



BERNARD STIEGLER: PHILOSOPHY, TECHNICS, AND ACTIVISM

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ABSTRACT This essay characterizes the principal theoretical coordinates of Stiegler's philosophy of technology and assesses its relevance for critical explorations between culture and the political. The focus is on Stiegler's major philosophical series, *Technics and Time*, and how he articulates therein his contribution to the philosophical consideration of technics in relation to key influences such as Gilbert Simondon, André Leroi-Gourhan, Jacques Derrida, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, and Immanuel Kant. It then examines the activist dimension of Stiegler's later writing projects in the context of his work at the Pompidou Centre's Institut de Recherche et d'Innovation of which he is the founding director, and with *Ars Industrialis*, the association he co-founded

to promote a renewed public sphere engagement with key questions of contemporary technocultural becoming. A review of the critical reception of Stiegler's work in Anglophone contexts ensues.

KEYWORDS: Stiegler, philosophy of technology, mnemotechnics, activism, psycho-power



Bernard Stiegler's contribution to a rethinking of technology is becoming increasingly influential in Anglophone contexts as a significant renovation of the resources Continental philosophy offers for a thinking of contemporary culture. I will introduce Stiegler's work for this issue of *Cultural Politics* by characterizing the principal theoretical coordinates of this engagement with technology and assessing its relevance for critical explorations between culture and the political. I will first outline Stiegler's major, ongoing re-reading of the history of philosophy in the *Technics and Time* series (currently three volumes with a further two projected). This is his first major enterprise and provides the theoretical underpinnings for subsequent publications and activities. It is where Stiegler articulates his contribution to the philosophical consideration of technics in relation to key influences such as Gilbert Simondon, André Leroi-Gourhan, Jacques Derrida, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, and Immanuel Kant. I will then examine the activist dimension of Stiegler's later writing projects in the context of his work at the Pompidou Centre's Institut de Recherche et d'Innovation of which he is the founding director, and with Ars Industrialis, the association he co-founded to promote a renewed public sphere engagement with key questions of contemporary technocultural becoming. A review of the critical reception of Stiegler's work in Anglophone contexts and some comments on the contributions to this special issue will follow.

The above sequence suggests a passage in his career from contemplation to action and activism, from theory to engaged practice. This is not accidental. With the founding of Ars Industrialis, the move to Flammarion as the publisher of several new books (beginning with *La Télécratie contre la démocratie: Lettre ouverte aux représentants politiques* (Telecracy Against Democracy: An Open Letter to Politicians)) and Stiegler's emergence as a "public intellectual" in French mainstream media, there is a deliberate movement toward different audiences and interlocutors in Stiegler's publishing and other involvements from around 2005. The question of the difference between theory and practice, however, is one with which Stiegler has been preoccupied since before he embarked upon the *Technics and Time* venture. In 2003 Stiegler delivered a public presentation as part of a curated lecture series at the Pompidou Centre in which invited contributors were asked to talk about why they became a philosopher. In the lecture, published soon afterwards as *Passer à l'Acte* (subsequently published in English in *Acting Out*), Stiegler "confessed" that he began his philosophical

investigations while spending several years in the French prison system for committing a serious crime (Stiegler 2009b: 11). Elsewhere he has specified that he was convicted of armed robbery. This extraordinary reflection on what is an unusual pathway to philosophical training and practice makes very clear that for Stiegler the importance of the relation between philosophy and the everyday, reflection and action, has never been in question.

Citing the canonic but mis-represented (by Plato, first of all) example of Socrates' life and death, Stiegler argues that philosophy is inaugurated in the Western tradition as an act of individuation that must always engage the collective to which the philosopher belongs in a corresponding, connected, co-constitutive individuation. All else is just "chatter," he says (2009b: 7):

That man, as Aristotle says, is a political animal means that I am not human except insofar as I belong to a social group. This sociality is the framework of a becoming: the group, and the individual in that group, never cease to seek out their path. This search *constitutes* human time. And if the time of the *I* is certainly not the time of the *we*, it takes place within the time of the *we*, which is itself conditioned by the time of the *I*s of which it is composed. (2009b: 3)

Drawing on Gilbert Simondon's work to re-read the Socratic legacy, he identifies the potential for philosophy to promote and provoke other trajectories of becoming within the larger process of individuation in which all individuals and their collectives are always engaged. The "structurally incomplete" nature of this process is what Socrates' death both recalls and identifies as pivotal to the "action" of philosophy (2009b: 4). It is the "genius" of Socrates' philosophico-political decision to face the judgment of the City, that is, the collective in which he articulated in a singular way the project of philosophy: "Socrates' death *remains* incomplete – charged with 'potentials'" (2009b: 6) precisely through its recruitment of the collective in assessing the legitimacy of Socrates' philosophical assertions about existence, reality, being, and becoming. The effectivity of philosophy's action may not always be apparent, but for Stiegler philosophy worthy of the name is always practical, always political, inasmuch as it participates in this much larger process of individuation of the collective and its individuals. "It is impossible to 'know' individuation, writes Simondon, without *pursuing* this individuation, without *transforming* it, for example in *inaugurating thereby a new attitude, which is philosophy through acting*" (2009b: 6). Across the range of his writing and public activities, Stiegler pursues such an individuation.

THE RECOVERY OF *TECHNE*

In *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* Stiegler launches a rigorous reexamination of the Western philosophical tradition. This

is a necessary project for a philosopher setting out with the aim of “inaugurating a new attitude” about technology among the collectives of philosophers, students of philosophy, and those they will go on to teach, interact with, argue, debate, and otherwise transform in their own individuating transactions. As the series progresses its engagement in the contemporary technocultural milieu becomes more pronounced, with considerations of the current “crisis” in education, the “digital program industries,” the era of “real time” communications, and so forth. These are important and valuable engagements in debates on contemporary technoculture. Like much of the critical force of the other work Stiegler is involved with, these engagements are built upon his unrelenting effort to bring technics back from the margins of the founding – and persisting – metaphysical framing of the questions of being and becoming.

This “recovery” is also a demonstration of the nagging persistence of technics in refusing to remain excluded from these big questions of existence and essence. In *Technics and Time 1*, Stiegler, adopting the deconstructive method of his mentor, Jacques Derrida, reads this movement of technics from outside to inside the question of human being in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the influential paleontologist, André Leroi-Gourhan, and Martin Heidegger. Indeed, Stiegler deconstructs deconstruction “itself,” at least inasmuch as this term refers to Derrida’s own writings on the nature of *différance*. Stiegler’s own philosophy adopts key concepts, methods, and insights from these and other thinkers upon which he concentrates in the ensuing volumes, “correcting” these for their shortcomings in the maintenance of technicity at the center of their considerations. In keeping with the Simondonian notion of individuation introduced above, Stiegler characterizes in interview his relation to his major influences as being “against” them in the dual sense of being both right up close to them and marking out a distinct position in relation to theirs (Stiegler and Gaston 2003: 156).

The Platonic gesture of identifying *techné* with material, and therefore transient, beings which change and pass away, combined with the philosopher’s suspicion of the sophistic manipulation of techniques of oratory and writing, banishes techniques and technical artifactuality to the inessential realm of appearance and the “accidental” (Stiegler 1998: 1). The technical conditions of human existence find themselves on the impermanent and derivative side of the metaphysical divide between the universal, atemporal realm of the apodictic ideal and the world of passing appearances. That the key questions of human being and becoming must be thought through technicity is Stiegler’s principal claim in *Technics and Time 1*. This is because technics are the “origin” of temporal experience as such for the human.

Stiegler finds key insights concerning the nature of the human–technical relation since the industrial revolution in the work of theorists of technological modernity including Bertrand Gilles and Gilbert Simondon. From Simondon, Stiegler adopts, among many other insights,

an understanding of the systemic, autonomous nature of technical development, its ability to result in a new “associated milieu” of its own becoming (1998: 78), and the description of the “evolution” of technical ensembles of elements as a process of “individuation” (Simondon 2007). From Gilles, Stiegler takes the analysis of the inventiveness of the “technical system” and the asynchrony of cultural and political development vis-à-vis mutations in the technical system (Gilles 1978). A significant mutation in the latter brings about a condition of “dis-adjustment” in the former, which Stiegler will take as a key thematic in *Technics and Time 2* under the name of *Disorientation* (the subtitle of that volume). Without subscribing to a technological determinist position – for him there is no value in trying to oppose cultural or technological factors to each other in searching for some original condition of human-technical becoming – he will propose that the constitutive condition of human cultural development is one that is always already dis-adjusted, moving toward a metastabilization that is always conditional. It is a core claim of Stiegler’s work that the “who” and the “what” must not be thought in oppositional terms (Stiegler 1998: 177–8). Human and technics compose together a dynamic of mutual becoming.

Stiegler finds in the pre-Platonic, pre-metaphysical, tragic Greek myth of the origin of the human recounted in the *Protagoras* and elsewhere a precise formulation of the paradoxical condition of human nature, one which seems today to be written across the various contradictions and crises presenting themselves in environmental, bioethical, and political domains (Plato 1991). This condition is one of an essential “prostheticity” in which human being is lacking in essence, that is, is a “being-in-default” of an essence (Stiegler 1998: 188). The myth recounts how when the gods decided to create living creatures the Titans Prometheus and his twin brother Epimetheus were given the job of equipping the different creatures with suitable powers (*dunameis*). Epimetheus, whose name means “forgetting,” “forgetfulness,” and also “idiot,” begged his brother to take over the task. To each living creature he gave qualities to balance out the interplay of the species: “to some creatures strength without speed, and . . . the weaker kinds with speed. Some he armed with weapons, while to the unarmed he gave some other faculty and so contrived means for their preservation” (1998: 186). But when he came at last to the human, Epimetheus found that he had forgotten to reserve any qualities. This is why Prometheus had to steal fire and “the gift of skill in the arts [*ten enteken sophian*]” from Hephaestus and Athena to equip the human with some means of self preservation (1998: 186).

The tragic circumstances in which the human being finds itself as mortal and inessential are given a back-story in this myth. Tragic because these are irrevocable circumstances and, unlike in the Christian account of the fall from grace, not a human failing – a failing precisely to live up to their innate immortality – but a condition of human createdness, that is, mortality. The origin of the human here

is (in) a default of origin: “there will have been nothing at the origin but the fault, a fault that is nothing but the de-fault of origin or the origin as de-fault” (1998: 188). The Platonic account of the permanent realm of Forms, and the doctrine of the transmigration of the soul and of remembering (*anamnesis*) will launch the metaphysical project to forget this default of mortality.

Central to this project is the marginalization of technicity, the conditions in which the human lives and becomes across the generations on the basis of their techniques and technical artifactual supports. This is because, as the myth makes explicit, it is on the basis of *techne* as artificial *dunamis* and the know-how to use it, that humans make up for their lack of essence and so survive and prosper, if always conditionally, temporarily. Human becoming is always historical, contingent and never teleologically predetermined despite the tenacity of the metaphysical envisioning of temporality. Selective adoption of the cultural and technical heritage is crucial, and always political, because the human is not guided by any essential nature to realize its inevitable destiny.

As David Wills has pointed out, Stiegler’s thinking of the prosthetic nature of human being is in keeping with Derrida’s formulation of the logic of supplementarity in *Of Grammatology* (Wills 2006). Stiegler is well aware of this, developing a distinction rather than an opposition to Derrida’s thought of technics as supplement. For Stiegler, Derrida’s notion of the supplement and of *différance* has resources untapped in Derrida’s work. That “*différance* is the history of life in general” is a thought Stiegler takes from Derrida (Stiegler 1998: 137). He argues, however, that in Derrida there is something of an indecision about *différance*, that it tends to be thought from after the rupture between the human and the animal, in the iterations of cultural becoming (1998: 139). The passage from genetic to non-genetic becoming that the human names is a “passage remaining to be thought” (1998: 139). Technicity is in question in this passage in a way that Derrida’s thought of technical supplementarity tends not to address.¹

Having explored the implications of the tragic, pre-philosophical rendering of the default human condition of being-prosthetic, the latter part of *Technics and Time 1* focuses on a close examination of Heidegger’s thinking of technics, time, and existence. For Stiegler, Heidegger is the thinker who went furthest in a sustained effort to reframe the human-technical relation, before retreating to a more familiar metaphysical position in which the poetic capacity of human language articulates a technologically denatured human being with Being (Stiegler 1998: 13). Consequently the early – arguably more post-humanist – Heidegger is a greater resource for Stiegler than his later writings on technology.

This mobilization of Heidegger can be compared intriguingly to Stiegler’s positioning of his analysis vis-à-vis Marxism. If Karl Marx was the first major thinker in the West to call for the analysis of technology as an autonomous, motor force of human development (Stiegler 1998:

2), Stiegler argues that Marxism (Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas) has not been able to think the compositional dynamic of human–technical becoming, resorting to a teleological dialectic based on nature/culture and human/technics oppositions (1998: 10–13). Marx ultimately resorted to articulating the relations of production with the means of production through a dynamic ruled by the contest for ownership. Consequently, Stiegler argues elsewhere, technics never escaped determination as a means of human agency and object of political struggle in Marx’s political economy (Stiegler 2006b: 58). So while one can, as Stiegler himself has done, identify important correspondences between his account of technoculture and one leading from the *Kulturcritik* of the Frankfurt school, Stiegler’s prosthetic conception of human becoming develops a significantly different approach to thinking and acting against the technically conditioned contemporary cultural milieu. It can never be simply a question of ownership of the means of production (and of consumption, that is, marketing), nor one of exposing systematic alienation or reification. People do not simply use tools, or misconceive (or be deceived about) their use; they become (different) in and through the technicities which condition their very existence.

For Stiegler, Heidegger’s existential analytic of *Dasein* as a “being-there,” having fallen into a pre-existing, factual milieu of the “already there,” offers the best resources for considering human being culturally, politically, and in all the spheres of human experience and endeavor never left untroubled by the necessity of having to adopt selectively. *Dasein* lives a (dis)oriented negotiation of mortality, one which unfolds in a dynamic of reciprocal individual and collective individuation, the medium of which is technics.² In *Being and Time* he opens up the possibility of a radical thinking of human technicity in the account of the already there as co-constitutive of *Dasein*’s sense of itself as historical. Instead of realizing this possibility, Heidegger reverts to a more metaphysical thinking of the movement of “historizing in general” that represents for him a more constitutive, originary horizon of human becoming against and beyond a backdrop of technically constrained, inauthentic existence (Stiegler 1998: 288).

For Stiegler, Heidegger fails to follow his own analysis to the realization that technical objects are indispensable to the human experience of time. If as Heidegger argues *Dasein* is time, as temporality, that is, as remembering and anticipating from an always “enchained” present moment, then this is on the basis of its technically conditioned encounter with the world. The tool, the technique – and in this view both language and material objects are co-implicit, composed in human being – are always memories whose deployment is always in anticipation of an outcome. The knapped flint or the hammer preserves the memory of the gestures which produced it. As a medium or milieu of human existence, temporality is constituted out of this anticipatory projection from a past recollected on the basis of technical facticity. The development of tools and techniques specifically dedicated to support memory, which Stiegler calls “mnemotechnics,” from imaging

to storytelling to writing to the digital database, are a specialization of the memorial aspect of every tool.

No cultural transmission, or innovation, no historical, political, or philosophical reflection takes place without this recording of the experiences of past lives that I/we have not ourselves lived. If contemporary technological development poses major cultural and political problems today, it is on the basis of the constitutive relations that always pertain between individual and collective human becoming via the technical milieu in which they become. Consequently it can only be in a thinking of these relations that envisages their recalibration that these problems can seek a viable resolution.

THE MNEMOTECHNICS OF (POST)MODERNITY

The later volumes of *Technics and Time* can be understood as something of a bridge between the primarily philosophically situated thinking of technics and the more contemporary cultural and political orientation of later series such as *Constituer l'Europe* (Constituting Europe), *Mécréance et Discrédit* (Disbelief and Discredit), and *De la Misère Symbolique* (On Symbolic Misery). The bridge is constructed through the enduring attention paid by Stiegler to the processes linking the artifactual exterior systems and the works they produce to the ongoing development of the interior, individual and shared, collective becoming of human being.

In *Technics and Time 2: Disorientation*, photography, the time-based recording first instantiated in gramophone technology (but to become so central to modernity as cinema), and digital communications and media are discussed. In *La Technique et Le Temps 3. Le Temps du Cinéma et la Question du Mal-être* (Technics and Time 3: The Time of Cinema and the Question of Ill-being), cinema is the focus, as a medium in the familiar sense and as the technical basis of subsequent moving audiovisual forms, particularly television which Stiegler, somewhat unfashionably, focuses upon (here and elsewhere) as still the most important apparatus of the “program industries” today. Drawing on Barthes’ classic “ontological” analyses of photography (Barthes 1993), Stiegler thematizes photographic technology in *Technics and Time 2* as the industrially produced recapturing of the past (Stiegler 2009a: 42). This invention intensified the modern dynamic of objectivity and measurable observation, dis-adjusting cultural and social practices, rites and negotiations of experience, memorialization and reproduction. What is particularly significant for Stiegler is how this exteriorizes and makes discrete the experience of the viewing subject as a viewing of its past (which Barthes tell us is implicit in the viewing of every photograph of what has been), on a scale that reforms the mediation of the experience of individual and collective becoming. Passing through the photograph, and the photographic archive, both personal and public, this discretization inaugurates a new mode of the industrial conditioning of memory, and with it, a new range of techniques for selecting, making, reading, and ordering memories – a new phase in

the “grammatization” of experience, recollection, and consciousness (2009a: 41). Cinema is the key multiplier of this phase, one which is discussed here but taken up in more detail in *Technics and Time 3*.

Stiegler will introduce his account of digital technologies by characterizing the contemporary era as one in which the tendency toward the industrialization of memory approaches – if always asymptotically – its conclusion in the monopolizing of the symbolic production regulating cultural, political, and social life by specialist discourses and techniques. The program industries are an exteriorization of the imagination on an industrial scale. Used here by Stiegler in Kantian terms, imagination names the mind’s capacity for accommodating and processing experience according to the interpretative schemas already laid down in the understanding. Stiegler will go on to argue in *Technics and Time 3*, against Kant, that these schemas are not transcendental, but historically and therefore *factually* conditioned (Stiegler 2001a: 78). Indeed it is on this very basis – that is the “faulty” basis of human being as essentially prosthetic – that the industrialization of memory is possible. The latter represents, however, a distinctive and definitive change in the dynamics of exterior–interior co-evolution. It is this which Stiegler insists has not been adequately thought in most critical accounts of technology and culture.

The weakening of a collective negotiation of orienting symbolic production corresponds for Stiegler with the era of consumerism. “After participative ethnic aesthetic forms, the industrial aesthetic opposes producers and consumers of figures, images and symbols...” (Stiegler 2009a: 121). This leads towards a loss of the grounds of social and communal association in favor of industrial prerogatives for sustaining increases in production (and profit) through regulating consumption. These traditionally territorial grounds were ordered via the artifactual forms of spatial and temporal situating that Stiegler names “calendarity” and “cardinality” (2009a: 120).

Drawing on other accounts of information such as those of Alain Minc and Simon Nora (1980) and Jean-François Lyotard (1984), Stiegler describes how it conditions the constitution of temporal experience on the basis of its functioning as a correlation of time and value (Stiegler 2009a: 123–30). This correlation is an economic one based on the speed which is definitive of information as such; old information is not, in economic or technical terms, information any more. In the era of global media communications, information, being nothing without the organizational architecture for its storage, processing, and access, becomes in the hands of a “very small number of producers the *prime material* of memory” from which the selection of what can become eventful is made (2009a: 134). From this selection, under the pressure of the economic need for speed, the “industrial fabrication of the present” is made on an increasingly global scale (2009a: 134).

Realtime is the concept being elaborated in this analysis, in the wake of other formulations (Stiegler cites Derrida here, and Virilio elsewhere). Stiegler’s account of information resembles those of writers such as

N. Katharine Hayles (1999) and Scott Lash (2002) from around the same time. Stiegler's point is that, while it is in general nothing new that a pre-selection operates via technical means in factually given contexts to condition the individual's experience of events, the production under these conditions of the experience and consequently the memory of events for the goal of producing surplus value for a global capitalist system is new. This dynamic threatens to undermine the very credit that enables the system to continue functioning. This "credit" or gain in time, an advance that in the form of money enables the system to continue to project its own progressive continuance, rests on the credence of the audience, that is, the credit they give to the production of significant eventfulness (Stiegler 2009a: 138). The immediacy of the global media event and its corresponding loss of spatiality (of distance, specificity, difference), exacerbated by its increasing pervasiveness, tend to erode the capacity of individuals to memorize, process, and anticipate experience in a coherent, significant fashion. They struggle to continue to exist in relation to a credible, metastable collective against which they can individuate themselves. This tends to open up a dangerous vacuum in the exchanges between the individual and the collective. What will be characterized in later texts as the auto-destructive cycle of global capital is outlined here at the heart of the information age.

The final chapter of *Technics and Time 2* discusses the phonogram as a recording technology that is the first to exactly duplicate the experience of temporal duration. It conducts a rigorous reading of Husserl's efforts to develop a phenomenology of the perception of time. It is reprised in the next volume of the series, becoming the platform for elaborating a theory of cinematic temporality that converges with a critique of its predominant temporalization by Hollywood in the service of global capital. The question of memory becomes the crux of both the theory and its extension into a kind of political economy of consciousness. To Husserl's primary and secondary retention, both interior to consciousness and defining the difference between present perception and the recollection of past presents, Stiegler insists on the prosthetic but no less crucial tertiary retention borne by exterior artifactuality.

In *La Technique et Le Temps 3*, Stiegler insists on the centrality of the question of tertiary retention as the essential supplement of consciousness. The finite, fragmentary, secondary memory of individual consciousness is always already supplemented by the external record accessible through all forms of objective "memory":

cinematogram, photogram, phonogram, writing, painting, sculpture, but also monuments and objects generally, inasmuch as they testify to me about a past that I have not necessarily lived myself. (Stiegler 2001a: 54)

Memory is inside/outside the phenomenological subject, who must be rethought as not essentially the container of phenomena, but as a form

(“me”) that is originally “outside myself” (2001a: 84). Cinema and the audiovisual technologies that come in its wake are a major influence on consciousness because they form a vital part of this “what” that is outside.

The phonograph and then the cinematograph, as the sum of photography and phonography, represent decisive shifts in the tertiary “substrate” of consciousness in the industrial epoch. The cinema, in its predominant, Hollywood manifestation, extends this restructuring of individual and collective becoming. For Stiegler, it instantiates and disseminates a cultural program of the adoption of American identity as a “way of life” (2001a: 163). This “way” was precisely projected as adoptable, because the American industrial system demanded such an adoption of the mass of new immigrants required as labor power in the early decades of the twentieth century.³

Following the global crisis of capitalism from 1929, the attention turned toward the cultivation of the individual less as labor and more as consumer guaranteeing demand for the products of the industrial system. Marketing seizes on the success of the star-system in promoting the cinema and develops techniques, technics, and programs (campaigns) for coordinating consumption with the needs of production through soliciting the attention and desires of consumers.

The success of the cinema as commercial medium is linked to the structural affinities between consciousness and film as forms of temporal experience constructed via montage. In a deliberately quasi- or “atranscendental” analysis – the logic of which should be apparent now as one in which the conceptual and the technical are composed rather than opposed as the sensible and the intelligible, the universal and the historical – Stiegler asserts that the

structure of consciousness is through and through cinematographic, if one calls the cinematographic in general that which proceeds by *the montage of temporal objects*, that is, of objects constituted by their movement. (Stiegler 2001a: 52; Stiegler’s emphasis)

The present of perception, as of the perception of the flow of a film, is a montage of anticipated perceptions built on the changing synthesis of past moments selectively recollected in the metastable continuity sub-tending the flux of perception. The success of the cinema has had a major impact on individual experience worldwide, providing as synthesized, tertiary retentions, the resources for conditioning experiences, significance, and individuation on an industrial scale.

Television adds two additional factors to this: “Through the technique of broadcasting, it allows a mass public to simultaneously watch the same temporal object in all the points of a territory” (2001a: 62). This makes possible the constitution of “mega temporal objects”, which intensify the production of attention as a marketable, calculable commodity for the program industries (2001a: 62). Secondly, “as technique

of capture and *live retransmission*, it allows this public to live collectively and in all the points of a territory the event so “captured” at the very moment it takes place . . .” (2001a: 62). However constructed (and deconstructible) this liveness might be, these two effects come to “transform the nature of the event itself and the most private aspects of the lives of the inhabitants of the territory” (2001a: 62). This includes, and as a principal tendency, the erosion discussed above of the territory as ground of significant eventfulness.

I claimed that for the purpose of Stiegler’s argument it does not matter that television for the most part is not “live.” It is well known that liveness is almost always a simulacrum, eminently deconstructible in its preprocessing of images and sounds, its mixing of direct and delayed or stock footage, all its anchoring and mediating techniques, and so on. It does not matter for the purposes of Stiegler’s account of its predominant reception. This is because the assumption or expectation of liveness is what conditions the experience television is able to generate, an expectation routinely “confirmed” through live broadcasts of sporting or other “special” events.

It follows from Stiegler’s insistence on the programmatic role culture plays in pre-selecting our encounter with phenomena that a default reception of television (as with other media) conditions our experience and understanding of the audiovisual signals transmitted to our receivers. Stiegler identifies this as belonging to the “passive synthesis” that we adopt as part of our cultural moorings (2001a: 54). In fact these cultural presets comprise a dual synthesis negotiating between the technical synthesis of a dynamic ensemble of technological developments cross-fertilizing and crystallizing as a new technical set of possibilities, and the formation of an (always metastable) collective consensus about their use and significance. This latter he describes as the cultural “doubling” of a technical innovation, one with which it is composed and which contributes to its ongoing elaboration (Stiegler 2009a: 94). His analysis of television is at pains to challenge these assumptions of liveness and the delivery of an immediate presentness to the telespectator.

But for Stiegler there is no point in proposing an account which would be the truth of television with the assumption that this would somehow open people’s eyes to its real significance and potential as a technology and lead to a correct deployment of it. Television, as a technology, and the human with which it is composed, are becoming and at best metastable. Its predominant significance is of course deconstructible, but what is important is deciding how to inflect its iteration against itself. Interpretation is always a question of selecting what aspects and elements of the phenomena are important to pay attention to according to what criteria. Ethical and political decisions about what is valuable or damaging in the cultural heritage are required in developing these criteria.

PASSAGES TO ACTIVISM

A movement toward increasingly direct engagement in contemporary technocultural politics is evident in Stiegler's more recent writings, professional entailments, and other organized activities. It is a movement toward the redoubling of the dual synthesis of the predominant adoptions of the systems comprising our technical milieu that Stiegler pursues (Stiegler 2009a: 95). This redoubling is something he associates with the reflexive, critical potential fostered in functioning cultural formations via the interplay between individual adoptions of technical resources and their "programmed" employment. The norms and routine procedures of culture were all once singular, idiosyncratic reproductions of existing norms and standards.

To this end, Stiegler has been involved in innovations in digital media and communications use and modification with the aim of promoting an increased "bottom-up" critical adoption of "top-down" technical development. He leads the Institut de Recherche et d'Innovation, a branch of the Centre George Pompidou's Department of Cultural Development, which he founded in 2006. IRI has a creative studio, research seminar, and dissemination program aligned with the Centre's exhibition program. Its overall brief, however, is to pursue its own education, research, and commercial partnerships. A primary aim of these is the fostering of user agency in the adoption of new media technologies. More recently, Stiegler and other IRI participants have couched this in terms of a renovation of the nineteenth-century notion of the amateur (Puig 2008–2009). For instance, activities promoting collaborative debate and online co-production of a review, entitled *L'Amateur*, constitute one aspect of IRI's activities. As a selective appropriation of a nineteenth-century discourse, emerging in a period where a progressive proletarianization made workers into "labor-power," the amateur is being cultivated to address the second proletarianization that Stiegler discusses in the interview in this volume (and elsewhere), that turning the citizen into "consumer-power" available for the needs of the system of production (Stiegler 2008).

IRI's "Timelines" project is aimed in this vein at inventing software tools for viewing, analyzing, and commenting on films and audiovisual media works. In the context of the expansion of digital video-making via domestic digital video cameras, nonlinear editing software on personal computers, and distribution via online video-sharing sites, the Timelines project attempts to provide a means for the enhancement of critical production on and around film and digital cinema. This fosters the cultural redoubling of technical shifts so that the new movement in personal video production might not simply double the mainstream norms of moving image production and reception. Modeled on the form of interface found in digital editing software, Timelines enables a shot by shot analysis of a film, providing the means for the statistical tracking of various characteristics such as image shot attributes (duration, camera angle and scale, color and lighting values), character appearances, and larger structural elements such as narrative segments and other

sequential determinations. Annotations can be added to these analyses, or contributed to existing ones in an online co-production of a reading of the film. The user can also experiment with different arrangements of the film structure or shot elements in their own hypothetical timeline(s).

Stiegler's more polemical, engaged publications of recent years present a symmetrical diagnosis of the contemporary technocultural milieu as one which is becoming increasingly "toxic" due to a progressive inhibition of the process of cultural redoubling.⁴ In series such as *Mécréance et Discrédit* (Disbelief and Discredit) and *De la misère symbolique* (On Symbolic Misery), as well as in numerous other books, Stiegler draws on the resources of his philosophical work to argue the necessity for a wide-ranging reorientation of industrial, social, and political structures. In the newest of these series, *Prendre Soins* (Taking Care), he asks rhetorically why there is no recognition that, in the terrain of the cultural milieu in which individuals become, what is needed is something akin to the efforts now gaining momentum internationally to rethink economic, institutional, and cultural approaches to the physical environment in the face of the crisis caused by industrial pollution (Stiegler 2008: 83). In *De la misère symbolique* the theme is "hypercapitalism" and its spiral of increasingly short-term speculation (on financial, property, and product innovation markets). The production of consumption to sustain this short-term gain cycle via the program industries substitutes marketing-designed desires for new products and services for the processes of the formation of cultural affiliations. These affiliations – from the ancient Greek *philia*, love – condition individual desire in relation to longer-term rhythms of the collective's becoming.

Extending his adoption of Simondon's work on individuation toward a more explicit cultural critique – for him this is what Simondon himself was unable to achieve despite the value of his account of technical individuation – Stiegler elaborates in these series a diagnosis of the malfunctioning of the dynamic of psychic and collective individuation. The balance between the "synchronizing" tendency of the collective and the "diachronizing" capacity of the individual element to adopt and reinvent the synchrony is upset by the massive effort of marketing to regulate desires in the interests of the amortization of investment. A destabilizing vacillation between hyper-synchronization (extreme political formations, fundamentalist religious movements, security states, repressive "tough on crime" legislative programs, etc.) and hyper-diachronization (individual atomization, community and familial breakdown, criminal associations, gated communities, addictive and sociopathological behaviors, etc.) is the dangerous result.⁵

Mécréance et Discrédit develops this critical diagnostic with a focus on the production and evolution of desire and filiation in the individual and between individual and collectives. A disbelief in living as a worthwhile process of inheriting and passing on values through one's acts and interactions is thematized as a loss of value arising from the becoming-calculable of everything in the "hypermarket" of consumption-based exchange. Desire is liquidated in such a social

milieu, and with it the value of the society itself, along with its members as they become “disaffected” in the generalized equating of all values with purchasable services, experiences, and commodities (Stiegler 2006a: 117–22). The system is unsustainable – and consequently the very opposite of “progress” – inasmuch as its efforts to design desire try to regulate by rendering calculable the unconscious component in the composition of individual becoming. Stiegler’s claim is that the implementing of this strategy will always fail and, moreover, it tends to destroy desire as such.

In *Mécréance et Discrédit 3: L’esprit perdu du capitalisme* (Disbelief and Discredit 3: The Lost Spirit of Capitalism), Stiegler develops a reading of psychoanalysis that, like his philosophical interventions, resituates the question of technics vis-à-vis its central claims in order to renovate its critical potential. He argues that desire must be understood in terms of its “originary technicity” inasmuch as it is always deflected onto an exterior object, arising from an originary default always supplemented by culturally, that is technically, conditioned objects (Stiegler 2006b: 12). The management and marketing strategies of hypercapital are possible only on this basis. Desire is historical, cultural, and adoptable in its composing of the biological and cultural elements of the individual in the ongoing epiphylogenetic becoming of the collective. Hypercapitalist regulation of consumption patterns represents, however, what Derrida would call the autoimmune tendency of capital to destroy itself: “capitalism, which only survives through desire, destroys it” (2006b: 36). This is what engenders disaffection in the individual and “disindividuation” as the breakdown of social and cultural processes. The pleasure principle/reality principle negotiation which constitutes the process of sublimation at the heart of becoming a socialized human being – which negotiation Stiegler translates into the synchronizing/diachronizing dynamic composing the process of individuation – gives way to a desublimation that “liberates” the dangerous potential of the pulsions. These emerge as significant destabilizing forces in cultural and political collective dynamics (2006b: 74).⁶

Ideas, values, goals, indeed all objects of desire are produced through this process of sublimation, and always on the basis and the condition of the technocultural factual existence in which one comes to live. The psyche is always composed in its becoming with the social as it is made available in and through the technocultural milieu. These objects of desire are projections, existing only on a “plane of consistence” on the basis of factual existence, whether they be ideas like justice, the perfect political organization, a romantic partner, the toy that will give the most enjoyment, and so forth. Unlike Platonic ideals, however, they do not transcend the material, factual history of technicity in which desire has always already developed as a motive force in the interiority of a constitutively prosthetic, externally supported, becoming. This is why Stiegler’s activism is directed at rethinking industrial models of production and consumption via strategies involving a reinvestment of both workers and consumers in the processes of making and using.

Political responsibility lies in fostering the conjugation of the individual and the collective in a renewed technocultural program that counters the autoimmune tendency that threatens the very milieu of human becoming on a psychic, social, as well as environmental basis today.

Prendre Soins 1: De la jeunesse et des générations (Taking Care 1: Of Youth and the Generations) is the most developed articulation of this alternate program. It calls for a selective reanimation of the Enlightenment project of pursuing individual and social perfectibility through the “public use” of one’s reason via techniques of critical reading and writing (Stiegler 2008: 51). It insists, however, on the importance for any cultural critique or political intervention today of thinking of criticality, indeed of intelligence itself, as historical. The social and technical conditions in which Kant outlined the goal of promoting the passage to a state of “majority” – exiting from a “minority” condition of ignorance, dependence, and passivity – for an increasing part of the population, are no longer the same. New challenges to pursuing this goal exist today, for Stiegler none greater than in the rise of the model of the consumer as predominant orientation to existence supporting the maintenance of an outdated industrial model.

He argues the need for collective, political action to cause a refocusing of collective attention on the erosion of the circuits and practices of attention paid to the task of forming the attention of younger generations. The success of the program industries in channeling attention according to the needs of industrial capital for ever-renewed consumption tends to monopolize the time required for this process of formation. Stiegler discusses this in terms of a passage from the milieu of “psycho-techniques” of attentional development – writing, reading, storytelling and fabulation, playful interaction between the generations – to that of “psycho-technologies” of the mediatic solicitation of engagements in marketing-directed milieus of experience. The nature and implications of this evolution in the production and deployment of “psycho-power” is what remains unthought, in his view, in Foucault’s account of “bio-power” in *The History of Sexuality* and elsewhere (Foucault 1988, 1990). The compositional dynamic of mind and exterior, mnemotechnical forms is not adequately addressed in Foucault’s preference to think the discursive regulation of bodies as bio-economic resources for capital.

CRITICAL RESPONSES

The critical reception of Stiegler’s work has been relatively limited to date given the delay in the publication of English translations of his first major series, *Technics and Time*. There are, however, substantial responses to his project in some Anglophone disciplinary contexts. The more receptive of these have attempted to unpack and/or apply his hypotheses on technicity or particular engagements with major philosophical positions (Crogan 2006, 2007; Ross 2006, 2007a, 2007b). Ben Roberts works at a careful examination of Stiegler’s relationship to Heidegger and Derrida’s work (Roberts 2005, 2006). Working from the terrain of

film and media studies, Roberts considers, for instance, Stiegler's interventions in the theorization of cinematic technics for their potential to reinvigorate both contemporary philosophy and film theory. Mark Hansen mobilizes Stiegler as an important contributor to his efforts to develop theoretical models for better approaching new media and how they recast spatiotemporality today (Hansen 2006). Stiegler anchors his considerations of the way new media demand a reconsideration of cultural and aesthetic frameworks of the spatiotemporal experience in general and the reception of media works in particular. This is not without a critical element; in *New Philosophy for New Media* Hansen contests Stiegler's "neo-Husserlian" account of cinematic perception as too narrowly centered on human memory (Hansen 2004: 255–7).

The most strident critical responses so far have come from more explicitly Derridean ripostes to Stiegler's negotiated departure from the orbit of his mentor. A review of the English translation of *Technics in Time 1* by Geoffrey Bennington set the tone in 1996, casting that book as exhibiting a problematic, positivist tendency to misread Derridean *différance* in terms of technics, rather than the other way round (Bennington 1996). This is seen as tending to smuggle in a renewed transcendental, universalizing concept of human technicity for what in Derrida's thought would and must remain deconstructible. For his part, David Wills sees Stiegler's work as an important contribution to thinking technology deconstructively (Wills 2006). Wills concentrates on his sustained effort to think the technical conditioning of human temporality in an at best metastable dynamic. The question of speed, of the speeds technics make possible for human becoming and the speed of the technical dynamic with and through which the human is composed in time, is at the center of this effort. Ultimately, however, Wills argues that Stiegler tends to forget the importance of language in the human mediation of technicity. He forgets the "rhetorical speed" that conditions technical becoming itself (2006: 257). Wills reasserts the preeminence of a Derridean thought of linguistic *différance* as site and vehicle of the promise of a deconstructive reinvention of the human to come over Stiegler's repositioning of language as composed with other technics on the interior/exterior border between the human and the technical.

Wills is susceptible to the claim that he is "shooting the messenger" here. As he himself points out, Stiegler "performs" the kind of linguistic "redoubling" of technics in his work, all the while following Derrida's lead in pointing to the troubling tendency toward an instrumental "deconstruction" of language operating in the contemporary technical milieu of the information age.⁷

Arguably it is Ulrik Ekman's critique of the *Technics and Time* series, published among the set of essays addressing Stiegler's work in a recent issue of *Parallax* that offers the most comprehensive consideration of his rethinking of technology (Ekman 2007). In "Of Transductive Speed – Stiegler," Ekman situates his project in post-structuralist, philosophy of technology, and media theory contexts. He gives an account, not

unlike that of Wills, of Stiegler's thematization of the speed of technical objects and technical evolution at the center of his analysis of technical temporalization. He identifies ways in which Stiegler's account of the originary technicity of the human oscillates between two poles. These are a post-human engagement with the technical object as autonomous element whose evolutionary dynamic exceeds (or precedes) a human-centered articulation, and one that returns compulsively to mourn the loss of a full human essence nonetheless understood as having never been constituted.

Ekman identifies, for instance, and quite rightly I would argue, Paul Virilio as a kind of "grey eminence" in the *Technics and Time* series (Ekman 2007: 53). Concepts drawn from Virilio such as "lighttime" and the "false day" of realtime media and communications are significant for Stiegler's account of the contemporary technical milieu even if his critical engagement with Virilio is limited. As Stiegler himself notes, among others (Bennington 1996; Cubitt 2000; Wills 2006; Ekman 2007;) Virilio's work relies on certain humanist critical assumptions concerning the nature of human being while also striving to think "at the speed of" contemporary technical developments that destabilize the continuing pertinence, if not legitimacy of such assumptions. The struggle has echoes in Stiegler, echoes which Ekman reads as symptomatic of the oscillation between transcendental and empirical tendencies in his approach to technicity.

Ekman sees in Stiegler the undelivered upon promise for a detailed encounter with contemporary mediatic and technoscientific becomings that would be better able to characterize how "'our' life-form co-exists with autonomous intelligent agents and creative self-organizing machines in the epoch that is of 'us' but also of biotechnology and pervasive computing" (2007: 60). Instead, Ekman sees Stiegler's analyses of specific technologies and technical developments as selectively privileging a consideration of how these have both reiterated the prosthetic default of human origin and intensified the challenges these developments have posed to human becoming. The stakes for Stiegler are the maintenance of the latter in a manner still recognizable as the basis of existing cultural or political programs.

What Ekman sees as a weakness can be seen as precisely Stiegler's strength from a point of view privileging cultural political considerations. This is because the "tragedy" of originary technicity is indeed never completed. The "default" of the human is not an historical event, it is history: what to become is a question that lasts as long as the human. If the human still exists – and Stiegler's work poses this question in general, preferring to believe in an affirmative answer for now – history is the negotiation of originary technicity. Ekman (and, in this light, Wills and Bennington) may be right in signaling that Stiegler does not escape the aporias that beset any critical discourse trying to decide how to conceptualize human events and phenomena and evaluate their historical development. His critical activism emerges out of a selective adoption of the writings and other mnemotechnical

records available to him in his experience. In this regard, Ekman and the Derridean critics fail to think the importance of Simondon for Stiegler and the implications of his conjugation of the latter's thought of the dynamic of individuation with a rethinking of social and cultural becoming always mediated through technical evolution. This is where the critical mobilization of a deconstructive, aporetic tradition emerges in his thought. Rather than tarrying in the undecidable impossibility haunting critical engagement, or the thought of an unthinkable future, or pursuing a fascinated tracing of autonomous technical poesis toward a (hopefully) non-threatening co-existence, Stiegler's past has led him to pursue a cultural and increasingly political questioning of the adoption and redoubling of technical becoming.

IN THIS ISSUE

This special issue seeks to explore and extend Anglophone critical engagement with the cultural and political dimensions of Stiegler's enterprise. In particular it wants to draw out the significance of Stiegler's thinking of the transductive interrelationship of culture and politics through his work on technicity. An interview with Stiegler exploring these themes follows this introduction. Stiegler explains his conceptualization of cultural politics and why it is key to his analysis of contemporary crises – social, economic, and environmental. He situates his work in relation to the problematization of the conventional spectrum of left and right political positions and talks about how his more recent publishing and public activities proceed from his account of the necessity to invent a viable cultural program for inter-generational reengagement with the technical milieu beyond the widespread disenchantment with social and political processes.

Following that, "Telecracy against Democracy" is the first chapter of a book with the same title published in 2006 in the lead up to the French presidential elections of 2007. Stiegler argues the need for politicians to address themselves to the current situation as one in which politics itself, as a viable democratic process, is rendered increasingly unviable by the prevailing "telecratic" conditions of cultural and political communication. Dominated by the logics and techniques of marketing, and submitting all discourse to the demands of the audiovisual program industry formats (news grabs, sound bites, slogans, talk shows) and now, increasingly appropriating new media fora such as blogs and other peer-to-peer networks, political discourse today is the simulacrum of authentic political interaction. Stiegler sees contemporary audiovisual technological media, however, as both source of threat to democracy – in their capacity as telecratic organs of political power – and as locus of potentially new forms of "social bond and civil peace."

Richard Beardsworth was co-translator of Stiegler's *Technics and Time 1* and was one of the earliest critical theorists to identify and evaluate the significance of Stiegler's work as a movement beyond that of his mentor, Jacques Derrida (Beardsworth 1996). In "Technology and Politics: A Response to Bernard Stiegler," Beardsworth reassesses

Stiegler's work in relation to its more recent trajectory toward an engaged activism. He focuses on Stiegler's re-reading of Marx and Freud through the overarching theme of technicity. Reiterating his earlier accounts of the value and strategic importance of Stiegler's intervention into the thinking of the political in the contemporary context of globalized economy and technoculture, Beardsworth nonetheless identifies what he sees as limits in Stiegler's evaluation of the key dynamics of the contemporary crises of politics and society. What amounts to a tendency toward a technological determinist position is discernible, he argues, in Stiegler's selective adoption of Marxist political economy and Freudian accounts of desire and the unconscious.

The artwork commissioned for this issue is by New York-based Russian artist, Yevgeniy Fiks. These paintings cite a series of Hollywood propaganda films from the World War Two years that portray in a positive light Stalin's Soviet Union as the USA's ally against Nazi Germany. Resonating with Stiegler's account of Hollywood's role in orienting the adoption of beliefs and values, Fiks's images remind us of the selective, situated, and programmatic character of this industrialized imagining of collective commonality. They also demonstrate the idiosyncratic potential of the artist's revisiting of the cultural archive to reflect on and refigure the significance of that imagining for a different, globalized technocultural moment.

Ian James's "Bernard Stiegler and the Time of Technics" provides a perceptive commentary on the substantial philosophical and critical platform that Stiegler erects in the *Technics and Time* series. Crucial aspects of Stiegler's encounters with Husserl, Heidegger, Derrida, and Virilio on the themes of technics, time, and their interrelation are examined and evaluated. James is able to show how Stiegler develops his position by composing insights from these thinkers in a critical recombination that focuses on the way that technicity plays a crucial if problematic role in each of their projects. The elaboration of Stiegler's relation to Derrida is especially valuable (and lucid) in this regard, given that this frame is the most influential one (for very good reasons) in the initial Anglophone reception of Stiegler's work.

The issue also presents some material concerning another of Stiegler's central inspirations, Gilbert Simondon. Partly due to Stiegler's mobilization of his work, and partly due to his influence on Gilles Deleuze, interest in Anglophone contexts in Simondon's difficult and to date untranslated major texts has grown in recent years.⁸ "The Limits of Human Progress: A Critical Study" is a translation of a short essay by Simondon written in the late 1950s. In this essay, Simondon's groundbreaking insistence on making philosophical thought adopt a systemic approach to understanding human being is in evidence. Simondon develops a schematic but breathtakingly ambitious and thought-provoking hypothesis about the passage and pitfalls of human progress from ancient through to contemporary times as a succession of overlapping and interrelated concretizations; from linguistic to religious to technological. The grounds both for Stiegler's interest in

and differentiation from Simondon's complex teleology are discernible in this text.

In "What New Humanism Today?" Jean-Hugues Barthélémy provides an overview to Simondon's project that characterizes it as offering a "difficult humanism" in response to the crisis in humanistic, Enlightenment tradition thought in the post-World War Two period. Through a complex consideration of what might today be characterized as the two major tendencies in "post-humanist" theory – reconceiving human being in relation to animal and other biological being, and thinking the paradoxical centrality yet autonomy of technology to human being and becoming – Simondon sought to reformulate framings of human history, culture, and politics. Barthélémy shows how Simondon sought to replace a Marxist understanding of an historical dynamic of labor exploitation and alienation with a more "difficult" thought of the composed dynamics of human and technical "individuals." Stiegler's work is characterized correctly by Barthélémy as working explicitly and constantly in dialogue with Simondon's compositional thinking of human-technical becoming. In the final contribution to this issue, Chris Turner has reviewed the first volume in Stiegler's recently launched book series, *Prendre Soins 1: De la jeunesse et des générations* (Taking Care 1: Of Youth and the Generations). Turner situates this book – discussed above and in the interview with Stiegler – in relation to the itinerary of Stiegler's critical activities toward the current French cultural and political context. He develops some reflections on the significance and merits of Stiegler's criticism of Foucault's influential notion of bio-power for neglecting what Stiegler sees as the crucial dimension of globally mediated "psycho-power."

NOTES

1. Stiegler evaluates the place of technics in Derrida's work in "Derrida and Technology: Fidelity at the Limits of Deconstruction and the Prosthesis of Faith" (Stiegler 2001b). While Derrida is a key resource for Stiegler, his commitment to "philosophy in action" will lead him to engage in contemporary technological debates in a more practically, explicitly politically oriented manner than the later works of his mentor. See the contributions by Beardsworth and James in this issue for more detailed discussions of Stiegler's relation to Derrida.
2. Stiegler associates Heidegger's decision to align himself with Nazism, and his inability to complete the project begun by *Being and Time*, with his failure to pursue the consequences of his thinking of facticity politically or philosophically in his life and work (Stiegler 1998: 208; Stiegler and Gaston 2003: 158).
3. Stiegler's account is somewhat reductive in its failure to consider the Eurocentric delimitation of this program of adoption, readable in the complex of de facto and de jure exclusions of indigenous American, African, and Asiatic ethnicities from this program of national identity well into the twentieth century.

4. This environmental idiomatics of toxicity and pollutants resembles that of Neil Postman in *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992) and in research around media ecologies inspired by Postman. For Stiegler, the challenge today is to compose a more durable milieu of becoming through critical and creative inflections of technicity's predominant tendencies.
5. This analysis is concisely summarized in *Acting Out* (Stiegler 2009b).
6. Stiegler develops this psychoanalytic analysis in an important commentary on Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* and its influence on the May 1968 movement.
7. See *Of Grammatology* where Derrida situates his project as offering an alternative to a more instrumental deconstruction already underway in the cybernetic milieu of 1960s' technoscience (1967: 10).
8. Work on an English translation of *L'individuation psychique et collective: A la lumière des notions de Forme, Information, Potential et Métastabilité* (the 2007 re-released French edition with Stiegler's introduction) is understood to be in train at the time of writing.

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