rudolf Bernet, 'Derrida and His Master's Voice' in William R. McKenna and Joseph Claude Evans (eds), *Derrida and Phenomenology*, Dordrecht/ Boston/London, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995, p1-21, p14.

13. Ibid., pp14-15; the presence of consciousness to itself - which Husserl links with the presentation of the retained past in the living present - will hence be replaced in Derrida's work by a consciousness always somehow escaping from itself by virtue of its very structure ('removed from itself in advance', as Derrida writes in *Limited Inc*, Alan Bass and Samuel Weber (trans), Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1988, p56).

14. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1 : The Fault of Epimetheus*, op. cit., p220: 'it is tekhne that gives *differance*, that gives time'.

15. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 2: Disorientation*, Stephen Barker (trans), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2008, p110, http://dx.doi. org/10.3366/ E1079345308000187

16. Friedrich Kittler called Friedrich Nietzsche - author of 'our writing instruments contribute to our thoughts' - 'the first mechanized philosopher' as he was the first philosopher who

of Stiegler's is inspired by Edmund Husserl's concepts of retentions and protentions and by Jacques Derrida's focus on the reproductive character of the past. As Husserl saw, our experience of time is not built up from the succession of different now-moments. After all, this successive interpretation of time does not account for why and how one now is left for another; it does not explain the fact that the past present is still related to the new present, that it is *its* past. In other words, it cannot explain the continuity of time. And it cannot expound why the actual present does not continue to exist but is chased by the new present; a passivity is mysteriously added onto the act of presence of the actual present or, in other words, the new present is attributed with a power that remains unaccounted for. Husserl therefore claims that every 'apprehension of the present extends beyond the "originary impression" of a punctual now, that it encompasses also the "retention" of the elapsed duration and the "protention" of the future duration of the lived experience'.[12] Derrida takes over this idea but slightly modifies it by stating that the apprehension of the present does not only refer to something which is outside of this present (or which is not-present), but which also stands in an indicative or representational relation with the present. The retained past, for example, is not part of the perception of the present as an act of 'presentation' ('*Gegenwärtigung*') - as Husserl thought it was - but is a result of the reproduction and thus representation of the past in the present ('*Vergegenwärtigung*').[13] The presence of consciousness to itself, which Husserl links with the presentation of the retained past in the living present, will hence be replaced by Derrida with a consciousness always somehow escaping from itself. Stiegler, in his turn, emphasises the technological aspect of this reproduction of the past and the future in the present.[14] It is through technology that man has access to his own historicity, to his own already-there and not-yet-here. It is through writing for example, that we extend our living presence to a past we have not lived ourselves or to a future we cannot foresee. Writing is a technology because it formalises language and hereby gives it a certain performativity.[15] The formalisation of language into grammar and spelling rules, into logical laws of argument composition, exteriorises language and makes it for example possible that the writer is assisted by a spelling corrector and a translation program. In a certain sense, the exteriority of written - and to a lesser degree, of spoken - language allows one to put the original, inspired thinking on the backburner and resort to preconceived constructions; it allows one to produce truth instead of being inspired by it; thinking becomes a mechanised activity.[16]

Real time as the erasure of deferring time

However, not all technologies are the same. Stiegler discerns a line of fracture with the advent of what he calls 'real time technologies'. These are the technologies that allow, for example, electronic payment, email traffic,

live broadcasting, mobile phone communication, etc. They all have the common feature of erasing the difference and deferment that was so essential in Heidegger's, but also in Stiegler's conception of time. The technological invention of the video function on mobile phones makes it for example possible to film the concert one is attending and to diffuse these images on the internet before the concert is finished. In other words, there is almost no delay between the event, the registration of the event and the reception of it. The duration of the event is reduced to an instantaneous now which does not exceed itself towards a past which it is not or towards a future which it is not yet, since there is no time allowed to make these leaps. An important, if not the only, criterion to evaluate and value information has become the speed with which information can be released over a surface as big as possible. Instead of the duration of an event being conditioned by the shift that makes a coincidence of present, past present and future present impossible, it is now conditioned by the possibility of inscription of the momentary. It is the technological support or surface - for example, the turning on and off of the computer or television screen - that determines the duration of the event. Time has become surface.[17] The event, and thus also time, has been derealised and delocalised; the singularity of the here and now has been eroded.[18]

And yet this absence of duration or *differance* in time creates a suggestion of presence, of reality, through absorption rather than through reflection. Just as a photograph provides that which has been photographed with a sense of reality and historical truth, live television images make us experience the present as if it has an already historical sense. The live image proves that this event has happened - because of the public sphere in which it is recorded, because of the fact that it is never without reporter-watcher, because of the fact that it is 'to be seen unfolding';[19] and this happening appears as something which is already established. According to Stiegler this is a false sense of historicity though. It is a historicity that obscures the work of time in the sense that it tries to resolve the undetermined which constitutes the core of the retentional-protentional nature of time. As shown above, we experience time by relating to a past that is not entirely ours and by projecting ourselves into a future that is actually unknowable. However, in order for time to be time, this indeterminacy has to remain undetermined. The knowledge that is implied in the anticipation of the future is a knowledge that is always withdrawing.[20] In contracting the future and the past with the present, contemporary technologies make the undetermined disappear into the transparency of that which is posed in front of us.

AMBIGUITIES IN STIEGLER'S CHARACTERISATION OF REAL TIME

Despite Stiegler's extensive descriptions of the nature of real time technologies, it is not clear whether he believes these technologies are an accomplished fact or rather a fiction with a warning function. As we will document, at

composed his thoughts straight on a typewriter, Friedrich Kittler, 'The Mechanized Philosopher' in Laurence A. Rickels (ed), *Looking After Nietzsche*, Albany, State University of New York Press, pp195-207, p195.

17. Stiegler refers to a passage in Paul Virilio, *Vitesse et politique* (Paris, Éditions Galilée, 1977) to affirm that real time technologies turn the duration of time into a 'writing surface', Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 2: Disorientation*, p124.

18. Cf. note 50. Since an event comes with a heightened sense of the 'here and now' of its occurrence, its derealisation will consist in an uprooting abstraction. This is obviously so in the case of live coverage of what happens in distant places, or in images of what happened at other times. However, according to Derrida this is also the case in the most 'present' act of perception, which is as much a differential 'play of traces' as reading is.

19. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 2: Disorientation*, p120 ; Bernard Stiegler, *La technique et le temps 2. La désorientation*, Paris, Éditions Galilée, 1996, p143: 'être vu se faisant'.

20. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, op. cit., p197 and p216.

one time Stiegler claims that technology's ever accelerating speed actually suppresses the creation of differences so as to swallow up the human; at another time he presents this doom image as an allegory illustrating the vital importance of the differential play. Thus it seems that Stiegler has himself become indifferent to a distinction that should be respected, if only for being a distinction, namely between a tendency and the realisation thereof. Rather than just wanting to sort out Stiegler's stance with respect to this topic, we would like to investigate the consistency of these positions with Stiegler's basic insight of the technologically mediated origin of man. In other words, is it at all possible to declare the end of the differential play when one adheres to a conception of the human that is built on the fundamental *differantial* nature of the human? We will examine five text passages, each addressing the same theme in a somewhat different way.

First passage: The divorce between culture and technology

21. Ibid., p14; Bernard Stiegler, *La technique et le temps 1. La faute d'Épiméthée*, Paris, Éditions Galilée, 1994, p28: 'Tout se passe comme si un divorce pouvait se trouver prononcé entre la technoscience d'un côté, et, de l'autre côté, la culture qui l'aurait produite'.

22. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, op. cit., p15; Stiegler, *La technique et le temps 1. La faute d'Épiméthée*, op. cit., p29: 'De fait, il en résulte un divorce.'

In the 'General Introduction' to the *Technics and Time* series Stiegler notes that 'it is as if a divorce could now be pronounced between, on the one hand, the technosciences and, on the other, the culture that claimed to have produced them'.[21] For example, the introduction of technoscience in the world of dating - the technological innovation of being able to track down people matching your interest list - might be said to have eradicated the culture of meeting and seducing. Yet a couple of lines further down the argument Stiegler observes how the ever-accelerating processes of innovation have already entailed that divorce; the divorce is thus no longer hypothetical: 'It results in a divorce, if not between culture and technics, at least between the rhythms of cultural evolution and the rhythms of technical evolution'.[22] The transition from 'as if' (*comme si*) to 'in fact' (*de fait*) is not really argued for; it is performed as if it went without saying. 'It is as if' presents a situation in figural terms; 'in fact' takes the figure literally. 'In fact' is far less discreet: it implies a claim, while the 'as if' suspends the judgment it seems to entail. Beside the fact that the linguistic difference between 'as if' and 'in fact' is so obvious, Stiegler's linguistic ambiguity is even more remarkable when one realises that divorce is essentially a matter of pronunciation; one is not divorced until the divorce has been pronounced.

Second passage: The becoming-ant of man

The second text passage treats the possibility of a future for mankind that is apparently opposed to the one sketched in the previous passage. Here, Stiegler discusses the idea of prosthetic man being naturalised instead of being devoured by technology. However, a closer reading reveals that Stiegler understands the naturalisation of man or the becoming-ant of man as the technologically induced reduction of the *differance* towards a point zero, which

is exactly the meaning behind the idea of technoscience devouring culture.

In *Technics and Time, 1* Stiegler writes - and he quotes Simondon here - that 'the ever more concretized object [that is, the ever more functionally overdetermined technical object] tends toward naturalness, and "this process may well appear as the naturalization of the human"'.[23] The use of the conditional tense ('may well') as well as the verb 'appear' prevent the said 'naturalization of man' from being taken literally: it remains a virtuality, an appearance even. However, in the essay 'Allégorie de la fourmilière'[24] man's naturalisation is presented less as a *virtual* possibility, than as an *actual* condition of sorts. The affirmative stance in this essay is rather strange since the allegory already appears earlier on in Stiegler's work, in a longer version in which the limits of the allegory are clearly indicated. In this earlier version the allegory is preceded by the question: 'Can ants be said to "share knowledge"?'[25], to which the final sentence answers negatively: even if ants do externalise their memory and organise their territory, they are mere 'reactive agents', not 'cognitive agents'.[26] Thus, man cannot be compared to ants as the temporality of ants is not 'constituted in relation to the temporality of a technics which is itself a technical development or becoming'.[27] Since, however, the first and last line of that paragraph are not quoted in the 'Allégorie de la fourmilière' the limitation of the analogy is not brought out so clearly. On the contrary, Stiegler now stresses the continuity: 'the exteriorization of human memory ... would result in the creation of a reactive network, as if the totality of experience could hence be standardized and disincarnated'.[28] However, in contrast to the conditional tense in the Simondon-quote in *Technics and Time 1*, the conditional 'would' and hypothetical 'as if' in the above sentence do not bracket the analogy but further it beyond its limitedness. More generally, the tenor of *De la misère symbolique* ('symbolic misery' or 'poverty') - the book in which the allegory is published - is - as the title indicates - quite pronounced or denunciative.

Third passage: The almost completely technologised man

A little earlier in the 'Allégorie de la fourmilière' Stiegler writes how technical developments would allow for the 'almost perfect accomplishment' of what Leroi-Gourhan calls 'a pure and final synchronisation': 'the synchronous system which Leroi-Gourhan had anticipated could accomplish itself almost perfectly ... It would have the advantage of allowing individual specialization, as in an anthill'.[29] How the individual distribution of tasks in an anthill establishes a system that is in perfect synchronicity with itself is of less interest to us than the re-occurrence of the adverbs 'almost' and 'as'. Similarly to the anthill passage, these adverbs thicken the similarity between man and ant, despite their dissimilarity.

Furthermore, it is tempting to relate Stiegler's 'almost', in the above quote, to Rousseau's use of that adverb in his characterisation of the savage's nakedness:

23. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, op. cit., p81.

24. Bernard Stiegler, 'Allégorie de la fourmilière. La perte d'individuation à l'âge hyperindustriel' in Ib., *De la misère symbolique 1. L'époque hyperindustrielle*, Paris, Éditions Galilée, 2004, pp95-161; the essay's title may be translated as 'Allegory of the anthill'.

25. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 2: Disorientation*, op. cit., p167.

26. Ibid., p167-8; to what extent does Stiegler here harden the distinction between 'reactive' and 'cognitive' agency into an opposition reminiscent of Plato's divide between 'hypomnesis' and 'anamnesis'?

27. Stiegler, 'Technics of Decision: an Interview' in *Angelaki*, 8, 2 (2003): 151-68, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0969725032000162639

28. Stiegler, 'Allégorie de la fourmilière', op. cit., p156.

29. Ibid., p152.

30. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, op. cit., p117; Stiegler, *La technique et le temps 1. La faute d'Épiméthée*, op. cit., p127.

the Carib is 'almost naked'[30] ('*presque nu*') but nevertheless as powerful, if not more so, in preserving his life than the civilised man with all his tools. In his wonderful reading of Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*, Stiegler identifies this adverb as that which allows Rousseau to think the necessity of the fall of the original, pure man; it is because man was never completely naked, because the seed of civilisation was always already present from the beginning, that the degeneration could have occurred. Because Stiegler does not share this technophobe view, but on the contrary, makes a plea for the positive significance of technology, he transforms Rousseau's 'almost' into a 'default' that is 'almost not a default'.[31] Nevertheless, it is somehow thanks

31. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, op. cit., p122.

to Rousseau that Stiegler comes to the formulation of his problem: 'Rousseau will not, therefore, have been mistaken; he will have been right, almost …'[32] Rousseau's 'almost' is the lever for Stiegler's deconstruction of the metaphysical myth of the full and pure origin. However, if Rousseau's Carib is 'almost naked' at the origin, then it seems that the figure of man Stiegler projects in the end, his 'last man' so to speak, will be 'almost an insect', or what is the same, almost a technically eclipsed human. Whereas Rousseau uncouples anthropogenesis and technogenesis in order to think the (pure) origin of man, Stiegler does the same but for thinking the (pure) end or disappearance of man. Despite their initial divergence - for example, Stiegler does not stop repeating that the anthropogenesis is a technogenesis and vice versa - they end up in a similar thinking in terms of purity. The fiction of a pure technics (of a pure 'end of man') is perhaps more essential to the way Stiegler organises his arguments than he may care to acknowledge.[33]

32. Ibid., p133.

However, we have to admit that the essay 'Allégorie de la fourmilière' leaves no doubt about its status: it is an allegory. As much as Rousseau is clear about the status of his tale of a 'state of origin', Stiegler is clear about the fictionality of his narrative: 'The reader could object that the hypothesis [of the becoming-ant of man] is but a fiction that does not correspond to his everyday experiences'.[34] To this virtual objection Stiegler replies the following. First of all, the reader is asked to consider that 'this fiction describes an asymptotic tendency, with which one has to compose'.[35] Hence, the fiction of a pure technics does not so much have a descriptive as a heuristic value. Secondly, the reader should not forget that he is very much privileged: 'having the capacity and inclination to read a book like *Symbolic misery*, s/he is a representative of a social category that is probably endangered'.[36] Which is to say that the people whose *differance* is supported by the book might be the only ones for whom the 'pseudo-humanity'[37] is still a fictitious prospect; for the majority of people, however, it has become a reality.

33. It seems that, at least on occasion, Stiegler is in a hurry to impart a sense of absolute urgency, as if the end were near. However, as Richard Beardsworth puts it in the final chapter to *Derrida & the Political*, op. cit., p150: 'There is no technocalypse of the human. Pure technics is pure metaphysics'.

34. Stiegler, 'Allégorie de la fourmilière', op. cit., p157.

35. Ibid., p157.

36. Ibid., p157-8.

37. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, op. cit., p87.

Fourth passage: exact dramatisation

At the beginning of the second chapter of *Technics and Time, 1* Stiegler describes how all domains of life are now being 'technicized': 'In the technological

context of *Gestell* a "technicization" of all domains of life is experienced on a massive scale'.[38] The tenor of this passage is Heideggerian through and through, from the title of the section - 'The question coming to us from Technics' - up to the invocation of the imminent assault on the human essence by technics. Interestingly enough, Stiegler characterises this sketch of recent technological developments and the fate they have in store for us, humans, as a 'cursory, dramatic, but nevertheless exact presentation'.[39] He thus admits that his image of the technical eclipse of the human is a little exaggerated, that he has added a little extra, but in order to - and this is remarkable - gain exactitude. Readers of Gilles Deleuze will perhaps recognise in these words Deleuze's characterisation of his own philosophical enterprise as a science that is anexact, but rigorous.[40] However, in Deleuze this description is grounded in a meticulously developed metaphysics of Ideas that are non-actual (and thus impossibly exact), but determinable (which requires rigor). The problem in Stiegler seems to be that this exact dramatisation is not accounted for in his theory. Fictions (of a pure technics), allegories (of the anthill), conditional tenses ('may be'), hypothetical and affirmation-suspending adverbs ('as if', 'almost') seem to be essential in his thinking but are never admitted this status. However, before turning to an examination of the philosophical value of the fictional in Stiegler's work, we would like to refer to a last passage in which Stiegler remains unclear about the actuality of what he is describing. It is a passage that brings us back to the theme of real time.

Fifth passage: from 'real time' to real time

As it comes to so-called 'real time technologies' and 'the end of history' this may entail, a similar passage from 'tendency' to 'actualization' is to be noted. Early on in the 'General Introduction' to the series, a couple of lines after having noted that the divorce between culture and technology has occurred, Stiegler notes that indeed 'technics evolves more quickly than culture: the temporal relation between the two is a tension in which there is both advance and delay'.[41] As we saw in the first part of this paper, this differential tension is characteristic of the process of temporalisation, of the prosthetic time of mortals. According to Stiegler this differential human time is severely threatened by new technologies: 'It is as if time has leapt outside itself: not only because the process of decision making and anticipation has irresistibly moved over to the side of the "machine" or technical complex, but because, in a certain sense, our age is in the process of breaking the time barrier'.[42] The qualifications Stiegler uses - 'as if' and 'in a certain sense' - are vague and provisional, which indicates that he is prudent. However, on the final page of the first volume, today's day seems already to have gone *beyond* the specifically deferred time of the history of Being: new conditions of 'event-ization'[43] have today been put in place, which are characteristic of what Stiegler calls 'light-time', a time that seems to conceal all difference and *difference*.[44] Despite the

38. Ibid., p85.

39. Ibid., p87.

40. Gilles Deleuze, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2. Mille Plateaux*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, p454-455.

41. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, op. cit., p15.

42. Ibid., p15.

43. As R. Beardsworth and G. Collins translate '*l'événementialisation*', in Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, op. cit., p16.

44. Ibid., p276: 'Light-time forms the age of the difference in real time, an exit from the deferred time specific to the history of being that seems to constitute a concealing of difference and a threat to all kinds of difference'.

45. Ibid., p276.

46. Ibid., p89.

47. Maurice
Blanchot, 'On a
Change of Epoch:
The Exigency of
Return' in Ib., *The
Infinite Conversation*,
Susan Hanson (trans
and foreword),
Minneapolis,
University of
Minnesota Press,
1993, pp264-82,
p264.

48. Ibid., p264:
'The fact of our
belonging to this
moment at which a
change of epoch, if
there is one, is being
accomplished also
takes hold of the
certain knowledge
that would want to
determine it, making
both certainty
and uncertainty
inappropriate'.

49. Stiegler, *Technics
and Time, 1: The
Fault of Epimetheus*,
op. cit., p16.

50. Ibid., p228.

51. Inverted commas
are analysed as a
technique in John
M. Sinclair, Michael
Hoey and Gwyneth
Fox (eds), *Techniques
of Description: Spoken
and Written Discourse*,
London, Routledge,
1993, p20. Their
history goes back
to Aristophanes
of Byzantium (3rd
century BC) who
should perhaps be
saluted as the first
'mechanized ironist',
as 'irony' never goes
without commas.

52. Stiegler,
*Technics and Time,
2: Disorientation*,
op. cit., p124; a
'derealized time' has
the pits of differance

softening effect of the 'seems to', Stiegler's tone in this sentence is definitely affirmative. In the following line, this even builds up to a straightforward declaration of the end of history: 'one can speak of the end of history or of a change of epoch'.[45] 'One can speak', that is to say: one can speak with some good reason, one can speak well of 'the end of history'. As history has revealed, it is very problematic to declare 'the end of history' or 'a change of epoch'. Stiegler should know this, as he approvingly quotes Blanchot's reflections *On a Change of Epoch*.[46] Blanchot claims that a change of epoch is *neither* a matter of certainty *nor* of uncertainty. A change of epoch - 'if there is one', as Blanchot adds - can only have a 'discrete force',[47] which invalidates both certainty and uncertainty.[48] For 'a change of epoch' would alter the very terms in which it may be cognitively evaluated. In stating that one could speak (well) of 'a change of epoch' and 'the end of history' Stiegler seems to lose this sense of discretion. Although, on many occasions, Stiegler is careful enough to put 'real time' between inverted commas, for instance when he writes about 'certain effects of technical developments ... that in computing one calls "real time"',[49] or talks about 'what is called "real time"'.[50] 'Real time' may well have been the talk of the day at the time Stiegler was drafting the first volumes. It would have been wise only to mention that expression, *as if* he had not much use for it, not yet or never, in the way philosophers read newspapers or catch rumours. However, the small defence offered by the 'technique' of inverted commas[51] is dropped when he affirms that 'real time is a derealisation of time, as if time were really real only in remaining unreal, chronically diachronic, asynchronized'.[52] Similarly, when he affirms that 'light-time forms the age of *differance* in real time',[53] he does not use commas. As a result, 'real time' seems to be more real than it can be, in effect.

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PHILOSOPHICAL INCONSISTENCY OR UNCONTROLLED RISE OF MILITANCY?

These five text passages have sufficiently demonstrated how Stiegler keeps the reader, and maybe also himself, dangling about the actuality of his observations regarding new technologies neutralising the *differance* that grounds man and culture. This ambiguity is remarkable since the straightforward affirmation of the technical eclipse of the human would imply a contradiction with Stiegler's central idea of technology as the means of meeting man's lack of essence without ever being able to fill it up. Thus, for reasons of consistency Stiegler should have to reject the idea of a technocalypse: because man is originally short of an essence, every attempt of his to fill up this gap will necessarily remain faulty. In other words, the creation of different prostheses and the deferment of a completing prosthesis, is without end, it 'is endlessness itself'.[54] The *differance* can never be stopped, however small or almost invisible it may

be. This is exactly Derrida's point in *Echographies of Television*, the book with conversations between Derrida en Stiegler:

> There is never an absolutely real time. What we call real time, and it is easy to understand how it can be opposed to deferred time in everyday language, is in fact never pure. What we call real time is simply an extremely reduced *"differance"*, but there is no purely real time because temporalization itself is structured by a play … of traces.[55]

In other words: it is as if Derrida has to remind Stiegler of the ever-remaining rest or 'between'[56] that prevents a pure mankind or a pure technics from taking place. However dominant technics can be, it will never be able to prevent its being used in a way that was not intended, or giving rise to languages and behaviours with non-technical goals.[57]

Some scholars, such as David Wills, argue that Stiegler's forgetfulness might be the effect of an 'ideology or a metaphysics of realism'.[58] When the militant in Stiegler takes over - wishing to make the world a better place, a place where the *differance* can reign in all its variety, and not in the margins of what the techno-capitalist society leaves us - the philosopher in him turns a blind eye.

LITERARY HIGH SPEED TECHNOLOGY

It is our opinion that there might be more to this ambiguity than just philosophical inconsistency or an uncontrolled rise of militancy. And it is the same David Wills who somehow puts us on track. In his article 'Techn*e*ology or the Discourse of Speed' Wills argues that, in Stiegler's own reasoning, technology can be seen at work in the numerous neologisms he devises (for example, 'who-what totality'[59]), in his rather poetical utterances ('Man is this accident of automobility caused by a default of essence [une panne d'essence, a "lack of fuel", an "empty tank"]'[60]), in the word games he plays (the 'necessary default' ['le default qu'il faut']61) and the linguistic coincidences that form the starting point of new theories (the rhyming of 'cortex' and 'silex' ('flint'), for example, which inspires him for his thesis of the mutual determination of man and technology[62]). In these moments of literary cleverness, it is as if Stiegler's thinking is occurring in spite of himself. It is something originally exterior (for example the fact that 'cortex' rhymes with 'silex') which all of a sudden becomes the core of a so-called intimate activity: thinking. It is as if Stiegler is running behind on something that used to be instigated by himself. However, at the same time one can say that his thinking takes place exactly at the moment when the linguistic coincidence is remarked. There is no delay, no running behind, but, on the contrary, a perfect coincidence between the observation and the thinking. This allows Wills to say that Stiegler's neologisms and quasi-poetical leaps constitute a *mis-en-scène* of absolute speed.

removed, as it were.

53. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, op. cit., p276.

54. Ibid., p216.

55. Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television. Filmed Interviews*, Jennifer Bajorek (trans), Cambridge, Polity Press, 2002, p129.

56. The 'between' between technics and differential time is an issue in Richard Beardsworth's review of J. Derrida and B. Stiegler, *Echographies of Television. Filmed Interviews*; published as 'Towards a Critical Culture of the Image' in *Tekhnema*, 4 (1998): 114-37.

57. Cf. Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida & the Political*, op. cit., p150: 'Technical invention has always already gone wrong, become "other"'.

58. David Wills, 'Techn*e*ology or the Discourse of Speed', in Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra (eds), *The prosthetic impulse: from a posthuman present to a biocultural future*, p252.

59. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, op. cit., p262.

60. Ibid., p121.

61. Bernard Stiegler, *Acting out*, David Barison, Daniel Ross, and Patrick Crogan (trans), Stanford, Stanford University Press,

2009, p24; Bernard
Stiegler, *Passer à
l'acte*, Paris, Éditions
Galilée, 2003, p39.

62. Stiegler, *Technics
and Time, 1: The
Fault of Epimetheus*,
op. cit., p141.

63. David Wills,
'Tech*ne*ology or
the Discourse of
Speed', op. cit.,
p259. According to
Derrida, (human)
intention and
attention are
'directed towards
something iterable,
which in turn
determines it as
being iterable'
(*Limited Inc*, op.
cit., p56); it is
hence by virtue of
their structure that
(human) intention
and attention are
susceptible to the
instantaneous effects
of what David Wills
describes.

64. The following
paragraph is a
paraphrase of Gilles
Deleuze, *Difference
and Repetition*, Paul
Patton (trans),
London/New York,
The Athlone Press,
1994, pp214-6.

It is 'language travelling at the speed of light … always already projected it "arrives" ahead of itself … always already in translation it is a displacement out of the therefore never intact original moment of its production, en route at lightning speed towards the outside limit of comprehensibility'.[63]

This implies that Stiegler's writing style exemplifies his theory in a perfect way: technology (such as language) is a non-original origin. The question is whether this correspondence also applies for his undecided way of describing the fate of so-called 'real time technologies'. Can this literary ambiguity be explained by referring to the content he wants to convey? In other words, is this literary ambiguity a theoretical necessity?

REAL TIME AS A DELEUZIAN-KANTIAN IDEE

In order to answer this question, let us go back to Deleuze. As we mentioned above, Deleuze's non-classical ontology is centred round Ideas. These are not to be confused with Platonic Ideas or supermundane, perfect and unique essences that are exemplified in particular beings, things and concepts. Deleuze conceives Ideas rather in the Kantian way. As he explains himself,[64] Ideas have to be understood in a double fashion. They are either the ideal focus which lies outside the boundaries of experience and upon whose lines the concepts of the understanding (for example, the concept of causality) are arranged; or they are the common horizon that embraces all concepts of the understanding. As such, the object of an Idea is neither a fiction, nor a hypothesis. It is an object which can be neither given nor known, but must be represented without being able to be directly determined. On the contrary, the Idea's object is undetermined, and this neither because of an imperfection in our knowledge of it nor because of a lack in the object, but because it is a structure that acts as a focus or a horizon within perception. It confers unity upon the objects of experience without being itself a unity or an entity, just as love can unify different attitudes (ranging from caring for a child to killing the man who raped your wife) without being itself something determined. The undetermined ideal object makes it possible to identify objects of experience and it is only by this activity that it can be determined itself. Thus, it can only be determined itself in an indirect way, that is by analogy with the determinate objects of experience. As these analogies are in principle infinite, the object of the Idea is infinitely determinable.

Can Stiegler's idea of real time be considered such a Deleuzian-Kantian Idea? The passages in which Stiegler's pessimism is very pronounced clearly do not regard real time as a fiction or a hypothesis. Real time has a reality that a fiction or a hypothesis lacks; everyone who has lived the pre-digital age will agree that life *does* go faster now, that there certainly *is* less time to reflect upon events, that the reflection almost comes together with the presentation of the event and is thus hardly to be called a reflection. Real time is present among us, it haunts our time.

But what Stiegler seems to forget and Derrida has to remind him of, is that real time does not have the presence or reality of a chair, for example. Its features cannot be clearly distinguished and identified. Every instance that can be called upon as an instantiation of real time (for example, the video function on a mobile phone) will never completely realise it (for example, the decision that still has to be taken as to where and when the images will be posted, still involves a moment of difference). For every instantiation of real time, uses can be imagined and effectuated which reintroduce time to the synchronicity, which reintroduce a reflective moment, a delay, a deferment. An instantiation of real time is never only and never definitively an instantiation of real time.[65]

So, real time has a reality that is not the reality of a chair. Because of this different reality, if real time needs to be determined, it can only be done so by referring to things and concepts that allow for a determination. That is to say, real time can only be determined by analogy with discrete, empirical facts, such as an anthill, or by analogy with delimited concepts such as a divorce. However, this is not to say that it is itself an empirical fact. On the contrary, it is an ideal horizon out of which different empirical facts get their meaning. It is a line that unites phenomena without being a common divisor of these phenomena, or a chronological or causal link. It is a line similar to the one distinguished by the two main characters in Witold Gombrowicz novel *Cosmos*.[66] A sparrow hanging by the neck on a wire in a tree, the slippery lips of two women, a crack on the ceiling and a broken farm tool in the garden constitute the knots of a line that changes direction every time one tries to figure out the connection. The line brings sense into this whole, without this sense being explicable, let alone being understandable.

In sum, Stiegler's concept of real time (as well as some other 'regulative' notions such as the naturalisation of man, the derealisation of time and the end of history) can only make sense and can only be consistent with his theory of man's origin by default, if it functions as a Deleuzian-Kantian Idea, as an ideal focus or a common horizon. The ambiguity in which Stiegler dwells has the wrong subject. The question is not so much whether real time is a fiction or a fact, whether it is realised or not, because it *is* realised in, for instance, the video function on a cell phone and the poetics of his language operating at light speed. Such and similar realisations of real time, however, do not exhaust real time. Just as the care for a child *is* love, but love cannot be reduced to the care for a child, real time never coincides with its realisations. The ambiguity should thus regard the irrecoverable character of real time. We have to admit that it is a thin line between the idea that real time can never be exhausted by its realisations and the idea that real time is never realised, for the first idea implies that the realisation of real time is never complete and in that sense not a fact. We think that Stiegler's use of allegories, conditional tenses and affirmation-suspending adverbs certainly indicate a sensibility of this ungraspable nature of the Idea of real time. They have one tedious side effect though: they deny real time's reality.

65. However, one can ask oneself if a chair completely coincides with itself, if a chair is only and definitively a chair. But even if it is not, the chair's openness or difference will be less than real time's difference, as real time is a quality that can be found in different phenomena ranging from rhyming, live broadcasting, to the outburst of laughter.

66. Witold Gombrowicz, *Cosmos*, Danuta Borchardt (trans), New Haven, Yale University Press, 2005; first published in 1965, in Polish, http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ncr.4100540916