Detox Politics: Thinking-Salving the Retreat of the Public
Gerald Moore in conversation with Bernard Stiegler[1]

Translation by Joost de Bloois

Gerald Moore: We've been given the brief to talk about contemporary politics, a withdrawal from politics, disillusionment, retreat in the political sphere, which, in turn, links to questions of demotivation and voter apathy. I think we can enlarge that frame of reference and make some connections with fake news and the structuring of the technology market that underpins our contemporary political discourse. That will bring us back, in due course, to a particular question that I've been working on with regard to technology addiction.

Perhaps it would be useful to start this question by asking what we mean by politics and the public, the sphere from which we might retreat into a space of withdrawal in the first place. I remember thinking, when I first read your two-volume *Symbolic Misery* (2014), that this is ultimately a kind of response to Jacques Rancière's *Le Partage du sensible* (2000; english translation 2004), which you confirmed to me. Why that becomes so important is because one of the fundamental (though not very explicit) ideas in Rancière's essay is that, for politics to take place, there has to be a basic agreement in place about what it is that a given population is experiencing. Rancière calls this a "common *aisthesis*." (see 2001) Community, in other words, is organized around a sharing of experience. We can differ, to some extent, in our interpretations of what exactly that experience consists in, and Rancière is emphatic that dissensus is even necessary. But - and he doesn't really make this point himself - there has to be an object, or as Bruno Latour (2017) has more recently put it, there has to be a shared world, common to all involved, for some kind of commensurable dialogue to emerge between differing perspectives.

This question of shared experience is profoundly technological. If we go back and look at the anthropological-historical records, we will see that communities have always already been structured around the technologies that they have in place for the creation of an experiential common ground. In Simondonian terms (Simondon 2007), we would say that politics begins with a *fonds préindividuel*, a pre-individual ground of experience common to the members of a community-in-making, which serves as the starting point of transindividuation. This is also the manifold of experience that Kant thought schematized and categorized into meaningful content by the transcendental subject. From a more post-Kantian, Lévi-Straussian perspective, we'd say that the schemata through which we process this manifold into the shared norms and organizational principles of society, are in fact profoundly technological, phenomeno- and cosmotechnically produced by technologies that generate perceptual norms, cultural categories of experience and so on.

Politics has always consisted not in a shared consensus that is already given, but in the continual creation and recreation of a shared aesthetic basis, one that is dependent on the technologies that organize and structure society. Once we accept this idea, we can see that this

shared aesthetic base, over the course of technological history, is always being reinvented, eroded. Corresponding to this process, we pass through moments of recreation of the public and the retreat, fragmentation and disillusionment of political space, which, in turn, we can map onto the history of technology and philosophy. Plato, for instance, coincides with the transition from oral to written society; Kant with the transition from the pre-Gutenberg galaxy to the world of mass-publishing and books; and you, Bernard Stiegler, with the digital age, spanning both the initial optimism it engendered, but more specifically also the more recent wave of technological disillusion and disadjustment. With every technological revolution, we can observe something like an opening phase of optimistic affirmation – think Manuel Castells (1996) in the age of digital globalization, which is then followed by a retreat of politics: a withdrawal from political participation, into some kind of hermetic space of retreat.

I've done some work quite recently (2020) on the idea that what we have above all in Plato is, on the one hand, a commentary on the collapse of the polis, which can be traced back to the shift from oral to written society; and, on the other, an attempt to generate philosophy as a discourse for the regeneration of the public. Of particular interest, there, to me, is what happens to the Athenian ruling classes once we move into an age of writing. The old Athenian aristocracy had dominated the military with their martial fighting style of frenzy and hubris. It is increasingly argued that more-than-functional literacy became the pre-condition of participation in the government of the polis. The new literate classes push the aristocrats out to the margins, only to retreat into their symposia to spend their time getting drunk and intoxicated. Here is where you start to see Plato's sustained discourse on the weakness of the will and the need to recreate some kind of viable public space, no longer governed by drunkenness, but one to be governed by the rational deliberations of philosophy instead.

As I have shown elsewhere (2019), something similar happens in the age of Kant, whose writings also exhibit a fear of what we might call the automation of the nervous system, or proliferations of intoxication and addiction. At the end of the fifth century BC, when the Athenians start to retreat, they start to let their thought-processes get automated by their intoxications. The anxiety that Kant is dealing with at the time of the Enlightenment is that the newly emerging technology of the book is automating the thought of the population in a way that renders citizens both uncritical and docile. We see in Flaubert and Stendhal that there is a sustained fear over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of literacy spreading to the working classes and women; of the untrained reader retreating to the bath or masturbating in bed while reading some novel that fills their head with ideas that they haven't been properly taught to engage with. A similar thing happens in the Middle Ages with the shift from Latin to vernacular writing: the novel becomes a mechanism for withdrawing into a private space away from the respectable sphere of the public, and into some unpoliceable realm that suddenly stokes up a great deal of concern. Until very recently there was a real tendency to look at eighteenth and nineteenth century debates over novel addiction as just pure fantasy and metaphor. But if we look back at that period of technological change in light of the period that we are now going through with digital technology and digital addiction, we can see it as a clear precursor: an analogous retreat from the public sphere of politics into the zone opened up by technology. Of course, the contemporary zone is scarcely private. Rather, public space has been recreated as a highly fragmented set of quite often incommensurable and non-overlapping echo chambers that we enter into by means of our mobile phones, all of which gets done in the

kind of spirit of retreat from the anxiety and stress that is inextricable from technological change.

An increasingly prevalent idea in the neuroscience, anthropology and social psychology of addiction, but also in the sociology of technology, is that retreat into addiction should no longer be thought along the lines of twentieth-century model of a "diseased" dopamine system. (see for example Lewis 2015) Newer research points to addiction being a strategy for coping with environmental trauma. (see Alexander 2010; and Schüll 2014) There is a very interesting idea that comes out of Georges Canguilhem (1991), where he references the biology of Kurt Goldstein. The organism will get to a point when its stress levels are so high that it withdraws into itself, and it is no longer capable of nesting and creating its own milieu. The survival function springs to the fore and everything else gets put on the backburner. Now this is, I think, something else that really becomes for us a key question when we look at contemporary forms of retreat from politics.

There is another idea from contemporary biology that I'll bring in very briefly, and that is the theory of Darwinian populations, developed by Peter Godfrey-Smith (2011). Godfrey-Smith will argue that, if we begin at the level of the cell, in the first instance, multiple different cells will compete with one another for nutrients and resources. However, over time, those cells will form a new collective organization, an organ, an organism, and, ceasing to compete with one another, will "de-Darwinize." Daniel Dennett (2017) has reprised this idea to argue that culture is de-Darwinized: society or culture, as a whole, will absorb the selection pressure acting on its component members, for example through a welfare state, or just through the norms of non-violence imposed on its members. But neither Godfrey-Smith nor Dennett talks about re-Darwinization, the idea that de-Darwinization is a reversible process, where the suspension of selection pressures can also give rise to new forms of culture that heighten selection pressures. Referencing Bertrand Gille (1986), we can say that when we pass through rapid technological change, the rapidity of change exerts new kinds of environmental selection pressure, causing a collapse and re-Darwinization of previously de-Darwinized social spaces, which in turn pushes people back into this Canguilhemian-Godsteinian position of self-defense, mental survival and adaptation above all else. We are then no longer in a position where we can generate the norms that structure our own environment and are simply increasingly forced to adapt to whatever circumstances get thrown in our direction.

That is another provisional link to addiction: when we retreat from the stress of the public sphere into our Athenian symposia, into our eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel-reading in bath, into our twenty-first century mobile phones and internet echo chambers, we are basically reacting to, and seeking some kind of anxiolytic, therapeutic retreat from the exhaustive selection pressures that are being placed on us by the contemporary technological climate.

Bernard Stiegler: The first philosophers to have asked these questions – I mean in the modern world, after Kant obviously, whom you referred to just now and to whom I will return – the first to have argued that capitalism was entangled with a system of addictions, were Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who in *Dialectics of Enlightenment* [orig. 1944] already saw how the effects of cinema and radio worked. They anticipated what they call "a new kind of

barbarism" (2007, ixv) with the introduction of television. They do not speak of "addiction," they speak of *Dummheit*, foolishness or stupidity. (2007, passim)

Something of merit appeared with television. I was born with a television because my father built one the year I was born, in 1952. I discovered literature, theatre, politics, cinema, Aeschylus, Sophocles thanks to television. And I remember how Georges Bataille, at 20:30 one evening in 1958, presented *Literature and Evil* on a TV program! All that has degenerated since François Mitterrand invited Berlusconi to start a television network, which in the end did not work out, fortunately, because Berlusconi did not understand French culture. But it bears repeating: it was not Nicolas Sarkozy who brought Berlusconi to France, but Mitterrand and the Socialist Party. This shows the level of political carelessness of the French left. When the world wide web went public on April 30 1993, many people, not least myself, thought it spelled the chance to break the consumerist logic of late-capitalism and what we then called mass media with the world wide web. At the time, I was working for the French National Library to develop a workstation, and in that context we were trying to develop a search engine. We exchanged texts that we annotated and we thought that digital networking opened up a downright revolutionary opportunity to create a new industry, one that, in 2005, we called 'ars industrialis'*,* dealing with technologies of the mind and spirit. At the same time, free software communities were working with the same approach; that is ultimately how free software was born. The internet enabled all sorts of free software contributors, hackers, peer-to-peer communities, to proliferate and, for about ten years, this was very fruitful. We created *Ars Industrialis* in that context.[2] By 2005 we had 40,000 subscribers. It was incredible! That was the power of the world wide web*:* if you knew how to use it well, it had great potential. *Ars Industrialis* entered the public debate very quickly because we knew, thanks to Philippe Aigrain, how to make use of search engines. But it was already too late! Facebook was about to go mainstream a year later, then smartphones appeared. What we then called the *social web*, or web 2.0, became social networks, and platform culture emerged.

The history of mankind is a history of shocks. The great shocks, at first, are millions of years apart. These are not even shocks in the sense that is meaningful to us. Leroi-Gourhan (1993, 92–97; 74–77), for example, writes on the double-edged chopper: now *that* was a technological shock. At a given moment a splitting occurred, I don't know the exact dates, but we're thinking in the order of a million years ago, and this transformation affected the human brain, not simply in terms of its electrochemical activity, but also its physiology, which resulted in the development and unfolding of the "cortical fan." When there is a technological shock, there is always a moment of retraction, which can be a form of regression in the Nietzschean or Deleuzian sense. We can, in this respect, see something regressive in the current "yellow vests" [*gilets jaunes*] movement. But one could also see it differently. Leroi-Gourhan, for example, argues in the second volume of *Gesture and Speech* (1993), that in every society there are figures of withdrawal (monks, priests, hermits, artists), who create their own niches and cut themselves off from the outside world. Crucially, without them, there could not be society.

That is what I have tried to theorize with the concept of "epochal redoubling" (Stiegler 2008, 7). When there is a shock, a new *pharmakon* emerges, or a new constellation of

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[2] Ars Industrialis is Stiegler's "association internationale pour une politique industrielle des technologies de l'esprit." For more information, see: http://www.arsindustrialis.org/

pharmaka appears, which results in the destruction of the existing circuits of transindividuation. The advent of MP3 *peer-to-peer* has destroyed the copyright system, the entire culture industry, which generates all sorts of mobilizations. I have always argued that we have to defend copyright *and* we have to overcome it: in order to defend the copyright system, we need to change it, to turn it into something more efficient, more spiritual, more noetic. And that is the ambition that we at *Ars industrialis* had concerning digital technologies, including television, radio and so on. And we failed, by the way. It is important to remind ourselves that we failed. Anyway, the epochal redoubling always consists of two moments: first, there is a shock that destroys the existing circuits of transindividuation, and rightly so. With Marx we can say: "good riddance," we have to destroy them, because they are ossified, they have become systems of domination, of regression, and as a consequence, we need to seize that destruction. That is what the accelerationists are saying, except they know nothing about pharmacology. As long as we fail to consider how capitalism is a revolutionary force, we cannot understand how the proletariat is a new revolutionary force. Revolution is the second moment of the epochal redoubling. Modernity appears with industry in England towards the end of the 18th century, and in France and Germany at the turn of the 19th century, but it is only after 1850 that Flaubert, Baudelaire and others begin to talk of "industrial art" (Flaubert) and "modernity," (Baudelaire).[3] At the time, Baudelaire was withdrawn, in retreat; Flaubert was also withdrawn, but intermittently. They were in a relation of retreat, and also in retreat from the political, clearly.

To understand the relation between epochal redoubling and retreat, we need to return to Socrates and Plato and distinguish the two from one another. For Socrates, the sophists are the ones who come to ruin the city [*polis*]. But what is the city for Socrates? The *polis* is made of writing, of the written word: it is where laws become *written* laws, as in Kafka's penal colony (1914). In the words of Marcel Detienne, "the city is a writing machine" (1988): this machine inscribes the law into the citizen body, and does so heavily, by means of a chisel, a hammer. Engraving occurs in marble. There is a need to imprint them upon the eyes of the city's readers, to enter into their bodies, to brand them with a hot iron, so as to inscribe their bodies and minds. Henri Irénée Marrou's (1982) study on the history of education clearly shows how, as early as 654 BC, two centuries before Socrates, honorable Greek citizens deemed it essential to send their children to school. Through the fact of sharing retentions and secondary protentions, school serves as an epiphylogenetic (Stiegler 1994, 140) institutionalization of inscription on the basis of a pre-individual ground. Parents want that their children to read Homer, Hesiod, and so on *and* they want them to become nomothetes, or "law-givers" – part of the bouleuterion (the assembly house, the senate) – who know how to read the law and how to write it.

It is stupid to say that Socrates and Plato are against writing. They stated they were against the sophists, who used writing to make money! This is why I disagree with Havelock (1963; 1988) and Ong (1967) who claim that Socrates defends oral culture and Plato defends written civilization. It is Socrates who argues that speech and writing are the same thing, both can be mendacious. The question is how find a *therapeia* for it, how to cure; and, from there on, to install institutions that will allow us to deal with the *pharmakon* that is both the poison and the remedy. I will try to demonstrate in the fifth volume of *Technics and Time* that Socrates

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[3] See Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* [1869] and Baudelaire's 'The Painter of Modern Life' [1863].

is a figure from the age of tragedy: a pre-Socratic who still belongs to the world of Heraclites and of Sophocles. Like all tragic figures, he knows that the destiny of mortals is to have in their hands *pharmaka* that resemble Zeus' fire, but which are not the fire of Zeus. Jean-Pierre Vernant argues that the first great question is how to take care of domestic fire. That is the role of Hestia: to pay attention, to keep the fire burning all the time without setting fire to the house. For Socrates, it is absolutely clear that one cannot master the *pharmakon*. It is Plato who will try to overcome the toxicity of the *pharmakon* by rethinking dialectics, no longer as Socrates' dialogism, but as the dialectic that will separate analysis from synthesis, turning it into a method for analytical dissection. That is to say, Plato tries to eliminate this toxicity of the *pharmakon* by eliminating the poets, whose culture is oral. The problem, fundamentally, is not writing, but overcoming the poetic, the ambiguity of poetry and tragedy, so as to get out of the world of tragedy, a world that is in-between speech (the oral) and writing (the written). Socrates is the inheritor of all this. And that is what constitutes the mythology of Prometheus and Epimetheus. Today we find ourselves living through a similar scenario, but the difference is that between the appearance of writing in the late eighth-century BC and its thematization in the late fifth-century, three centuries passed, whereas now, since the emergence of the web in 1993 only twenty-five years have passed. The time between the start of Facebook in 2004 and its enabling of Trump, Thiel, Putin, the new politics of surveillance in China, and so on, is even shorter. The accelerations have been absolutely dazzling.

Between Plato and the present, we also had the age of Kant and the age of the novel that you talked about. Marcel Proust, in a short text entitled *On Reading* (1993; 2011) , describes reading exactly as you just did: I withdraw into the book, and I become an *addict*[4] to reading. There are several ways to withdraw. The problem is not to celebrate withdrawal, or to condemn it, but to think through what is at stake in withdrawal and retreat. We have to withdraw all the time. In bourgeois society, when we say, at eleven in the evening, "Excuse me, I will retreat," this means: I'll go to sleep now, I will withdraw into the nocturnal system of my dreams, initiate processes of cerebral cleaning. While we clean up our brains, the unconscious expresses itself. Sleep is a form of withdrawal. To sleep is to withdraw. Obviously, there are other forms as well. I will retire in two weeks and that is another form of withdrawal. Leroi-Gourhan's figures of withdrawal, priests, monks, hermits, et cetera, live through periods of retreat. Our mutual friend, Vincent Puig,[5] takes a retreat every summer in a monastery as a lay person. These are healing practices. I think we need to have a philosophy of withdrawal, and that there are all sorts of withdrawal we need to define. Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* (1883) is a figure in these questions. Nietzsche himself withdrew, while also condemning those who sought to escape society and its *pharmaka*.

Again, ancient Greece offers an interesting analogy. In the fifth century in Athens and Greater Greece all sorts of cults started to appear. Some were orphic: they wanted to purify themselves, they were vegetarians, and wanted to withdraw from the *polis* because they considered it corrupt: nothing was to be expected from the *polis* anymore. Others were Dionysian. They practiced a ritual constitutive of tragic culture by eating raw and living flesh: practices of becoming-savage. So, on the one hand, we have the Orphics who wanted to purify

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[4] Translator's note: in English in the original text.

[5] See https://www.iri.centrepompidou.fr/tag/vincent-puig/

themselves, to become gods; on the other hand we have the Dionysiacs who wanted to become animals. All these are forms of political withdrawal. Today's survivalists resemble this, they have similar features: they want to escape not just politics but technology more generally, the industrial world, the reality of the Anthropocene. They posit it as a principle that, no matter what, the catastrophe *will* take place, and that we need to try and survive afterwards. We, here at IRI and in *Plaine Commune*,[6] believe that these are flight behaviors and not "lines of flight." (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) What we need to find are, exactly, lines of flight. This implies a reasoned practice, including a withdrawal from addictive media.

Now I would like to add something on addiction. Addiction is indispensable to society. If it wasn't for addiction, there would be no bonds. When an infant is separated from its mother, it is in complete distress. The mother is other to the infant, the infant is *addict* to its mother. It is normal, it is indispensable. This is what Bowlby calls "attachment."(1983) If we did not have that, there would not be any *philia* [friendship, affection]. Addiction is necessary for the constitution of *philia*. It is what Donald Winnicott (1971) says: the transitional object is an object of addiction. Addiction is indispensable. What we need to learn is how to switch addictions. At IRI, we are working on with Anne Alombert on the "Clinique Contributive" (*Contributory Clinic*),[7] referring to Gregory Bateson's (1971) work with alcoholics. It would be worth talking about alcoholism with Gilles Deleuze, who knew how to knock it back, or about heroin with John Coltrane, who died of an overdose in 1967 and who would never have been Coltrane without the heroin, that is absolutely clear. There is addiction all the time and everywhere, in all levels of society. Now, heroin addiction – or, worse, crack addiction – is terrifying and, obviously, we should absolutely not allow it to grow. This is an immense question if one agrees that Coltrane or Charlie Parker, without heroin, would not have been possible.

The fundamental issue is how to deal with withdrawal. Do we need to disconnect? That is a question everyone seems to be asking themselves at the moment. I know people who tell me we have to disconnect completely, that we should stop using the internet, stop reading our email, and get rid of our smartphones. That is just stupid, it is a position I find unacceptable. I have a long-standing project of writing books on how we deal with *pharmaka*. Like, alcohol for example, which has haunted me for a long time, and which I am supposedly no longer allowed to touch at all because, as an ex-alcoholic, if you ever drink a glass you're off again. Now, I drink one glass of red wine every evening. I believe that there is a lot of work to be done in this area. The same goes for ex-drug addicts, or the addiction to reading. When Nietzsche says "do not read too much," or when Seneca says to Lucillius "do not read too much," it is a therapeutic prescription on the *pharmakon*: we have to read, but in small doses.

We have to pay attention and reflect upon the *pharmaka* of our times. We have to create communities. That is what we are trying to do with the Clinique Contributive. Right now we are collaborating with child care workers and doctors to create a community of mothers and fathers whose children are intoxicated by their smartphones. We are trying to put into place a therapeutic practice that allows us to learn lessons from the experiences of intoxication. What

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[6] See: https://www.iri.centrepompidou.fr/projets/co3-project-2/; see also Sam Kiney's reflection on the project: http://www.samkinsley.com/2018/06/13/bernard-stielger-and-the-plaine-commune-experiment/

[7] See: https://recherchecontributive.org/clinique-contributive/

is important is not to break with what intoxicates us altogether, but to succeed in taking something from the intoxication, which is not necessarily to reject them, but to try to have a therapeutic relation with these artefacts.

What you said about addiction as management of disadjustment (drawing on Gille), is what I, in my terminology, would call epochal redoubling. And it is of exactly this that we need to make a political economy. Such a political economy should not simply posit that we should, or should not, reject the *pharmakon* (for example, our smartphones), but should rather deal with how to cultivate and thus change it. Cultivation can consist of saying, for example, I will try not to listen to the radio, be on the phone, or read my emails before noon. I tell myself this all the time, but in fact, I cannot *not* read my emails. Still, I believe that we can cultivate such things. Jean-Marie André explains that the Roman practice of *otium* [retirement after active public service, also, leisure time, trans.] was born in the villas that the Roman emperor gave to legionaries who had led massacres throughout the Empire to conquer the Gauls, the Celts, and so on. Disgusted by their passion for killing and the massacres they had had to commit, they were granted a moment of curing-withdrawal. There are temples around Japan with fantastic Zen gardens. Passing through them, a physical change takes place, which, all of a sudden, can make you aware that you are no longer in an ordinary state, but in a state that was invented in the middle ages, around the tea ceremony, and by stewards who worked with the samurais to treat their death drive. These Zen gardens had the same function as was described by André: they enabled Samurai to withdraw from war and dedicate themselves to reading, culture, knowledge, meditation, and what the Romans called *otium*. These are all practices of addiction and of healing. The monk heals himself from addiction to killing by practicing a new form of religious or bibliophilic addiction. Monks who copy books are *addicts* to the book.

Gerald Moore: An idea I have been working on, but with which I have not yet gotten very far, is that we can read the continual reinvention of the university across the history of technology in terms of readjustive responses to technological disadjustment and periods of addiction. We see this in Plato's response to the decline of sympotic culture. We can see it in the reaction to the proliferation of reading and what Chad Wellmon calls 'information overload' in Kantian times. The new digital university, whatever it ends up being, will likewise have to be some kind of antidote to the toxic dimension of staring at our screens all day. There is a really interesting debate around the birth of the medieval university that links to increasing frustrations about the withdrawal of monasteries from the rest of society. Jacques Le Goff (1982) touches on it, albeit only briefly, in his reflections on the meaning of work in medieval Europe, where he writes on how the monasteries were no longer working in relation to the rest of the community. Their monastic prayer had come to be perceived as a form of nihilistic retreat. All of these things link back to the question of work, which we might come to in due course.

But I'll start by talking about the positive, the curative side of addiction and the dopamine system. I also want to talk about lines of flight and points of escape, because these are crucial to the history of philosophy, to Plato's response to addiction and withdrawal, as well as to Kant's response to that too. It comes back to the decisive idea with which Jean Pierre Vernant concludes *Les Origines de la pensée grecque* (2013), where he reflects on the way the ancient Greek aristocracy effectively withdraws from the public sphere and into the symposium. Vernant describes the discipline of philosophy as having been born there, in

between the symposium and the *polis*, and muses that it will remain forever destined to oscillate between the two. There is always this dangerous potential of philosophy to become so far withdrawn from the *polis* that it becomes counterproductive, and yet there is also a great positivity and generativity in this withdrawal, which allows for the birth of something new.

What Plato was looking to do with the reinvention of philosophy comes down to an attempt to reinvent the education system at the heart of a period of retreat. The original function of the ancient Greek symposium was educational, pedagogical. It was taking young men of wealthy, noble families, teaching them how to discourse in private, teaching them how to learn poetry and engage in rhetoric. But the more the aristocracy gets alienated from the *polis*, the more these symposia descend into drinking parties and intoxication; the more they become a place for plotting. We also see a fascination in fifth-century Athens with the rise of the Eleusinian mysteries, a kind of religious experience of intoxication, devoted to frenzy, and again, it looks increasingly depoliticized. There is a sense that political renewal is giving way to oblivion. It is at this moment that Plato, in his very late work, starts to talk positively about writing. Every time he mentions writing in *The Laws*, it is because he sees in the possibility of writing and a written constitution, in laying down rules about how much young men can drink and in what circumstances, a means of creating a way out of intoxication. At the very start of the *Phaedrus*, it is all about writing (or, at least, reading) being every bit as potentially intoxicating and addictive as poetry and drugs. He is talking about intoxication in general. And yet, what he also sees in writing is this possibility of creating a critical distance between the thing that one is obsessing over, the object of love and intoxication, and the possibility of stepping back and thinking about it critically, in less emotive terms. And this critical space that he opens up becomes the space of philosophy, a kind of refunctionalization of the intoxicated mind that allows for the birth of something new. And here is where we start to see the history of philosophy in terms of the desire to create exit points, and lines of flight: ways out of entrapment in intoxication and seduction.

Now, it is far from clear that this always worked. If you look at the Roman commentaries, people like Plutarch on Plato, and even Alcibiades in the *Symposium*, will say of philosophy that it is just another form of bacchanalianism: an indulgence, a way of avoiding civil duties. This comes back to what you have said to me several times in the past: there comes a time when someone has to stop doing philosophy and start being a citizen. All too often, philosophy remains at the level of impotent and self-indulgent masturbation. But when its meditative retreat brings us back to that point of being a citizen, it works. We should reread Kant in these terms: the search for productive exit points, for creating something that stands outside our capacity to be automated and locked into a given experience, becomes his hallmark. If you read Kant's works, not just with the essay on Enlightenment where he's talking about the fear of books that do our thinking for us, he talks as well about how alcohol and drugs will effectively automate away autonomy, causing the body to be taken over by heteronomy, which is to say, corporeal forms of causality. The whole point of transcendental philosophy, I think, for Kant, is that it guarantees an exit point from heteronomy. Kant states this explicitly in relation to Vaucanson, the great marionettist, the automator of the eighteenth century. The thing that will stop human life from collapsing into automation is that, unlike Vaucanson's automaton, we have this possibility of a transcendental exit point, which takes us

out of physical causality, and that allows us to create some point of externality from which we can reopen ourselves to different kinds of stimuli.

This becomes interesting in relation to addiction, which is nowadays increasingly analyzed not as the much-touted "brain disease" of the "War Against Drugs", but as a rational adaptive strategy: drugging ourselves is a means for coping with the world. It is also the primary mechanism through which we neuroplastically learn from experience. The brain, via the body, is constantly reorganized by our environment, a product of simultaneous interiorization and exteriorization. If we are the product of our external surroundings and those external surroundings are the product of us too, it is because the dopamine system is the interface through which we reorganize the way we think and experience the world. The problem is that, at the level of the brain, the more our sensory horizons are colonized by restrictive forms of experience, the more we become incapable of experiencing anything else. The dopamine system is basically a kind of memory. If you teach the brain that it will be rewarded by alcohol, it will crave more and more alcohol and it will actually prune away its capacity for alternative forms of stimulation, to the point where it just becomes unreceptive to them. So you create your own artefactual environment where the only biosemiotic signals—the only things that trigger your capacity for world-making—are the ones that will give you your drip-feed of dopamine. We thus find ourselves getting locked into these vicious circles of ever-decreasing stimulation. The only thing that will stimulate a drug addict is heroine or alcohol, which causes them to become increasingly desensitized, and get ever narrower horizons of experience. So here's where we come back to that question of the need to create lines of flight. How do we create points of externality that stand outside all that?

New avenues in addiction and social reinsertion are so much more interesting than the consumerist model of Alcoholics Anonymous on this point. It's been argued that Alcoholics Anonymous has a differential success rate of about 5%. There is a phenomenon in the brain called ego-fatigue, ego-depletion: the more you try to resist temptation, the more you reinscribe the neuronal circuits that cause you to crave that temptation in the first place. So if you want to overcome an addiction, what do you do? Well, what do people normally do? If Alcoholics Anonymous is 5% successful, so-called spontaneous remission is 50-80% successful. You fall in love with someone who doesn't like you smoking. You get a new job, you move house. You generate new forms of stimuli that enable you to engage differently with the world. And here's where we might start to say, well rather than abstaining, rather than simply trying to abandon one's mobile phone, which will get you nowhere, because it only makes the cravings worse, you generate new forms of stimulus and engagement. You learn a new language, you take up the piano, you do sports. It has even been show recently that LSD, ayahuasca and other kinds of drugs can open up closed-off synaptic circuits in the brain, creating new points of contact with the outside world which thereby allow one to generate a reorganization from this point of externality. And this fits exactly with your concept of *quasi-causalité*. It is that creation of an externality from which one can wrest oneself out of entrapment in a locked present, and we can see both Kant's transcendental and Plato's critical distance made possible by writing in these terms.

Now, let's come back to epiphylogenesis and the stakes of contemporary retreat, to this recent genealogy of media, which we were discussing in relation to Jacques Rancière and the idea of a pre-individual ground of collective experience. One of the things that is so crucial in

recent media history is the shift away from what looked like a future of hyper-synchronisation towards a much more complicated one of absent synchronisation: the growth of echo chambers and filter bubbles. Until relatively recently, there were few enough television channels that watching them could still create the basis of a shared experience. There was even anxiety over there being too few alternative points of reference. There was fear of our susceptibility to state propaganda, which was one of the justifications for the privatization of television in the 1980s. Since then, we have ever larger numbers of television channels chasing ever smaller pots of advertising money. We have a curious situation, where most internet traffic goes to no more than around a dozen websites, which constitutes a significant diminution in the diversity of the early internet era. And yet, simultaneously, there are large chunks of the population whose engagement with the internet now involves endless consumption of these very fragmented spheres of experience that have become detached from something like a "common aisthesis." We can see this as bound up with an economic model of what I call "dopamining," or, in David Courtwright's (2019) phrase, "limbic capitalism." We know from the Cambridge Analytica affair that it is now possible to pitch more or less tailored messages to more or less specific individuals, playing on their anxieties to push them in the direction of certain attitudes. The tailoring is arguably still very crude, but we might wonder if it really needs to be sophisticated, given the apparent effectiveness of so-called psychographic profiling in the swinging of marginal elections. We can read the proliferation of internet echo chambers as just one form of contemporary manufactured addiction.

One of the big arguments in contemporary addiction theory comes from Natasha Dow Schüll (2014), who argues that addiction isn't so much about chasing the high as about the possibility of retreat into an anxiolytic safe space where the chaos of the world momentarily abates; where one gets to exist in a kind of automated oblivion immersed in the object of one's pursuit without the threat of interruption. There is, moreover, a really interesting ambiguity here with what psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2008) terms "being in the zone," which he equates with happiness: being so immersed in a task that one loses oneself in reading or writing for hours – addiction in the curative sense, we might say. There is perhaps only a minimal difference here between the zone of immersion, which we can identify with your (Stiegler 2015) conception of "work" as the creation of *la vie d'esprit*, and the retreat into addiction that is a retreat into this anxiolytic safe space where one isn't necessarily reading or constructing something that enables one to return to the world; one is simply blocking out the world, or disavowing it. There is a claim to be made, on that note, that disavowal, in the psychoanalytic sense of simply declining to process, has become the dominant mode of contemporary (Anthropocenic) experience.

My worry with much of the contemporary retreat into internet echo chambers is that they really aren't providing us with lines of flight, that is, with points of externality from which we can quasi-causally carve ourselves a way back out. We were talking earlier about the resurgence of the Flat Earth movement, and various other modes of the far right, like the pro-gun lobby. The Flat Earth movement is not, as is often naively assumed, made up of crazed, unscientific loons. They have relatively good reasons to think they are doing contributive scientific research: reading, engaging critically with arguments, using technology as a means to recreate the kind of world-building from which they have been alienated by governments and the mainstream media. So far, so good! But where this conspiracy theorization becomes so

problematic is that they are drawing on pools of shared experience that are not rooted in a bigger pool of shared experience. In other words, we see a breakdown in the shared, epiphylogenetic, or cultural, memory that I adopt as my own through my uptake of the technologies that organize the symbolic order, and which mean that I don't have to relearn the entire history of astronomy from scratch – I can simply inherit thousands of years' worth of knowledge embedded in gamma-ray telescopes, which build on an entire history of telescopy incorporating Galileo, Kepler, and others. The extent to which we are proletarianized in relation to the technologies through which we experience the world has led to the erosion of trust in governments and the institutions of science. People are so skeptical of the values and institutions that they have played little to no part in building for themselves that they dismiss them as consumer choices that they don't have to buy into. We end up with people cloistering themselves in these little bubbles divorced from the rest of reality, fragmenting into multiple, incommensurable microworlds. It is very hard for us to see how we can recreate the experiential bridge, the common *aisthesis* on which the public is founded.

Bernard Stiegler: Let us start again from what you just said about the later Plato. I claim, across all the comings and goings concerning Plato's metaphysical position on the *pharmakon*, that there is a return to a more interesting practice afterwards, a re-problematization of the practice of writing. During these processes that are set in motion by the great characters of Plato and Kant, something gets lost - namely, what I call the exorganogenesis of *noesis* [intellect], of the faculty of *noesis*. Let me clarify briefly: I am not opposed to transhumanists because they are a menace to the human, it is just that this conception of the human does not seem interesting to me. I am not a posthumanist either: I have never understood what a humanist is, except during the Renaissance period, when there was a very precise sense of what "humanism" was; the rest, for me, is just hogwash that prevents one from truly thinking. What I fear in transhumanism, then, among a thousand other things, is that it destroys the possibility of *noesis* itself. What is *noesis*? It is the faculty of producing bifurcations, which brings me to the question of lines of flight.

When Heidegger comments on Book VII of *Republic* in "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," (1998 [orig. 1942]) he proposes his most important thesis on Plato, suggesting that Plato has changed the meaning of the word *aletheia*. Until Plato, *aletheia* meant "to leave from the (in-)retreat, (in-)withdrawal," from *lethe*, from lethargy, and from all these questions that we can throw at the narcotic. Now, with Plato, in any case in Book VI of *Republic*, *aletheia* comes to mean orthothesis, homoiosis – and it thus paves the way for Descartes and Kant. Heidegger points out that this resembles the withdrawal of metaphysics, and I think that he is right. But at the same time, elsewhere, Plato is operating a new functionalization, which we find in *Phaedrus,* when he argues that dialectics implies two things: analysis and synthesis. This is what Kant takes up in his *Critique of Pure Reason,* when he states that understanding and reason are not the same thing. Plato thus paves the way for something that is merely taking notice of an exosomatisation,[8] because it is the process of exosomatisation that brings us to this point. As shown by Sylvain Auroux, Jack Goody and many others, exosomatisation is, to the letter, an

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[8] Translator's note : From Latin: exo, meaning: outside, and sauma, meaning: body, thus roughly, moving outside the body.

analytical process of grammatization that makes analysis possible. In other words, it is the *pharmakon* that exosomatically generates a functional transformation of *noesis* in logical thinking in the Western sense of the word, which we do not find, for example, in China, even if Chinese thought was extremely developed at the time. Logic is related to an exosomatic history of exorganogenesis. The question of lines of flight, today, has to be inscribed here. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century this would not have been possible, even if, as I claim, it was already glimpsed by Marx and Nietzsche. Today, the entire world is living these issues. In the Clinique Contributive, for example, we encounter parents and childcare workers who enact these questions with their smartphones, while producing a "symptomatology," as Paola Vignola (2017) would call it.

What begins to count here is the function of the heteronomic. As soon as you discover the entropic character of the universe, heteronomy becomes the source of bifurcations. For a very long time, since Socrates and practically up until Kant and Hegel – though perhaps Hegel is a limit-case – it is in autonomy that the noetic experience is founded. It is the kind of autonomy that we find in Maturana and Varela's (1974) *autopoiesis*, though I have never followed them as far as *autopoiesis* is concerned, because I think *noesis* is a *heteropoesis*. *Autopoesis* is what we find in animals and plants, but human beings are heteropoietic. We have not succeeded in thinking heteronomy, because we still encounter it primarily as alienation. *Hetereopoesis* produces alienation, as you have shown. But it also creates the opportunity to bifurcate. To bifurcate, here, is not to dis-alienate, but to alienate differently: I fall in love, I quit smoking. But falling in love, fundamentally, is an addictive process!

This brings us back to questions of how to practice the *pharmakon*. I was thinking, when listening to you, of Katherine Hayles's (2007) first treatise on "deep-" and "hyper-attention," where all of a sudden she decides to use video games to do Faulkner with her students. We have tried to do something similar with *Minecraft* in Durham and Plaine Commune, which consists in creating lines of flight. Nowadays, we should read Faulkner through the world of video games, just as, in 1987, I tried to do something comparable with Jacques Roubaud, a member of *Oulipo: Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*[9] created by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais, a mathematician. *Oulipo* used mathematics to create poetic literature. We constructed a tool, with a poet, to analyze the literary work of Émile Zola. This tool morphed press releases by Agence France Press into novels by Émile Zola. It took press releases on the most diverse subjects, say, a lorry driver killing his wife, which the computer then reformulated in Zola's style through an analysis of the structures of Zola's sentences and grammatical habits. We were inspired by the work of the *Comité de Liaison de l'Enseignement par Ordinateur* (CLEO) based in Nancy, with whom we proposed to rethink the teaching of literature in high schools. Nobody listened! And you know why not? Because Microsoft were already selling their crap to the Ministry of National Education!

The issue, here, is stimulation. The problem of addiction is that it always ends up reducing the scope, the extension of possibilities of stimulation. Today, people are massively destimulated. But living beings need to be stimulated. Freud already observed this in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1963; orig. 1922), with his example of paramecia needing to rub

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[9] See : https://www.oulipo.net/ Translator's note : OULIPO literally means: the workshop of potential literature.

themselves against one another to trigger their splitting in two. Parthenogenesis presupposes the mutual excitation of the protozoea. Without stimulation, life is not possible. This starts in microorganisms. The problem of capitalism is that it exploits aesthetic technologies while making anaesthetic technologies. We cannot look at a work of art without doing anything. That is why we experimented at the Centre Pompidou in Paris with inviting people to comment on works, to share their commentaries, take photos. When she was four years old, my daughter Elsa used to draw by copying paintings by Picasso. She looked with her hand and her red chalk and her watercolors; she made all sorts of variations. That is stimulation. And stimulation, as Jakob von Uexküll (2010) shows, is part of a sensory-motor circuit. When we perceive, stimulation is in action through the response that perception has, not merely in reception. If there is no response, there is no reception. In human beings, this circuit is not *endo*somatic, it is *exo*somatic: it passes through the Picasso Museum, the school where I was taught how to draw, my parents to whom I showed my drawings – with this, I create *philia*. I cannot be stimulated if I do not partake in the construction of *philia*. This *philia* can be very local, a niche, or a very temporary zone. I'm not referring to Hakim Bey's (2011) 'temporary autonomous zones' (TAZ), there. For don't we rather need to create *heteronomous* zones, where temporary also means: intermittent? If they are not intermittent, we will be recuperated by marketing and strategic design.

Gerald Moore: We've seen that already, with Bey's TAZ being ideologically re-appropriated as a model of the highly deregulated, tax-free, "extrastate" spaces discussed by Keller Easterling (2016). Places like Yachay in Ecuador, and Songdo in South Korea are autonomous zones in the sense of being allowed to opt out from the legal systems of the nation-states to which they belong. And they are vaunted as the smart cities of the future, whose inhabitants are given no choice but to adapt to the most untrammeled form of international markets.

Bernard Stiegler: Precisely – and I fight this! The fight consists of claiming, via a return to Derrida (2001), that no, the university is not without conditions. Rather, it is conditioned in a heteronomous manner, it always has been and it always will be. When the university thinks that it is not, it cuts itself off from the proletariat, and it becomes, as you suggest, a form of masturbation, which has always been the saddest of addictions – onanism in the Bible… –, because it produces absolutely nothing at all. That is how the French University functions today, and the majority of European universities as well. How can we stimulate the academic world? The neoliberals respond immediately that we need to put pressure on their output, on their capacities for raising funds, etc. No! The academic world can only be stimulated by obliging it – that is to say, by creating "obligations" in Bergson's (1977) sense of the word – to be concerned with the *pharmakon*. This is coming, the Anthropocene will impose it. For the great line of flight of all lines of flight is the Anthropocene! How to transform an anxious and paralyzing Anthropocene that produces denial and regression into a line of flight? We have to build the Neganthropocene, one that is immensely exciting, stimulating. The Neganthropocene is not at all about rejecting *pharmaka* and intoxication. We have to rethink these questions of hyper-synchronisation of behaviors by television and the internet very precisely, as I tried to demonstrate in *Symbolic Misery* (2014, originally 2004). At the time of writing it, I said that the web could create a re-diachronisation of singularities, but in fact, the opposite has been the

case: not so much a re-diachronisation as an ultra-synchronisation. It is no longer a synchronisation by means of calendar control through moments of collective reception of television programs. We have transformed statistics with technologies of probability. Today, the whole process of transindividuation through language is controlled by Google's Markov chains, which force language to develop entropically. This is synchronization towards entropy, a selection process in the sense outlined by Maël Montévil and Giuseppe Longo (2013). The line of flight consists in knowing how to rethink these questions of synchronization, categorization and so on in light of the capacity to produce bifurcations. We therefore need a critique of calculation, but one that is not at all a (Heideggerian) rejection of calculative thinking. It is better to "make do" with algorithms: how to produce the incalculable with numbers? As long as we are incapable of articulating these questions in a programmatic way, we will end up manufacturing the effective reality of post-truth, that is, the drifting of a world towards entropy that is embodied in Trump. That is because we are incapable of thinking-salving (*panser*) and transforming social networks. The role of the University is not to submit itself to the telecommunication operators that are busily destroying everything, but to start working again! Work, here is not the genealogy of morals or the destruction of metaphysics, but an active organology of manufacturing instruments, considering how to use them to generate more care than intoxication, but also, considering how to manufacture new molecules for intoxicating oneself differently.

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