Of a mythical philosophical anthropology: the transcendental and the empirical in *Technics and Time*[1]

Michael Lewis

Introduction

Bernard Stiegler's *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* is a reinvention of *philosophical anthropology*. The book's central thesis is that man never exists without technics, and this means that any *transcendental* account of man's emergence must implicate an *empirical* account of the emergence of technology. These two accounts together comprise a philosophical anthropology, but Stiegler shows that such an anthropology can only take the form of a *myth* – and it is in this that Stiegler's 'reinvention' consists.[2]

Martin Heidegger has shown that in order to be individuated, the human subject must relate to itself in a way that is temporal because it joins the self as it presently is to the self as it will be in the future. Death is that event beyond which the self cannot experience the future, for any time that unfolds beyond that moment cannot be *my* future, and so death stakes out that stretch of time which defines my individual existence. In relating myself to death, I can relate only to myself, and thus I become most properly myself within this reflexive relation.

The subject's relation to itself is, thus, temporal, but Stiegler advances some way beyond Heidegger in showing that the human being is not by itself capable of achieving this 'transcendental subjectivity', which is 'transcendental' in the sense that it would be capable of constituting the objects of its own experience. Stiegler shows that man can relate to time only if he is already involved with 'technics' (*la technique*). 'Technics' is an obsolete English word that is used to translate a modern French term which encompasses techniques, technology, and the objects produced by these means: it thus includes the objects of pre-modern craft, pre-industrial and industrial techniques, and modern machine-powered technology. These techniques and technical entities have a dynamic of their own, the objective expressions of which constitute a history (*Geschichte*). Thus, in Heidegger's terms, there is no temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*) without historicality (*Geschichtlichkeit*) (Heidegger 1962 [1927], ¶72-4) (cf. Stiegler 2003, 160-1). This history of technology is, crucially, an *empirical* history, which means that it cannot be deduced *a priori* as a 'transcendental history' can. Stiegler shows that the transcendental can close upon itself only by encompassing the brute empiricity of the stone, as an oyster enclasps a speck of grit, and is thus able to consummate itself in the production of a pearl.[3]

In this way the technical object allows the human being to relate to time while simultaneously anchoring this relation within a history. This goes some way towards explaining why Stiegler describes his work as an '*archaeology* of reflexivity' (TT1,140). Reflexivity has an archaeology because this reflection takes place only by way of the tool, and these tools are then preserved for the future archaeologist to discover. 'The analysis of the techno-logical possibilities of the already-there [the historical-technical] peculiar to each epoch will, consequently, be that of the conditions of reflexivity – of mirroring - of a *who* in a *what*' (TT1,237,translation modified).

This is why we describe Stiegler as a philosophical anthropologist, because neither philosophy alone, if it is understood as transcendental, nor anthropology alone, if it is understood as

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1 Earlier versions of the ideas found in this essay were presented before audiences at the University of Cambridge (Anthropology) and the University of the West of England (Philosophy) on March 15th and May 2nd 2012, respectively.

2 One of the earliest accounts of Stiegler's work adopts the same perspective and remains one of the best (Beardsworth 1995, 2ff).

3 Tracy Colony provides an excellent account of the way in which Stiegler accompanies Heidegger's use of concepts only in order to take them beyond him at a certain point (Colony 2010, 120f), before going on to suggest a Heideggerian response that demonstrates the inherence of a certain facticity in Heidegger's own account of time (122ff.).

empirical, can provide us with an adequate account of a humanity that is inextricable from technicality. At the same time, we must ask why Stiegler himself refuses this name and refers very little to its exemplars.

One of the keys to our interpretation is the notion that the narration of the origin of the human always takes place retrospectively, and that means from a particular perspective. The perspective Stiegler chooses is that of contemporary technology. A certain technological system is beginning to corrupt the individual's relation to its future and therefore needs to be addressed: the stone at our hearts is threatening to supplant the living organ altogether.

Transcendental anthropology

There are two traditional approaches to the origin of man: transcendental and empirical. Broadly speaking, and not without certain important nuances, Jean-Jacques Rousseau may be identified with the former and André Leroi-Gourhan with the latter. In order to reach a proper understanding of the human it will be crucial to see how *neither* of these approaches can succeed because both fall short of the contemporaneity of man and tool.

Despite Lévi-Strauss's insisting that Rousseau is the father of *both* scientific and philosophical anthropology, Stiegler for the most part takes him to represent *philosophical* anthropology, which is to say a 'transcendental deduction' of the conditions for the possibility of man (TT1,85).

This deduction leads Rousseau towards a primitive humanity with qualities that must characterise every human being as such because they precede the differentiations introduced into the human species by the 'technical' supplements to his nature brought about by particular cultures and their history. This particularisation results from man's leaving his original habitat and dispersing into multiple geographical locations and climates. The first man possesses a naturality which can only be corrupted when he wanders away from his origin, into a differentiation which shatters his universality and adulterates the noble savage's original purity.

Thus the transcendental anthropology introduces a whole series of oppositions – beginning with nature and culture – such that it can hardly avoid thinking of pre-human animals and human beings as opposed to one another in the precise sense that each excludes the other and is defined by this negativity (TT1,108).

But, in a move that is crucial to Stiegler's own rethinking of the transcendental project, Rousseau undermines this oppositional understanding: the original state of man which he identifies, a primitive universality without cultural differentiation, did not actually exist. Indeed this is why the origin cannot be ascertained by facts and requires a transcendental deduction (Rousseau 1984 [1755], 78). As Stiegler puts it: 'The essence (the origin), impossible to find in the facts (the fall), calls for [...] a transcendental recollection' (TT1,108). This transcendental story will precisely amount to a 'necessary fiction' (TT1,108). Stiegler will call it a 'myth', and the lesson he takes from the 'father of anthropology' is that the transcendental and the mythical *converge* when it comes to the question of man.

The transcendental myth proposes a stage of humanity free of all technics, and this state would comprise the 'origin' of man. But this is just the first stage in the origination of man, for he is not comprised solely of this innocent purity; there is also a fall. The origin thus has two distinct moments, and it is this duplicity that Stiegler finds in both transcendental and the empirical anthropology. It is a doubling of origin which he will associate with the origin's mythologisation. Stiegler's first substantial reference to the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus arises in the context of an interpretation of Rousseau: the myth depicts a sequence that runs from a human animal that lacks to a human being whose lack is supplemented by technics. Myths are chronological stories and they describe an origin in narrative terms, and the myth which best expresses Stiegler's insight tells of Epimetheus's forgetful lack of foresight leaving man bereft of qualities and his brother Prometheus's theft of fire from the gods (cf. TT1, 113).

Empirical anthropology

Nevertheless, Rousseau himself does not deploy this myth, and indeed his account falls prey to an illusion to which all transcendental anthropology must succumb. Transcendental anthropology determines the origin of man *retrospectively,* and this approach can be decisively criticised by approaching this origin from the other direction, *pro*spectively, from before it has happened. Rousseau's mistake is to begin from man as he now stands, and to treat him as if he had always stood and walked upright, but without using his newly liberated hands for the manipulation of tools (TT1,113) (cf. Rousseau 1984 [1755], 81-2). For Stiegler, 'Rousseau may well decide to ignore the facts; he may not, however, totally contradict them' (TT1,112).

Rousseau does indeed refer to the factual discipline of 'comparative anatomy' but dismisses it because of its relatively inchoate state (Rousseau 1984 [1755], 81). But such progress can no longer be denied after the magisterial work of André Leroi-Gourhan, who uncovered facts that directly contradict Rousseau. They demonstrate that the upright stance of the primitive human being frees the hand from the tasks of walking and fighting, and reassigns its function to the grasping of tools. The empirical anthropologist thus proves that the emergence of man begins when the quadruped becomes the biped, and this may be shown empirically to be strictly contemporaneous with the emergence of technics. This contradicts Rousseau's hypothesis of an upright man *without* technics: 'the upright position has a meaning and consequences that are incompatible with Rousseau's account of the origin of man' (TT1,113).

Empirical palaeoanthropology reveals that there is no human being without technicality. By virtue of this insight, 'palaeontology will profoundly affect the anthropological *a priori*, governing at the most profound level the most authentically philosophical questioning' (TT1,132). It does this by insisting that our definition of man must rule out the possibility of a man *without* technics. It is precisely this thesis that generates the very structure of Stiegler's work.

The problem for Leroi-Gourhan is that humanity cannot be understood as a zoological species in any obvious way (cf. Leroi-Gourhan, 1989, 48-50). Man can be theoretically unified only by reference to the use of tools. In him, the evolution of animal life continues, but at a different rhythm to that of genetic drift. This is because technical objects display their own, non-zoological tendencies. Thus, in man, 'the evolution of life continues by means *other* than life' (TT1,135). This is another reason why it is problematic to speak of the human being as an animal species: man constitutes a *continuation* of life's evolution, but by radically new means *opposed* to the old – exteriorised technics, epiphylogenetic memory, the novel inheritance that transmits individual experience (epi-) to subsequent generations of the species (-phylo-) and thus initiates history in the strict sense. This idea allows Stiegler to maintain that the relation between man and animal is *both* an opposition *and* a continuation, for this form of memory 'must not be understood as a rupture with nature but rather as a new organisation of life – life organising the inorganic and organising itself therein by that very fact' (TT1,163).[4]

Man thus lacks a specific difference and identity *until* he is reflected in the technical artefacts that he produces (and which thereby simultaneously produce *him*). In a way that is avowedly indebted to Lacan, Stiegler understands man to be unified by an original 'absence of

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4 This is why Stiegler goes on to say that '*Nature must be understood differently*', beyond its opposition to technics (TT1,163). He immediately specifies, however, that this slackening of the absoluteness of the opposition between nature and culture does not homogenise the entire animal realm and eradicate differences. In this, Stiegler is a pupil of Derrida's. But unlike Derrida, Stiegler is not content simply to multiply the differences notionally and to establish the possibility of a more complex typology; rather, he makes a *decision* and adopts *just one* of the many possible perspectives on the animal realm, one in which man and animal are indeed opposed to one another in a certain way. Derrida himself comes very close to explicitly allowing this as a possibility within a *certain* taxonomy (Derrida, 2004, 72-3). Our argument will be that Stiegler makes a decision that leads to just such a taxonomy.

The *decisive* moment of Stiegler's relation to Derrida seems not to be taken into account by Ben Roberts' critique of Stiegler's reading of Derrida (Roberts 2005). The exact relationship between Derrida and Stiegler on this point will be addressed in a future work.

propriety [or properness]' (TT1,133). This can be remedied only if it is supplemented by technics: '"human nature" consists only in its technicity, in its denaturalisation' (TT1,148; see also, TT1,157, 216). Man needs external technical objects to act as mirrors that reflect him and thus allow him to acquire a reflexive identity that he did not previously possess. The tool is in this sense a 'proto-mirror', and this period of man's evolution amounts to a 'proto-mirror stage', which for Stiegler is just as much a part of phylogeny as it is of ontogeny (TT1,157).

Stiegler's text devotes itself to the near impossible task of remaining true to the thesis of the contemporaneous origination of man and tool, and to showing why an account of the origin of man must nevertheless slip into a mythological chronologisation of man and tool whenever it attempts such a task. Even Leroi-Gourhan is at a certain point snagged on this mythopoietic machine, along with his opponent, Rousseau. Rousseau postulates the existence of a non-technical man at his beginning, while Leroi-Gourhan does the same at the end (TT1,151) (Leroi-Gourhan 1989, 92-3). So, in both empirical and transcendental anthropology, the origin of man is split into two stages.

From anthropology to philosophy

Stiegler's book is constituted by the effort of resisting this apparently irresistible duplication. Were a theory of man to achieve this, it would have moved definitively beyond an anthropologistic understanding and become 'philosophical'. Stiegler expresses the movement as follows, in reference to Heidegger's 'analytic of existence': 'is not the consideration of *technē*, as the originary horizon of any access of the being that we ourselves are to itself, the very possibility of disanthropologising the temporal, existential analytic?' (TT1,262, emphasis added). Despite Heidegger's own attempt to produce a non-anthropological understanding of man, he failed in precisely the way we have seen Rousseau and Leroi-Gourhan fall short, by ultimately failing to acknowledge the co-originarity of human and the tool, temporality and historicality. In anxiety, I relate solely to my own death, and the world seems to slip away. Thus, in my most authentic state, the ready-to-hand shows itself as inessential, and with its vanishing, history is likewise eclipsed (Heidegger 1998, 88).

So, for Stiegler, 'philosophy' designates Heidegger's approach to the question of man but perfected in light of a thesis drawn from anthropology (Leroi-Gourhan), one which immediately compels the latter to exceed its own (zoological) limitations. A philosophical understanding of the human being takes it to be something resolutely non-anthropological and non-animalistic, while nevertheless remaining within a history of animal life, albeit in the form of a technical exteriorisation of that life. Thus, in Stiegler, we find a philosophical anthropology which becomes philosophical precisely in realising that anthropology must of necessity exceed itself once it recognises the essential function of technics in relation to life.

Stiegler clarifies the transition from anthropology to philosophy as follows: 'any residual hint of the anthropological is abandoned in the fact that technology becomes properly speaking a thanatology' (TT1,187). This means that technology is here understood as making possible a relation to time and first of all to the future, and the future when it is understood in relation to individuation is death (*thanatos*). This is counterposed to a thinking of anticipation which would understand it as a given quality of the putatively zoological species, '*homo sapiens*'. But with the intervention of a technical relation to *death*, the last preserve of non-technicality is irremediably lost.

The mythopoietic machine

The first part of *Technics and Time, 1* demonstrates the contemporaneous invention of man and tool, and the way Simondon, Rousseau, and Leroi-Gourhan, became afflicted with double vision when confronted with this fact. The next stage in Stiegler's itinerary is to reveal the mechanism which makes this not merely a fault of subjective perception, but an inevitable diffraction. Philosophers cannot but fall back into anthropology, and Stiegler sees the origin of man as a machine for generating myths.

In the second part of the book -'The Fault of Epimetheus'- Stiegler demonstrates the necessity of supplementing Heidegger's existential analytic with the myth of Epimetheus and Prometheus. The supplementation of Heidegger's theory is intended to show that the peculiar evolution of man produces a 'transcendental illusion' or mirage which makes it seem as if man could one day have been without technics, or would one day reach such a point. Thus *Technics and Time* tries both to remain true to the concomitance of man and tool, and to do so precisely by explaining why philosophical and anthropological accounts always fall away from this in a process of 'dephasing', which, properly understood, produces a myth of origin.[5] To achieve this, Stiegler must establish the correct relation between the *empirical* facts established by anthropology, and the *transcendental* approach taken by philosophy, and finally, to ascertain the connection between this relation and the mythical chronology to which it gives rise.[6]

Man and technics; transcendental and empirical

To progress we first need to establish how the co-originarity of man and technics amounts to a mutual contamination of the empirical and the transcendental.

If one were to consider Stiegler's work merely as a perfecting of Heidegger's existential analytic that situated the techno-historical entity at the heart of time, then 'considered *from this perspective*, epiphylogenesis is a transcendental concept' (TT1,243, emphasis added). But this would ignore the most important philosophical consequence of rendering the auto-affective relation of temporality dependent upon technology, for 'this concept undermines itself at one and the same time, *suspending the entire credibility of the empirico-transcendental divide*' (TT1,243, emphasis added).

This means that the perpetual failure to fully uphold the thesis of the contemporaneous invention of man and tool is due to a seemingly inextinguishable wish to restore purity to the opposition between the transcendental and the empirical since it involves preserving the transcendental *subject* from any empiricity and empirical historicity. In the modern age at least, this amounts to a fall into anthropologism since this transcendental subject is understood to be inextricable from the human being. This means that the falling away from the necessary duplicity of man and technics is a return to *metaphysics*, since even a pure positivism of facts is still metaphysical insofar as it posits the metaphysical thesis that the world is ultimately comprised of atomic facts, which involves a radical division between the essence (which is posited as nonexistent) and existence (factuality).

Leroi-Gourhan's palaeoanthropology claims to speak of the origin of humanity 'from outside the snare of metaphysics' (TT1,84). Importantly, this means that it will try to place itself beyond both transcendental anthropology and positivist empiricism. Passing beyond metaphysics it seems that one is already standing astride the transcendental-empirical divide. Hence one will remain true to the insight of Leroi-Gourhan only by insisting upon a mutual *contamination* of the transcendental and the empirical (TT1,84).

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5 I refer to Gilbert Simondon's notion of an entity 'falling out of phase with itself' (*déphaser*) (Simondon, 1992, 300). The difference between Stiegler's use of the term and Simondon's is that Simondon refers to a real or a logical succession, while for Stiegler the appearance of succession is purely mythical.

6 For a treatise on anthropology, philosophy, and myth, Stiegler's references to Claude Lévi-Strauss are surprisingly scant. In *Technics and Time, 1,* they number only two or three (TT1,93,101). Stiegler seems to suggest that the fault of Lévi-Strauss is precisely to repeat old father Rousseau's mistake of installing a rigorous distinction between the empirical and the transcendental, mirrored in a strict separation between nature and culture that results from the incest taboo and the symbolic law which develops on this ground, incorporating all kinds of non-instinctual prohibitions. This leads Lévi-Strauss to postulate a *simple* origin of man and therefore a *human nature* which would be a universal invariant of every human culture. It is this unity of man that Leroi-Gourhan puts in question, which is why his work is more interesting to Stiegler than Lévi-Strauss's (TT1,93).

But is Lévi-Strauss not himself interested in the mythicality of any attempt to suggest that the incest taboo could have been instituted all at once, at a moment that can be chronologically located? Even Stiegler himself gestures towards such a reading (TT1,101).

Let us first of all see how the transcendental is infected with empirical factuality, and then examine the idea that empirical factuality must also be infected with transcendentality. These two tasks will occupy the following two sections, **(a)** and **(b)** respectively. The second task is the more difficult because Stiegler is frequently understood as appealing to 'facts' pure and simple, which is what we must avoid at all costs if we are to remain consistent with his logic.[7]

(a) How the transcendental is infected with empiricity

Stiegler examines the historians of technology (Bertrand Gille, Richard Lefèbvre des Noëttes (TT1,30), Gilbert Simondon) as well as its prehistorians (Leroi-Gourhan) in order to show that technics has a dynamics of its own which can be ascertained only *empirically*. Stiegler's transition from the technologists to the anthropologists is intended to demonstrate that the very autonomy of this external memory *defines* man. Subjectivity cannot be formed without the empirically historical technical object. The subject's temporal self-relation conditions the possibility of all experience and may therefore be deemed 'transcendental', and because the relation will not be completed if it does not enclose a historicity that is empirically conditioned, the transcendental will never have been purely transcendental; its very constitution *depends* upon the empirical.

(b) How the empirical is infected by transcendentality

In the context of the second task, Stiegler understands the relationship between the empirical and the transcendental in terms of the relation between facts and their interpretation: 'facts [...] *are only given against the background of possibilities of interpretation* that are not themselves of the order of facts' (TT1,99, translation modified). When it comes to origins, facts become intelligible only as part of an interpretation, made in hindsight from a particular point of view within the present moment. This raises the difficult question of how to cope with the potentially distorting effects of hindsight, and the risk of mistaking a (retrospective) transcendental condition for a (prospective) factual chronological one, if this error can be avoided at all.

On plasticity

What happens to the fact when it is considered within the context of a retrospective interpretation? First of all, why does it not remain a mere fact? To answer this, we need to specify the empiricity in question: it is the history of technics. Stiegler has already shown that technical evolution is independent of zoological evolution, but this distinction is made partly in order to demonstrate the particular way in which the two evolutionary tendencies *converge* to form the human being. This means that the zoological character of man must be *conducive* to such a relation and indeed partake of a specular exchange with the technical object: in particular, this means that the animal human being must have a particular kind of skeleton and brain.

Here it is useful to recall a remark that Stiegler makes almost in passing, regarding the 'plasticity' of the human brain: 'the appearance of these tools [...] supposes a singular epigenetic plasticity of the cerebral structure' (TT1,176-7)[8], and to place this alongside his remarks on the non-specialised character of the human being's organs and members (TT1,XXX). However, this cannot mean that Stiegler is adopting the zoological explanation which he elsewhere criticises, which states that the adoption of the technical supplement was a necessary consequence of the fact that the front

7 Therefore our explanation of the transcendental-empirical contamination will take us some way towards refuting Geoffrey Bennington's critique of a certain 'positivism' and a confusion of the 'quasi-transcendental' and the empirical (or 'transcendental contraband') in Stiegler's text (Bennington 1996, 190 & 195-6), which David Wills describes as the 'palaeontological and the ontological' (Wills 2006, 240, cf. 260-1n.12). Even Beardsworth, among the most sympathetic of Stiegler's commentators, comes close to this form of objection in suggesting that Stiegler restricts the notion of originary technics (the 'quasi-transcendental') to just one empirically specifiable *kind* of technical object, those involved in the hominisation process (Beardsworth 1998, 81).

8 He also speaks of a 'double plasticity' of *both* cortex and flint (TT1,142, cf. 135). Stiegler may well be gesturing towards Catherine Malabou's work in this context (cf. TT1,xi).

paws and teeth of the pre-hominid had become useless as weapons when it assumed the bipedal stance (TT1,150). This understanding of technics is zoological because it understands the technical as the solution to a biological problem.

So how are we to differentiate Stiegler's solution from this straightforwardly zoological account? For Stiegler, the empirical tool fills in a gap in the animal's self-relation, and in the present context we might understand this as an evolved lack of specialisation and rigidity, an indeterminacy of function, the empirical fact that the human animal developed these features in the course of its zoological evolution. The facts involved here are those which *allow* the tool to become part of the constitution of the transcendental subject.

We have already spoken of the way in which the transcendental subject is affected by this supplement, but what happens to the *tool* when it is understood as serving this function?

On taking tools for souvenirs

The empirical facts of the history of technics are here being selectively interpreted, in relation to a certain end, and that is the role that the tool plays in the construction of the transcendental, and as a result only those facts which *can* be so interpreted are taken into account. Hence Leroi-Gourhan and Stiegler interpret the tool not as a means to an end - which it evidently also is - but as a type of *memory*, an enduring trace of the past: 'a tool is, before anything else, memory' (TT1,254).

This is to take the tool in a way that is independent of the intention of the inventor with respect to the specificity of the tool and the particular use that the tool has, whether it be killing, cutting, scraping, boring, or even writing. It is instead to understand the tool simply as something that was made in the past to be used in the future (temporality), and something which stands as a record of an earlier stage of technical development, a trace that can be inherited by later generations (historicity): in this way, the tool, understood as an external memory, constitutes and knits together the temporality and the historicality in which the human being develops.

From the point of view of transcendental subjectivity, 'the invention of the human' (Stiegler's title for the first part of *Technics and Time, 1*), the tool is of interest only as a temporal and historical object, an epiphylogenetic memory. The originality of Stiegler's theoretical gesture is expressed in the very unfamiliarity of taking a tool as a memory, a truly peculiar idea.

Here as so often, Stiegler follows Heidegger only to exceed him: the instrumental-anthropological interpretation of the tool may be *correct*, but it is not *true* (Heidegger, 1977, 6). The technical object need not be viewed solely in terms of how man uses it but also in terms of what it reveals, and indeed what it reveals about man and the constitution of a reflexive subject. What it reveals is that, in man, life's evolution is prolonged in a new, epiphylogenetic form.

So the empirical facts of the history of technics would be transformed by being incorporated into the genesis of transcendental subjectivity, and this transformation is expressed in the fact that Stiegler interprets them as memories, and thus in terms of time. How crucial this move and this effect are can be measured by the very title of Stiegler's series: technics and time.

Now we are in a position to understand Stiegler's assertion that Leroi-Gourhan avoids treating the facts he reveals in a positivistic manner. This is crucial to our reading, and our hypothesis is precisely that Leroi-Gourhan adopts one very particular *perspective* on the facts that we have just outlined, the perspective of contemporary technology. Stiegler adopts the same perspective, and he does indeed speak of these facts, whilst also adducing some of his own regarding neural plasticity. Both interpret the prehistoric evolution from the quadrupedal to the upright stance from the perspective of the ultimate assumption of the tool by the hand. Thus they can read the human as beginning with the feet, but only because this interpretation is retrospective and adopts the perspective of a particular *interpretation*. There are indeed facts here, but they cannot be knotted together to form an explanation unless one takes up a particular point of view that allows one to order these facts into something like a story. It is the necessarily retrospective character of interpretation - the transcendentality of the empirical - that Stiegler tries to capture by

speaking of the origin in terms of *myth*.[9]

'Lack' as mythical

This might allow us to approach the question of why Stiegler does not ally his own approach with those discourses which seem so close to his own, that are inspired by the natural sciences and anthropology and which understand man as unable to survive without an extended period of technical or prosthetic support: 'philosophical anthropology'.[10]

For Stiegler, the problem with these discourses is the way in which they understand the relation between the factual, natural lack and its technical supplement: they do not have an adequate understanding of the transcendentalisation of the empirical that we have outlined in terms of facts and their interpretation. They fail to see that their discourse can only be mythical. The (human) animal can only be described as 'lacking' in hindsight, from the point of view of a human being which has already been supplemented by technics: transcendentally, and not purely chronologically, which is to say from the point of view of the beginning. Stiegler's implicit response to the philosophical anthropologists is to suggest that the very *form* of their discourse risks 'naturalising the lack'.

Stiegler calls these two moments of lack and technical supplementation by the *mythical* names of Epimetheus and Prometheus. He does this in order to indicate, first, that the sequence is not *really* chronological (man and technics arise contemporaneously), and, second, that it is nevertheless necessary to narrate the sequence in this way. This means that the empirico-transcendental contamination that defines the human itself automatically generates a mythical retelling of its own origin. This automaton dephases the onefold of man and technics into a diffracted and animated mirage which always sees in itself a movement from lack to its technical supplementation.

Stiegler explicitly avows that the co-invention of human and tool produces 'the illusion of succession' (TT1,142). Rousseau's enduring merit for Stiegler is to have noticed the necessity of this fiction. It is impossible to decide which comes first, subjectivity's need of being supplemented by empirical technics, or the tool's assumption of a transcendental function: it is an 'aporia', a moment of undecidability in which neither of two opposed routes is navigable: 'the aporia always ends up hardening into a mythology that opposes two moments [...]. This is an excellent archetype of the discourse of philosophy on technics, relating through a fiction, if not by a myth, how the man of pure nature is replaced by the man of the fall, of technics' (TT1,101, translation modified).

Conclusion: Of an anthropology that must be philosophical

Ultimately we may say that what makes Stiegler's work so unusual is the curious coincidence of a retrospective and a prospective vision of man – a transcendental philosophical and an empirical anthropological perspective. This is why it is quite consistent to describe what Stiegler is doing as a philosophical anthropology.

The mythical clothing of an anthropological account is the *formal admission* that the story is

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9 This is where the present essay differs from Colony's critique of Stiegler, which accuses him of an anthropocentrism that opposes technical man and non-technical animal, ignoring Derrida's insight into the dead elements to be found in *all* life. For Colony, this results from Stiegler's conflating the non-living with the technical in the *narrow* sense of human techniques and artefacts (Colony 2011, 85, cf. 75, 84). A similar thought, according to which Stiegler restores a radical opposition between the human and the other animals may be found in Roberts (2005), in a part of the text which bases itself largely upon Beardsworth's work (1998, 81), which is itself derivative, according to Roberts (Roberts 2005, n.18). But this is precisely what Stiegler avowedly wishes to do, and he is allowed to do it by virtue of his decision regarding the perspective from which to view and taxonomise the animal realm (contemporary technology), and the mythical character of his discourse here. Colony himself says as much, asserting – in a *critical* way - the mythical character of Stiegler's thought at this point (ibid., 88, cf. 86).

10 In Stiegler, we find only one, indirect reference to Arnold Gehlen, the greatest of the twentieth century German philosophical anthropologists (TT1,11).

told retrospectively, with a backwards glance towards the evolution in which the human emerges from the animal, an account which interprets the facts of neurobiology, anatomy, and zoology – the animal facts from a time before 'man'. It is thus a hindsight which impacts upon the *pro*spective standpoint which one should adopt.

This explains why Stiegler can speak of the relation between man and animal as *both* continual *and* oppositional, for the completely novel epiphylogenetic memory carries forward a movement of life that traverses all animality. We can speak of a radical leap only by viewing the history of animals from the point of view of technics, but this remains a continuist reading of this very movement. Perhaps what allows it to be so is the Derridean nature of Stiegler's understanding of life, which takes it to be homogeneous, at least up to a certain point and on a certain level, as *différance*, a medium in which recording by means of a trace or 'memory' can take place. The first stage of deconstruction is to efface the single line of opposition that metaphysics posits between man and animal, to render the field of all animals, including the human animal, homogeneous, but this is done only for the sake of a second stage in which one opens up a diverse typography within this realm (cf. Derrida 2004, 72-3; 2009, 15-16; 2008, 47-48).

The difference between man and animal is rendered *undecidable*, but only in order to open up the possibility of multiple *decisions* which will result from a multiplicity of different perspectives taken upon the newly homogenised realm as a whole. Stiegler's decision is to examine this terrain from the standpoint of modern technology, and consequently he deploys a history of the way in which the inscribed mark, understood as 'orthothetic' or increasingly accurate memory, develops from the simplest forms of life to the most complex, and for this reason he is forced to *restore* a kind of opposition between man and the rest of the animals.

Thus Stiegler's work is a reinvention of philosophical anthropology; but this discourse can only be enunciated in a mythical form, which form expresses the mutual entwinement of the retrospective and the prospective, the transcendental and the empirical that follows from the originally (palaeo)anthropological thesis that man and technics are born as one.

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