The Struggle for the Mind in Contemporary Capitalism
Introduction to Bernard Stiegler

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Because the work of French philosopher Bernard Stiegler is relatively unknown in the Netherlands, the editors have asked Pieter Lemmens, who is specialized in the relation between man and technology, to write an introduction for the following article by Stiegler *[www.onlineopen.org/interobjectivity-and-transindividuation]*.

The central theme in the work of French philosopher Bernard Stiegler is technology. More specifically, he is interested in the crucial role played by what he calls *mnemo*techniques or -technologies (writing, printing, computers, the Internet, etcetera) in the constitution of thought, a role that has been structurally ignored by traditional philosophy. Stiegler, a pupil of Derrida, demonstrates that thinking, and more generally human culture as such, has been based from the very beginning on technology, or in other words, that it is originally constituted and conditioned by technical 'supplements' or 'prostheses'. That which philosophers such as Hannah Arendt have called the 'human condition' is essentially his technical condition, according to Stiegler, who in this context also speaks of man's *original technicity*.

This original technicity is connected with the fact that man is marked by an original 'default of origin' (*défaut d'origine*), that is, with an original absence of intrinsic qualities and the lack of a natural mode of existence, entailing the necessity to continuously (re)invent and permanently cultivate such qualities and modes of existence. Man's mode of existence is therefore essentially artificial, that is to say: essentially accidental. It is a historical happening that is uniquely grounded in a process of *technical exteriorization* with which man must permanently negotiate and through which he himself permanently changes.

Following French philosopher of technology Gilbert Simondon, Stiegler understands the human mode of existence as a process of psychic and collective *co-individuation*, emphasizing that this co-individuation can only be achieved on the basis of a process of *technical individuation*, that is within a (mnemo)technical milieu that enables the articulation of psyches and collectives. The so-called *transindividual* should be understood as the 'product' of a co-individuation of psyches and collectives, and constitutes the order of meaning or symbolic order.

According to Stiegler, the problem of our time, in the sense of the technological situation currently confronting us, consists in the fact that the global mnemotechnical system which supports the contemporary symbolic order and as such forms the ultimate condition for processes of psychic and collective individuation, has been massively annexed by a capitalism that strives towards the total mobilization of the libidinal energy of individuals

and collectives for the benefit of the economy. It is this industrial exploitation of the (now predominantly digital) 'technologies of the mind' by the *psychopower* of capital that is chiefly responsible for the deep social, spiritual and political crisis in which we find ourselves embroiled at the moment (and which is the actual root cause of the current financial and economic crisis). In fact, it destroys the libidinal energy and therefore our 'spiritual life' and the critical attention for ourselves, for others, and for the world as the expressions of this energy. As it stands, Stiegler is even inclined to speak about a *global attention deficit disorder*.

Stiegler understands the nihilism that was described by Nietzsche in the nineteenth and Heidegger in the twentieth century as a crisis of desire which, according to his diagnosis, has its deeper cause in the *poisoning* of the technological milieu of the mind as a consequence of the capitalist industrialization of that milieu, an industrialization which almost exclusively serves production and consumption for the sake of capital accumulation. However, Stiegler is convinced that the digital technological milieu that has spread explosively on a global scale since the 1980s can bring about a turn and create possibilities for the constitution of a new libidinal economy, which would enable wholly new production methods and ways of living and living together (grounded in new collective projects).

Like all technologies, digital technology, for man, is essentially a *pharmakon*: both poison and medicine. This means that the digital technologies of the mind can undermine the mind as well as support its development and edification. Under current, hypercapitalist conditions, it is the former that prevails according to Stiegler, and we are dealing with a severe environmental crisis of the spirit. In the near future, what is important is to creatively and inventively appropriate the digital *pharmaka* – which constitute a new technological environment that irrevocably destroys the traditional social relations (think of the effects of 'social networks') – and make it the basis of a new culture of the mind and new practices of freedom and sociability. That this implies a fierce struggle with a still dominant neoliberal capitalism – which regards the mind only as *human resource or consumer preference* – goes without saying.

Pieter Lemmens studied biology and philosophy in Nijmegen and obtained his doctorate in 2008 with a thesis on the close relation between human beings and technology. At present, he does postgraduate research at Wageningen University and teaches philosophy at Radboud University in Nijmegen.

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