



# **WHAT'S EATING OUR SOCIETY?**

An investigation into the discontent of human civilization through the ideas of  
Bernard Stiegler and Sigmund Freud

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this thesis I analyze the work of French philosopher Bernard Stiegler (1952) to gain an understanding of the seemingly inherent discontent in human civilization. Stiegler's main thesis is that, in the Western industrial world, the constitutivity of technics is being repressed where it should be integrated in the processes of individual and collective becoming to prevent the liquidation of these processes and the rise of discontent in society. To better understand Stiegler's ideas, I compare them to those of Austrian founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), by whom Stiegler was greatly inspired. By outlining the parallels between these thinkers, both their work sheds light on the subject of discontent in our civilization and embeds it in a wider context.

# 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

‘Is mankind’s adaptability infinite? Can he continue to adapt to the conditions he creates for himself? How much concrete and asphalt, how much noise, pollution and mobility can we bear? Will we ever feel at home in a technotope with a high degree of delocalization, which is the demand of our market-orientated society that is being controlled by the process of globalization?’

*Ton Lemaire, 2002<sup>1</sup>*

## 1.1 Introduction of the main theme and question

As a child I lived on the countryside, surrounded by nature: I had my own tree house and there was lots of space to run around and play. Although I’m lucky to have had a happy childhood, I’ve always felt and still feel an uneasiness concerning my relationship with the world surrounding me. As a living being, and as an individual of our Western society, I simultaneously feel that I *am* and that I *am not* part of the world as a whole, as if I am a strange kind of stranger; one that is a stranger in his own home.

Although I have always enjoyed being away from the civilized world – going for a hike, strolling through forests and admiring all the liveliness out there – , I have always sensed a difference between myself, a human being, and other living creatures on this

planet. As biologist Charles Darwin (1809-1882) pointed out, with his (r)evolutionary theory about natural selection amongst earthly species, all life on Earth has a common ancestor, and thus all life is connected. Yet the fact is that my species dominates the landscape nowadays and whilst ruling the Earth by means of our advanced technologies, most of us live a life that’s indeed quite different from that of other living beings on Earth. Whether or not humans truly *are* part of nature – because there *is* an ongoing debate on this matter among scientists and philosophers, but I’m not going to elaborate on it here since it is primarily an infinite discussion on the meaning of the concepts ‘human’ and ‘nature’ that is not relevant for this thesis – , most of us certainly *feel* different than other living creatures. It seems as if we don’t belong outside the civilized world and yet we don’t feel very comfortable in our human society either. It is exactly this paradox that is eating me and that led me to the title of this dissertation. Because why does our society, that seems to be flourishing and highly developed, also include so much uneasiness, suffering and unhappiness? Do we still not have the power and the means to change this, are the “wrong” people in power, or is this uneasiness simply inherent to human life? In other words: what’s eating our society, in the double meaning of what is it that perpetually

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<sup>1</sup> Ton Lemaire, *Met open zinnen* (Amsterdam: Ambo | Anthos uitgevers, 2002), 52.

troubles us and makes us feel uncomfortable, and what is it that causes the ongoing decline of our so prosperous society?

The phenomenon of ‘discontent’, as the uncomfortable feeling of individuals in our society has been characterized throughout the history of philosophy<sup>2</sup> is, according to most philosophers, inherent to our human civilization and therefore as old as humanity itself, although some state that our modern age of highly advanced technological development contributes to a greater or lesser degree to this discontent. It is the feeling of never really being at peace or in line with the cultural system, of not being able to find a balance between individual desires and the demands of culture and of being part of a system that doesn’t resonate with its participants, though all philosophers describe the concept differently and much more extended. It would be impossible to discuss all theories about the discontent in our society in this thesis, let alone to do justice to all of them.

However, I would still like to investigate the discontent that seems to be inherent to human civilization in this thesis, in order to better understand the uncomfortable feeling that I myself experience, that drives me as visual artist as well and that, as I assume judging from all the literature on this theme, seems omnipresent. My strategy to do so is to investigate and compare the work of two philosophers who specifically thematized the discontent of our society and are – or were – innovative with their ideas on this

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<sup>2</sup> The phenomenon of ‘discontent’ in human civilization has been thematized by a wide range of thinkers, like for instance Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Max Weber, Herbert

theme. Both thinkers wrote about the discontent in a way that struck me and that sounded original as well as logical. I’m speaking about Bernard Stiegler (1952), who wrote extensively on this subject, in particular in his work *Mécréance et Discredit, tome 1: La décadence des démocraties industrielles* (2004) and about Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who discussed the theme most notably in his work *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930).

They make a good couple, as Freud’s work has been a great inspiration for Stiegler: he borrows terms and parts of Freud’s theory, but he is also critical on Freud’s writings as we will see later on. In this thesis I will mainly focus on the work of Stiegler, since he has fascinated me ever since I got to know his work and I really want to understand his ideas better. In addition, I will compare his work to that of Freud mainly to offer another perspective on the discontent in human civilization and to analyze to what extent Freud’s ideas had an impact on Stiegler. To be honest, the comparison with Freud also has the maybe somewhat irreverent function of finding and marking the frames of Stiegler’s thinking precisely through the outline of their similarities and differences. As ‘technics’ is the main concept of Stiegler’s work, I will focus primarily on the role and meaning of this concept in my writings. Namely, for Stiegler it is humanity’s inherent yet largely unacknowledged technicity that is the main cause of the discontent

Marcuse, Jean Baudrillard, Peter Sloterdijk and the two philosophers I discuss in this thesis: Sigmund Freud and Bernard Stiegler.

in our society, whereas for Freud it is human cultural development as a whole that drives the feeling of discontent in our civilization. This means that with my thesis I have a dual purpose: I do not only want to better understand the discontent that I personally experience by investigating the discontent in our society with the ideas of Freud and Stiegler as a guideline, I also want to analyze and make explicit Stiegler's thinking on the discontent in our society and Freud's influence on Stiegler. So it comes down to the following main question for this thesis: 'What is the diagnosis of Bernard Stiegler on the discontent in our Western society and on the role of 'technics' in this question of discontent, based primarily on his work *Mécréance et Discrédit: Tome 1, La Décadence des Démocraties Industrielles* (2004) and to what extent is it derived, but also critically departing from Freud's critical diagnose of our Western society as outlined in his work *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930) nearly a hundred years ago?'

## 1.2 Introducing the structure of this thesis

To begin with, I will give brief introductions to the ideas of both Stiegler and Freud, focusing on their diagnoses of human culture *in general* and in its *modern* appearance. Their diagnoses are quite different, although there are similarities as well. As Freud basically applies his psychoanalysis to human civilization, Stiegler advocates a better integration, care and understanding of (the role of) technics in our society. I will also give a first account of the

parallels between both thinkers here. The third chapter discusses the origins of mankind, since both thinkers return to this era while trying to gain a better understanding of the discontent in our human society. Stiegler postulates an original default of mankind, explained via the early Greek myth of Prometheus – a tale that is at the basis of Stiegler's thinking – , while Freud conjectures that the erect posture of mankind and the related change in genital erotism led to the formation of durable human relationships and thus to the beginning of human culture. Subsequently, I will elaborate on Stiegler's account of the concept of 'technics', especially on its constitutive role in the development of mankind and its share in the cause of discontent in our society. Stiegler's thinking is unique, in the sense that he is the first in the history of philosophy to understand the human being as a fundamentally technical being and to give technics a central role in his thinking on the origin of mankind. According to him, *anthropo*-genesis or the birth of humanity is factually a *techno*-genesis. This chapter will then pick up on some of the key concepts of Stiegler's theory, elaborating on terms like 'exteriorization', '*epiphylogenesis*', 'tertiary retentions', 'grammatization' and the 'transductive' process of technics, society and the individuals in it. Stiegler states that Freud wasn't aware of the constitutivity of technics, blaming him – together with many others – of the 'forgetfulness' of technics.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pieter Lemmens, "Gedreven door techniek: de menselijke conditie en de biotechnologische revolutie" (PhD diss., Radboud University of Nijmegen, 2008), 502.

One of the other key concepts of Stiegler's thinking, which he derived from French philosopher Gilbert Simondon (1924-1989) – who in turn derived it from colleague psychologist and friend of Freud: Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) – is the concept of 'individuation', by which he refers to the process of the *I* – because the *I* is not a state but a process – , that is a process of *individuation*; of becoming-one, becoming indivisible. The same applies to the *we*, only here it is not an individual, but a collective process in which all the individuation processes of the *I*'s are inscribed.<sup>4</sup> These processes of individuation can be seen as our conquests for elevation. The fifth chapter will focus on this theme, since it is the total process of – psychic, collective and technical – individuation that is out of balance in our society according to Stiegler. For this part of his work it seems clear that he got inspired by the works of Freud and Simondon – and, *through* both authors, also by Jung –, borrowing some of their terms and concepts. He says about it: 'The tendency [of individuation] *never realizes itself*, because it encounters a *counter-tendency* with which it forms a *metastable* equilibrium – and it must be pointed out here that the Freudian theory of drives is singularly close to this conception of the dynamic of individuation...'.<sup>5</sup> Therefore I'll also discuss Freud's theory of drives here to help see why, for Stiegler, it is so

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<sup>4</sup> Bernard Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1: The Decadence of Industrial Democracies*, trans. Daniel Ross and Suzanne Arnold (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 164.

important that a re-appropriation of this process of individuation takes place in our current epoch of hyper-industrialization.

Capitalism is a term we use since Karl Marx (1818-1883) for a process of social transformation that tends to liquidate the individuation processes as it 'is the expression of a tendency towards mechanical externalization and it has the effect of producing a standardization and formalization, imposing a calculability and synchronization on everything'.<sup>6</sup> In chapter six I discuss Stiegler's ideas on the capitalist epoch of the Western individuation process and on how this system inevitably leads to the decadence our time is marked by.

Lastly, I will address the remedy Stiegler proposes to counteract the destructive tendencies of current capitalism, which he theorizes as the 'renaissance of the spirit'. With it, he implies a transformation of our societies and a manner of integrating new technologies in such a way that they stimulate instead of frustrate the psycho-collective individuation process.<sup>7</sup> Although both Stiegler and Freud are tragic thinkers as they believe the human discontent is of all times and will always be part of humanity, Freud is more pessimistic: he believes that there is no remedy for the aggressive nature of mankind that causes the discontent in our society. He thinks no culture will ever be able to permanently repress this aggression, only to temporarily channel it by providing

<sup>5</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 164.

<sup>6</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 38.

<sup>7</sup> Lemmens, "Gedreven door techniek", 387.

an outlet for it through for instance war, sports or the repression of a minority group. Finally I will give my concluding remarks on

## 2. THE PROTAGONISTS, BERNARD STIEGLER & SIGMUND FREUD: AN INTRODUCTION

‘Originally the ego includes everything, later it detaches from itself the external world. The ego-feeling we are aware of now is thus only a shrunken vestige of a far more extensive feeling – a feeling which embraced the universe and expressed an inseparable connection of the ego with the external world.’

*Sigmund Freud, 1930*<sup>8</sup>

### 2.1 Bernard Stiegler

Bernard Stiegler (1952) is a French philosopher who is best known for his work *La technique et le temps* (1994), in which he first revealed his thinking about technics (*la technique*). For him, technics is constitutive for humanity and plays a fundamental role in our society and thinking; he postulates that most, if not all of his predecessors, didn’t give technics its rightful place and integral role in their thinking of humanity. His work contributes to a better understanding of the hyper-industrial and technological society we currently live in with all the problems and challenges it presents. According to Stiegler, ‘the human being is a technical being

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<sup>8</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1962), 15.

the differences between the diagnoses of Stiegler and Freud and on the discontent in our human civilization.

through and through, constituted and conditioned by technics from its very origin’.<sup>9</sup> Stiegler shows in his work how mankind is not the product of a biological, but of a technical evolution, causing it to have a different ‘way of being’ than other living creatures on this planet. Like Heidegger, Stiegler insists that ‘mankind doesn’t *live* so much, but *exists*’, although unlike Heidegger he believes that the human way of existing became possible precisely through technics, rather than that it was (and still is) threatened by it.<sup>10</sup>

Stiegler’s main claim is that mankind – in contrast to other living beings – has an ‘original default’ (*défaul d’origine*) that is being compensated by technics. I will come back to this in greater detail in the next chapter. With technics, Stiegler not only refers to technical tools (from the first stone tools until the advanced tools of the modern age), but also to our writing system and telecommunication mechanisms, for instance. Technics isn’t

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Stiegler, *Per toeval filosoferen*, trans. Pieter Lemmens (Utrecht: Uitgeverij Klement, 2014), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Stiegler, *Per toeval filosoferen*, 8.

merely instrumental, as a means to fulfill human needs; rather it ‘shapes what it means to be human’ and always already constitutes the human being.<sup>11</sup> He therefore rejects an opposition between technics and culture. For him, ‘technics is the condition of culture’ and it would be ‘absurd to oppose technics to culture’.<sup>12</sup> Also interesting for *this* investigation is to know that Stiegler, in line with Freud, thinks that the human being is equal to its *desires*, meaning that our desires are also greatly influenced by technics, as he points out in particular in the second part of his book series *De la misère symbolique* (2005).

Stiegler is not a typical scholar – he started his philosophical career quite accidentally during a prison sentence for a bank robbery. However, he’s a very bright and engaged thinker with a political-philosophical mission, who draws inspiration from a wide range of thinkers – like Foucault, Simondon, Derrida and Heidegger – and from philosophical movements like psychoanalysis, Marxism, anthropology, phenomenology and deconstructivism. It is the original way of how he mobilizes this multitude of theories and perspectives – in which technics is consistently given a prominent position – that gives his work its power and originality.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ben Roberts, “Introduction to Bernard Stiegler”, *Parallax* 13, no. 4 (November 2007): 26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13534640701682776>.

<sup>12</sup> Ben Roberts, “Introduction to Bernard Stiegler”, 26.

<sup>13</sup> Stiegler, *Per toeval filosoferen*, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 395.

## 2.2 Stiegler’s disorientation: a diagnosis of our human condition and Western society

So Stiegler states that the human being is a technical being and that he is characterized by an ‘original default’, or as he also puts it: the human being is ‘prosthetic from its origins’.<sup>14</sup> A consequence of this condition is that his life is permanently out of balance and that he is always and from the very beginning ‘disoriented’. This *original* disorientation is one of the primary features of mankind, being a prosthetic and thus incomplete, open being and therefore condemned to constantly investigate and invent himself; it is his fate to always be on his way towards himself and to always feel *alienated* or be a stranger to himself. It is in this context that Stiegler speaks of the notion of *in-dividuation*: a process towards becoming an *in-dividual* (becoming ‘un-divided’, sometimes called the process of ‘subjectivation’<sup>15</sup>), which never reaches an end and which thinkers like Nietzsche, Jung, Freud and Simondon thematized in their work, although it is Simondon from whom Stiegler derived the notion. I will come back to this in more detail in chapter five.

<sup>15</sup> The term ‘subjectivation’ was coined by Michel Foucault, as he wanted to refer to the fact that forms of subjectivity are not definite but are *processes*, resulting from historic and societal structures. With the term, he alluded to the double meaning of the Latin word *subjectum*, which can either mean ‘to have a certain identity’ or ‘being subjected to someone or something’.

Although this original disorientation has always been part of the human being, it *explicitly manifested itself* since the Industrial Revolution, from whence an unprecedented acceleration has been taking place in the development of technics.<sup>16</sup> So disorientation will always be part of the human condition as such, but it is *currently* manifesting itself in a striking manner, and it is this *current* disorientation that plays a central role in Stiegler's diagnosis of the discontent in our human civilization.<sup>17</sup> In fact it would be more accurate to make a distinction between Stiegler's diagnosis of the human condition *as such* with its *original* disorientation – leading to a *permanent* feeling of discontent and alienation – and his diagnosis of the *current* disorientation in our – mainly Western – societies, in an epoch that Stiegler understands as the age of *hyper-industrialization*.<sup>18</sup>

The *current* disorientation, as Stiegler thematizes it, is the effect of the mass industrialization and the appropriation of it through the capitalist system, which I will explain more later. It is this development that worries Stiegler very much<sup>19</sup>, as these new ways in which technics is developing in our era, 'industrialize the human spirit'<sup>20</sup> and therefore structurally frustrate the individual as well as the collective individuation processes of human society. These processes of individuation together form, in a dynamic that is

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<sup>16</sup> Lemmens, "Gedreven door techniek", 405.

<sup>17</sup> Lemmens, "Gedreven door techniek", 405.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Stiegler, *De la misère symbolique 1. L'époque hyperindustrielle* (Paris: Galilée, 2004), 15.

simultaneously a battle and a composition, the *Ps* and the *we* of our society.<sup>21</sup> Stiegler states that this whole movement of individuation actually has three, instead of the two strands originally proposed by Simondon: besides a psychic and a social strand, there's also a *technical* one. Together, these three form one composition of psychic, collective and technical individuation and their mutual relation is of a 'transductive' kind, meaning that the identity of each one is determined by the other ones. In chapter four and five I will further discuss Stiegler's understanding of individuation as a transductive process of technics, society and the individuals in it.

Stiegler's main critical diagnosis is that, in Western thought, the constitutivity of technics is being repressed – even though its industrial society shows ever more apparent signs of this constitutivity – where it should actually be acknowledged and integrated in a more 'healthy' way in the process of psychic and collective individuation if it wishes to develop<sup>22</sup>. A more detailed analysis of Stiegler's ideas on the current era of hyper-industrial capitalism is given in chapter six, but what he mainly says is that the absence of this integration – or as Stiegler calls it, 'adoption' – of technics by the psycho-collective individuation process of our time, is caused by the fact that the current technological

<sup>19</sup> Lemmens, "Gedreven door techniek", 405.

<sup>20</sup> Lemmens, "Gedreven door techniek", 405.

<sup>21</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 164.

<sup>22</sup> Lemmens, "Gedreven door techniek", 382.

system is completely submitted to the economical imperatives of a capitalistic production system. This system uses the current *mnemo*-technics – our ‘technical memories’, if you like – only as control-technologies to ‘hyper-synchronize’ individuals and collectives, thereby transforming them into consumers and reducing the society to a market.<sup>23</sup> Such a technical system, frustrating instead of stimulating the individuals in it, inevitably leads to an imbalance, then a *de-composition* and eventually a liquidation of the psycho-social individuation process, wherein the social system merely *adapts* to the techno-capitalistic system.<sup>24</sup> As Stiegler aptly put it in *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies* (2004) ‘the industrial, capitalistic production model, that is implemented in our society since the twentieth-century and that rests on the separation of production and consumption, has become obsolete and a sign of this impasse and the decadence to which it leads is the banalization of consumers who become caught up in this capitalistic reproduction of desire – a libidinal economy that ensnares individuals in a perpetual cycle of consumption.’<sup>25</sup>

### 2.3 Sigmund Freud

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<sup>23</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 382.

<sup>24</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 382.

<sup>25</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, back cover.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy. An essay on interpretation*, trans. Dennis Savage (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2008), 32.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is notorious and well known for his founding of ‘psychoanalysis’: a psychological theory and therapy that investigates the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind. French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) appointed Freud as one of the three ‘Masters of Suspicion’<sup>26</sup> – next to Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx – as Freud forever changed our image of the human being as an autonomous, rational individual with his theories of the unconscious. Like Nietzsche and Marx, he postulated that mankind is subject to factors outside his control, by saying that unconscious impulses and desires are at the basis of our conscious mind and thus of our actions. Freud is one of the most famous representatives of the psychological sciences of the twentieth century, shocking many with his innovative insights on sexuality, our mind and especially the unconscious.<sup>27</sup> Although his ideas were certainly original and spectacular, his work is also controversial, as one of the main principles of psychoanalysis – the principle that all our psychic problems can be traced back to our (traumatic) experiences during our early childhood – appears to be unprovable<sup>28</sup> and some of his case studies seem to have never taken place.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beschouwingen over cultuur*, trans. Wilfred Oranje (Amsterdam: Boom Uitgevers, 1999), 7.

<sup>28</sup> Freud, *Beschouwingen over cultuur*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Han Israëls, “De meest interessante patiënt ben ik zelf; Sigmund Freud geanalyseerd door Han Israëls,” interview by Max Pam, *NRC, April 17, 1993*,

Nonetheless, the influence of his ideas in our society cannot be denied; his idea that in every human being there are forces at work of which we are unconscious, but that determine our thoughts and our actions, has become widespread.

*Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930) is one of Freud's most famous and accessible works in which he *extends* his theory of psychoanalysis from the individual to the human civilization as a whole. It is on this work that the focus will be in this thesis, since this is one of Freud's most culture-critical works in which he theorizes the discontent in our society, and it is this work that has many parallels with Stiegler's writings on this theme as well. Freud explicitly presented his ideas on religion first in *Die Zukunft einer Illusion* (1927), considering religion as 'a part of the human culture that helps people to reconcile themselves with the continuous demands that human culture places on them'.<sup>30</sup> In *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* he draws on these ideas more radical and pessimistic as he now postulates the death drive (*Thanatos*) next to the life drive (*Eros*) as one of the main forces behind the development of human life. He states that our culture is designed around *Eros* and focuses on the self-preservation of the human species, but this is a major burden for the individuals of this culture as it represses their natural drive towards aggression or self-destruction, alias their death drive.<sup>31</sup> In sum, Freud's overall tone in this last work is

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<https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/1993/04/17/de-meest-interessante-patient-ben-ik-zelf-sigmund-7180041-a902958>.

<sup>30</sup> Freud, *Beschouwingen over cultuur*, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Freud, *Beschouwingen over cultuur*, 15.

grim and he firmly believes that culture, or cultural 'progress' hasn't made us happier so far and never will do so in the future either<sup>32</sup>, as it restricts our libidinal drives and systematically represses our natural tendency towards aggression and other impulses.

#### 2.4 Freud's psychoanalysis of the human culture

So what Freud displays in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, is that the battle between *Eros* or the life drive and *Thanatos*, the death drive, doesn't only occur at the level of the individual, but is also visible in the development of our culture. *Eros* is the force that works via our sexual drives and that wants to unite people, forging in this way a society that is libidinally connected, whereas *Thanatos* works in the opposite way, trying to undo the work of *Eros* and satisfy our desire for destruction. Hence life is always an entanglement of these two forces, and it is this complex composition that is related to the discontent in our society and that also inspired Stiegler considerably. Freud discusses this composition by focusing on the history and development of human culture, showing not only how people started to live in communities from early on in our history, but also how history shows that a dormant discontent has always been present in all human cultures, whether primitive or advanced, emerging once every now and then explicitly.<sup>33</sup> According to Freud, it is not the

<sup>32</sup> Hans Driessen, "Eeuwig onbehagen," *De Groene Amsterdammer*, September 14, 2007, <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/eeuwig-onbehagen>.

<sup>33</sup> Driessen, "Eeuwig onbehagen."

unequal distribution of knowledge, currency and power that is the main cause of this permanent discontent in our civilization – as Karl Marx thought – but he states that the most fundamental reason why individuals cannot find happiness in our society is not in the social or the political, but in the psychological structure of the human being as a cultivated organism (how could it be otherwise for Freud?).

Freud points out how the cultural process as such, inevitably developing itself, cannot make humans happy as it is asking too many sacrifices of its individuals. Our civilization certainly guarantees an amount of security, but the price we pay for it is a loss of happiness. Firstly, our culture restricts the fulfillment of our libido or sexual impulses and secondly, it systematically suppresses the aggressive impulse that is inherently human. Freud hesitantly postulated the death drive for the first time in his earlier work *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920) stating that, next to *Eros* or the life drive, humans seem to be equally driven by a death drive or a desire for destruction, of which aggression is the most visible manifestation. Especially the cultural claim to transform and expand our love – which originally is an intimate and exclusive drive – to the whole community to create a solidarity with all other humans, thus to ‘love thy neighbor’, is unrealistic and improper, says Freud, since humans simply aren’t virtuous, loving, kind creatures, but inherently aggressive, violent and cruel.<sup>34</sup> So it is our innate human aggression that fights human culture and it is the

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<sup>34</sup> Driessen, “Eeuwig onbehagen.”

repression of this aggression and restriction of our sexual drives, necessary to maintain our culture, that cause the discontent in our society.

### **2.5 A first outline of the parallels between the diagnoses of Stiegler and Freud**

As a comparative research, I will address the parallels between the diagnoses of Freud and Stiegler on the discontent in human civilization throughout this thesis. With every theme that I treat I will discuss the perspective of both thinkers, if relevant. This investigation explores not only the boundaries of the ideas of both thinkers and reveal to what extent Stiegler’s ideas are funded on those of Freud, but also better embeds my research on the discontent in our society in the history of philosophy and offers a wider perspective on this subject. Below I will give a first short overview of their main differences and similarities.

One main parallel between Stiegler and Freud is that both of them postulate the discontent as being inherent to the human condition and society as such, but it is only Stiegler that really thematizes the modern epoch starting from the Industrial Revolution as a time in which this discontent is more explicit and visible. Freud *does* however, although briefly, acknowledge the characteristic technical expression of modern mankind when he mentions how ‘the present time deserves a special interest’ as ‘men have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man’, thereby referring to the new technical and

scientific developments of his time and to how these were an important cause of the ‘unrest, unhappiness and ... mood of anxiety’ back then.<sup>35</sup>

An obvious difference is of course the context in which they wrote their work. Freud wrote his work at the eve of the Second World War, aware of the great threat of Hitler; something which might have caused his view on our human civilization to be grim and pessimistic. Stiegler wrote his work almost a hundred years later in a time in which new technologies – developing at an unprecedented rate as they are propelled by our capitalistic and industrial democracies – and the current ecological and political crises that are related to it, form a major threat – and opportunity, as Stiegler will affirm – for our society today. Of course you can also treat their temporal contexts as being similar as they both seem to be situated at the eve of threatening events for our civilization, although the nature of the threat varies. In any case it seems logical, given the times in which both authors developed their theories, that Freud thematized the human aggression in his theory while Stiegler’s main theme is the constitutive role of technics in the evolution of mankind *in general* and the accelerated development of technics in our current epoch *in particular*. It is their difference in the treatment of the concept of technics that will be highlighted in this thesis, since it is Stiegler’s main theme that Freud didn’t give the necessary attention. But I will argue that

Freud isn’t as ‘forgetful’ as Stiegler depicts him; although his ideas of technics aren’t nearly as developed as those of Stiegler, a lot of concepts Stiegler uses, are initially Freud’s. Let’s elaborate a bit more on this.

Firstly, Stiegler’s concern about the modern ‘crisis of the spirit’<sup>36</sup> and his promotion of its renaissance wasn’t foreign to Freud, as Freud also alludes to the ‘psychological poverty of groups’<sup>37</sup>, that arises when the leaders of a group fail to play their role in the development and education of the masses. Furthermore, Freud agrees with Stiegler that the human being started off in this world as a ‘feeble animal organism’ that was vulnerable and flawed, but that developed through its technical and scientific achievements to become a godlike creature, ‘a kind of prosthetic God’<sup>38</sup>. He then elaborates more on this prosthetic character of mankind’s technicity, stating, as Stiegler, that ‘with every tool man is perfecting his own organs’<sup>39</sup> and that ‘when [mankind] puts on his auxiliary organs, he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times’.<sup>40</sup> Another parallel can be seen between Freud’s list of technical auxiliaries and what Stiegler calls *mnemo*-technics: ‘in the photographic camera [mankind] has created an instrument which retains the fleeting visual impressions, just as a gramophone disc retains the equally fleeting auditory ones; both are at bottom

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<sup>35</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 92.

<sup>36</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 28.

<sup>37</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 62.

<sup>38</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 38.

<sup>39</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 37.

<sup>40</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 39.

materializations of the power he possesses of recollection, his memory'.<sup>41</sup>

It is remarkable however that Freud didn't theorize the radio and cinematography and their influence on mankind, since it was to a large extent through these new, upcoming technologies that Hitler was able to influence the masses and gain so much power. One would think that Freud was able to foresee that these technologies would transform our society in an unprecedented way. However he *did* point out the overall ambivalence of technics as such, as Stiegler does too, stating that 'during the last few generations mankind has made an extraordinary advance in the natural sciences and in their technical application and has established his control over nature in a way never before imagined ... but [men] seem to have observed that this newly won power over space and time, this subjugation of the forces of nature, ... has not increased the amount of pleasurable satisfaction which they may expect from life and has not made them feel happier'.<sup>42</sup> And like Stiegler, Freud *doesn't* oppose technics to culture and he *does* thematize the control or power over fire as one of the primary acts of mankind, as he says that 'if we go back far enough, we find that the first acts of civilization were the use of tools, the gaining of control over fire and the construction of dwellings'.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 38.

<sup>42</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 34-35.

<sup>43</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 37.

<sup>44</sup> Bernard Stiegler, "Suffocated desire, or how the cultural industry destroys the individual: contribution to a theory of mass

A last parallel between Freud and Stiegler is that they both teach us to defend the individual's freedom and development to prevent it from becoming numb and part of the apathetic masses, thematizing the process of individuation as humanity's perpetual elevating process of subjectivation. The frustration of this process of individuation, Stiegler says, will inevitably cause an irreconcilable conflict between the desires and needs of the individual and the cultural demands – and even the whole architecture – of our society.<sup>44</sup> Freud says somewhat the same stating that 'a good part of the struggles of mankind centers round the single task of finding an expedient accommodation – one, that is, that will bring happiness – between this claim of the individual and the cultural claims of the group; and one of the problems that touches the fate of humanity is whether such an accommodation can be reached by means of some particular form of civilization or whether this conflict is irreconcilable'.<sup>45</sup>

However, Freud's ideas are still far from Stiegler's claims that technics play the most prominent role in the constitutivity of mankind and that the current submission of our technical organs to the economical, capitalistic system has led to a general

consumption", trans. Johann Rossouw, *Parrhesia* 13, 2011, 54-61, [http://xenopraxis.net/readings/stiegler\\_suffocateddesire.pdf](http://xenopraxis.net/readings/stiegler_suffocateddesire.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 43.

proletarianisation of individuals, a desublimation of desire and liquidation of our individuation process. In the next chapters I will give more consideration to these thoughts and concepts of Stiegler

and call on Freud's work whenever relevant in comparison to the work of Stiegler.

### 3. THE ORIGIN OF MANKIND: THE FAULT OF EPIMETHEUS AND THE ERECT POSTURE OF HOMO SAPIENS

'Nietzsche is a tragic thinker and his most powerful thought is that a tendency only exists as that which constitutes the *condition* of its counter-tendency, which it cannot therefore be a matter of eliminating. But it is just such a *drive for elimination* that, precisely, also characterizes *ressentiment* and, in particular, does so *insofar as it is founded on guilt*. Guilt is that which sees a *fault* [*faute*] where there is a flaw [*default*], and thus which does not want to understand that the flaw is *necessary* [*qu'il faut le default*].' Bernard Stiegler, 2004<sup>46</sup>

#### 3.1 Stiegler's concept of the original default of man

All Stiegler's thoughts and statements factually boil down to one single idea, namely the fact that mankind has, unlike animals and other creatures on this planet, a 'default' *as its origin* or an 'original lack of origin'.<sup>47</sup> Since he clarifies this idea by analogy with the old Greek myth of Prometheus – and Epimetheus –, the next

paragraph will expand specifically on this tale. But first I'll reflect on how this idea of the original default forms the 'foundationless foundation' of the technicity of mankind and relates to the indeterminacy, contingency and disorientation of the human way of being.<sup>48</sup>

As we will see in the myth, the human being – in contrast to animals and other beings –, lacks intrinsic or natural qualities; he is the being that is 'substantially without an essence' and is defined by this *accidental* character, which makes the human condition that of technicity or *prostheticity* as mankind is condemned to use technics to compensate and complement its default.<sup>49</sup> It is important to understand that Stiegler doesn't see this default as a lack or defect; it is our *original* condition and it is only through this condition that the human being as such is possible; it is because of this that Stiegler speaks of a *default qu'il faut* or 'necessary default'.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 55.

<sup>47</sup> Stiegler, *Per toeval filosoferen*, 9.

<sup>48</sup> Lemmens, "Gedreven door techniek", 437.

<sup>49</sup> Scott Nicholas Romaniuk and Marguerite Marlin, *Development and the Politics of Human Rights*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 112.

<sup>50</sup> Pieter Lemmens, "Bernard Stiegler," in *De nieuwe Franse filosofie, Denkers en thema's voor de 21e eeuw*, eds. Marc Schuilenburg, Sjoerd

Moreover, mankind merely exists *as* a defect or default (*par défaut*), which implies that it is his fate to constantly invent himself and his way of being, yet to never truly become himself.<sup>51</sup> This is how the human being is marked by an invincible ambivalence: a fact that Western metaphysicians have been repressing structurally since Plato, says Stiegler, since they've always rejected the accidental in favor of the essentialness of beings and it is because of this repressing that metaphysics is characterized by 'the forgetfulness of the human condition as technical condition'.<sup>52</sup>

The structurally incomplete and technically constituted process of becoming is what Stiegler understands as the typical human process of *individuation*; a concept first developed by French philosopher of technology Gilbert Simondon and which will be discussed further in chapter five.<sup>53</sup> Stiegler is very interested in the role of technics in this process of individuation, as human culture as a whole is founded on the possibility of the inheritance of technical artifacts that function as exterior, material memory tracks.<sup>54</sup> In chapter four, these transductive and evolutionary processes of technics, society and individuals will be thoroughly discussed but in summary, Stiegler argues that the becoming of man is equal to the becoming of technics and that these processes share the same origin. To illustrate this, Stiegler draws an analogy

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van Tuinen, Bram Ieven and Aukje van Rooden (Amsterdam: Boom Uitgevers, 2011), 298.

<sup>51</sup> Lemmens, "Bernard Stiegler," 298.

<sup>52</sup> Lemmens, "Bernard Stiegler," 298.

between this shared origin of man and technics, and the old Greek myth of Prometheus; this myth is very important in Stiegler's thinking, forming the foundation of it even, so in the next section we will take a closer look at Stiegler's interpretation of it.

### 3.2 The myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus

Through the old Greek myth of *Prometheus* Stiegler tells the story of how the original default of mankind forms the basis of his original technicity and relates to the indeterminacy and contingency of his being.<sup>55</sup> The myth is not only about Prometheus; it just as much tells the story of his brother, the forgetful Titan Epimetheus, to whom Prometheus passed on the task to create the world of the mortal beings that was initially given to him by Zeus; Zeus had also given Prometheus a basket full of qualities that needed to be distributed amongst all the animals.<sup>56</sup> Epimetheus wanted to take over the task, but as he was quite sloppy and forgetful, he just freely and thoughtlessly started to distribute the content of the basket, providing all animals in an equal distribution with strength, wings, weapons or velocity so that they could keep themselves alive, but when he was nearly done and only the humans still needed to be provided with qualities, the basket was already empty. He *forgot* the human being, who then came to be the creature without any qualities – which explains

<sup>53</sup> Romaniuk and Marlin, *Development and the Politics of Human Rights*, 112.

<sup>54</sup> Lemmens, "Bernard Stiegler," 301.

<sup>55</sup> Lemmens, "Gedreven door techniek", 437.

<sup>56</sup> Lemmens, "Gedreven door techniek", 395.

why the human being is a naked, vulnerable and barely viable creature in his natural state, compared to other living beings.<sup>57</sup> Prometheus then intervenes in order to try to compensate this deficiency of mankind that his brother accidentally caused with his forgetfulness; he went to Olympus to steal the fire – representative of technique (*techne*) – of the Gods and gave this to the humans.<sup>58</sup> Only, this theft of Prometheus is a fault as well, says Stiegler, which means that the human being is the creature that is generated through a double fault, which makes him *fundamentally* without qualities as well as *fundamentally* technical or prosthetic.<sup>59</sup>

For the Greeks, Prometheus is the god of technicity or *prostheticity* and anticipation, while Epimetheus symbolizes the ‘forgetting’ and ‘the fault’ – the Greek word *epimetheia* means ‘knowledge gained by experiences or mistakes of the past’ or ‘gained by trial and error’. The myth as a whole is read by Stiegler as a mythical explication of the essence of the pre-platonic, tragic and technical human condition.<sup>60</sup> See, when it comes to the understanding of the human condition as a technical condition, Stiegler specifically differentiates between the mythical epoch *before* and the metaphysical epoch *since* Plato, as Stiegler states that the mythical understanding of technics is very different and nearly opposite even to that of the metaphysical understanding.<sup>61</sup> In metaphysics,

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<sup>57</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 395, 439.

<sup>58</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 395.

<sup>59</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 395.

<sup>60</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 437.

technics (*techne*) is understood as the opposite of ‘reason’ (*logos*, *episteme*) and nature (*physis*) – like the law (*nomos*) is also being opposed to nature (*physis*) and the soul (*psyche*) to the body (*soma*) – , since it is seen as merely the result of the human hubris and violence against nature, while reason actually complies with nature in its search for the truth (*aletheia*).<sup>62</sup> Like Stiegler, Heidegger also stated that these metaphysical oppositions aren’t valid, pointing to the fact that *techne* and *physis* should both be seen as forms of *poiesis*: not only in the meaning of ‘making something’ but more fundamentally in the sense of ‘the emergence of something’ or *her-vorbringen*, as Heidegger called it.<sup>63</sup>

The mythical, tragic thinking of the ancient Greeks doesn’t construct such opposites between technics, nature and reason, but instead postulates several dimensions (*topoi*), defined by the boundaries of mortality; at one end are the immortals or gods (*theoi*), at the other end there is the animal realm, in which those who cannot die nor understand their death find themselves, while in between is where the human being is, godly in his mastery of fire but as mortal as animals, hence doomed to a technical,

<sup>61</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 437.

<sup>62</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 437-438.

<sup>63</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 41.

prosthetic<sup>64</sup> existence in anticipation of his own death.<sup>65</sup> Based on these ideas, Stiegler argues that technics forms the horizon of human existence and that philosophers have suppressed this fact since the rise of metaphysics, which has always preserved the distinction between *episteme* and *tekhne*.<sup>66</sup> Stiegler's critique of Western metaphysics is thus that it ignores the fundamentally technical and accidental character of human existence and thus structurally 'forgets' Epimetheus as the one who 'forgot' the human being. And it is because of this fault of Epimetheus that the human being can't participate in the balance that prevails in the animal realm<sup>67</sup> and that there's a permanent absence of orientation – or permanent disorientation – in human society. But it is also since this fault that the human being participates in the divine and it is this fault that created and still defines him; it is why Stiegler mentions that the human being *arises there where he is forgotten*: 'humans are the forgotten ones. Humans only occur through their being forgotten; they only appear in disappearing'.<sup>68</sup>

### 3.3 Freud's ideas on the beginning of human culture

Like Stiegler, Freud also reflects on the origins of humanity to investigate the discontent in our society. His study definitely shows parallels with the work of Stiegler as he for instance states

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<sup>64</sup> Here it is interesting to make a comparison with Freud's ideas, as he stated in chapter three of *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930) that 'mankind has become a kind of prosthetic God'.

<sup>65</sup> Lemmens, "Gedreven door techniek", 438.

<sup>66</sup> "Technics and Time 1," Wikipedia, accessed October 11, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technics\\_and\\_Time,\\_1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technics_and_Time,_1).

that the human being came upon this earth as a weak creature, writing that 'man first appeared on this earth as a feeble animal organism' and that 'human civilization commenced as soon as we gained control over fire and started to use tools'.<sup>69</sup> And he too emphasizes the ambivalent character of the technical advancements entailed by the evolution of mankind, saying that 'man has become a kind of prosthetic God, ... truly magnificent when he puts on all his auxiliary organs; but those organs have not grown on to him and still give him much trouble at times' and stating that 'future ages will bring new and probably unimaginable great advances in this field of civilization ... but in the interests of our investigations, we will not forget that present-day man does

<sup>67</sup> Lemmens, "Gedreven door techniek", 440.

<sup>68</sup> Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 188.

<sup>69</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 37.

not feel happy in his Godlike character'.<sup>70</sup> But although these remarks of Freud on the technical organs or auxiliary of mankind definitely show similarities with Stiegler's work, these are merely superficial and his notes are still very far from Stiegler's claims that *anthropo*-genesis is fundamentally a *techno*-genesis and that the current suppression of the technical organs by a capitalistic economical system has lead to an overall proletarianisation, desublimation and destruction of desire.

Freud most extensively reflects upon the origin of human civilization in chapter IV of *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, where he humans need for genital satisfaction became a permanent need instead of a need that occurred once in a while<sup>72</sup>, mankind was incited to enter into long-term relationships and form primitive families.<sup>73</sup> However, while in our civilization humans are mainly bound together in a libidinal way according to Freud – and Stieger – , love and civilization eventually aren't compatible with each other, leading to the discontent in our society. Families for instance tend to isolate themselves from the collective, preventing

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<sup>70</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 38-39.

<sup>71</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 48.

<sup>72</sup> In a long footnote at the beginning of chapter IV of his translated work *Civilization and its Discontents* (1962), Freud states that with 'the diminution of the olfactory stimuli', caused by 'man's raising himself from the ground', assuming 'an upright gait' and making his genitals visible, visual excitations took over and whereas the female 'menstrual process' used to influence the

writes that the origin of mankind lies firstly in the compulsion to work and secondly in the power of love<sup>71</sup>. He states that 'when primal man had discovered that it lay in his own hands, literally, to improve his lot on earth by working' – which assumes what Stiegler would later call *epiphylogenesis*, or the artificial recollection of memories – it became important whether other humans worked with or against him and these 'others' now suddenly became valuable as companions. And furthermore, as the

individuals from detaching and developing themselves in society. Furthermore, 'since a man doesn't have unlimited quantities of psychological energy at his disposal', society extracts libidinal energy from its participants – from men in particular, as woman 'represent the interests of the family and of sexual life, while the work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men' – in order for them to be able to labor and accomplish

male psyche merely intermittently, these visual excitations now had a permanent effect on the male's arousal. This is how, as Freud says at the first page of chapter IV 'the male acquired a motive for keeping the female or, speaking more generally, his sexual objects, near him while the female, who did not want to be separated from her helpless young, was obliged, in their interests, to remain with the stronger male'.

<sup>73</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 46.

cultural achievements.<sup>74</sup> Finally, civilization heavily regulates sexual life, as it restricts certain choices of love objects and imposes restrictions on man's erotic life through taboos, laws and customs.<sup>75</sup>

Like Freud, Stiegler too emphasizes the role of libidinal energy in the development of mankind and its discontent as I will show in chapter six of this thesis, but he thereby underlines the fundamental technical mediation of libido, whereas Freud barely thinks this technicity and rather 'represses' the fundamental role technics play in the origins of humanity and its discontent.

In brief, Freud states that the discontent in our civilization is caused by the fact that our sexuality is inherently and inevitably suppressed by our civilization, as he writes that 'with the assumption of an erect posture by man and with the depreciation of his sense of smell, it was not only his anal erotism, but the whole of his sexuality which threatened to fall a victim to organic repression'.<sup>76</sup> It seems quite paradoxical that it is our libidinal energy which keeps our civilization going and brought it to life in

Freud makes a clear distinction between the roles of men and of women in our civilization, where Stiegler doesn't: his sexist remarks may be typical of his time but they are also due to his own theory, which is all about sexual energy as the catalyst of our drives and compulsions. In any case, he has a quite dismissive attitude towards women, allocating them a paradoxical role in our society: as the pivot of the family, women *enable* the foundation of our society while they also *undermine* its full potential as they oppose against it out of resentment over the intimacy that the demands of labor take from their men.

the first place. It is this disparity that mankind is unable to escape from, causing him to 'take up a strange attitude of hostility towards civilization' and to 'not feel comfortable in it'.<sup>77</sup> In chapter five and six this anomaly between the human civilization and its individuals will be thoroughly discussed but first, to get a better grip on Stiegler's thinking, the next chapter will set out to bring a deeper understanding of his conception of technics.

## **4. THE CONSTITUTIVITY OF TECHNICS: ANTHROPO-GENESIS AS TECHNO-GENESIS AND FREUD'S FORGETFULNESS OF TECHNICS<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>74</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 50.

<sup>75</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 51.

<sup>76</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 53.

<sup>77</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 34, 36.

‘Man is differentiated from animals in ontology, not in species or genus, so he cannot under any circumstances be considered an animal with a cultural or metaphysical addition. On the contrary: the form of being of the human itself is different from all vegetable and animal beings, because man has a world and is in the world, while plants and animals inhabit only a transitory environment.’

*Peter Sloterdijk, 1999*<sup>78</sup>

#### 4.1 On the constitutive role of technics in the evolution of mankind

This chapter will show how Stiegler has not only thoroughly thought through the origins of humans, or *anthropo*-genesis, but also the further evolution of mankind up to the current epoch in order to understand the nature of humankind and the discontent in its society. A preliminary observation concerns the fact that Stiegler drew the notion of *anthropo*-genesis from the French paleoanthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan (1911-1986), who showed how humans originate from a process of technical exteriorization of life, whereby technics as a medium of exteriorized experience has always functioned as a supplementary system of inheritance.<sup>79</sup> Hence technics behaves as an external memory that is unique for the human being and that fundamentally differentiates him from other species. It in fact means that the human being is a new way of being that cannot

merely be seen as a biological being; this process of technical exteriorization is what separates mankind from the animal kingdom and what makes humans human.<sup>80</sup>

These ideas of Leroi-Gourhan underlie Stiegler’s work and he not only concludes from it that the individual human being has to be considered as part of a process and not as a definite substance or concept, but also that this process of *anthropo*-genesis is in fact a *techno*-genesis and that it is nothing more than *the effect* of the becoming-technical of life or of the continuation of the biological evolution with non-biological, technical means.<sup>81</sup> With the ideas of Leroi-Gourhan Stiegler shows that through technics, the human being has access to an extra, external or third memory, where other species only have two memories in order to be able to evolve and to guarantee the preservation of the – knowledge of the – species over the generations.<sup>82</sup> The first memory is the individual or *epigenetic* memory, which consists of the nervous system and the body more generally and is lost when the organism dies, while the second memory is the species-specific or *genetic* memory that is located in the genome of a species and is made available to the new generation.<sup>83</sup> Now with their third or *epiphylogenetic* memory, a human can transmit individual information *beyond* his lifespan and to the collective as a whole,

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<sup>78</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, “Rules for the Human Zoo: A Response to the Letter on Humanism,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27 (2009): 18, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1068/dst3>

<sup>79</sup> Stiegler, *Per toeval filosoferen*, 8.

<sup>80</sup> Lemmens, “Bernard Stiegler,” 300.

<sup>81</sup> Stiegler, *Per toeval filosoferen*, 8.

<sup>82</sup> Lemmens, “Bernard Stiegler,” 300.

<sup>83</sup> Lemmens, “Bernard Stiegler,” 300.

through the exteriorization of experiences, information and memories via technical ‘artifacts’. So technically, humans create artifactual memory aids or *hypomnemata*.<sup>84</sup> It is this capacity of being able to accumulate and sedimentate successive *epigeneses*,<sup>85</sup> that makes the human being into an *epiphylogenetic*, technical being. In fact I would argue that for Stiegler, humanity *initiates* with the becoming exterior of memory, embodied in physical objects, where previously memory was something interiorized. Through these technical artifacts, memories are able to travel through time and space, beyond the individual organism, to become ‘technically synthesized’.<sup>86</sup> The whole of human culture, tradition and spirit is based on this possibility of extra-biological inheritance through technical artifacts, functioning as *hypomnemata*.<sup>87</sup> So this evolutionary *epiphylogenetic* process, which is characteristic for *anthropo*-genesis, is a process unfolding itself through time, or even better: *as a temporalization of the process of individuation*, it is *constituting* time and so it is not merely an empirical, but rather a transcendental process. Besides this process as a whole, Stiegler also specifically wants to understand the current epoch as a part of this evolutionary process and which according to him is marked by a development that he refers to as ‘*hyper-industrialization*’; a theme to which chapter six is devoted.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 76.

<sup>85</sup> Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1*, 140.

<sup>86</sup> Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 2: Disorientation*, trans. Stephen Barker (California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 97.

<sup>87</sup> Lemmens, “Bernard Stiegler,” 301.

#### 4.2 On the process of grammatization and the question of *mnemo-technics*

This process of exteriorization through technical artifacts that Leroi-Gourhan described is at the core of Stiegler’s thinking, although he extends this theory with his own ideas and concepts, drawing inspiration from philosophers like Derrida and Husserl. For instance, to describe this exteriorization of memory as it happened since the invention of the script, he also uses the term ‘grammatization’, which he derived from the French linguist Sylvain Auroux, who referred with it to the formalization or ‘discretization’ of spoken language into elements – *grammés* – that together form a system (the alphabet).<sup>89</sup> Stiegler broadens this notion by stating that also the formalization and automation of a worker’s operations through a machine or an assembly line, as well as the digitization of sounds and images, are forms of grammatization.<sup>90</sup> He describes the notion as ‘the process by which all the fluxes or flows through which symbolic – that is, also, existential – acts are linked, can be discretized, formalized and reproduced.’<sup>91</sup>

Stiegler often speaks of the Western grammatization process, referring to the specific individuation process of the Western

<sup>88</sup> Lemmens, “Bernard Stiegler,” 301.

<sup>89</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 465.

<sup>90</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 465-466.

<sup>91</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 172.

world, which is characterized through ‘the appearance of certain *mnemo*-technics and *mnemo*-technologies, which are the basis for both ancient and recent developments of the grammatization process characterizing Western becoming ... and [which] constitute the characteristic pre-individual funds of the psychic and collective individuation process in which the West consists’.<sup>92</sup> This paragraph will elaborate more on the notion of *mnemo*-technics. To do so, it is necessary to introduce another of Stiegler’s terms, closely linked to his concept of *hypomnemata*, which is ‘tertiary retention(s)’. For this concept, Stiegler was inspired by the ideas of philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) on primary and secondary retentions.

Husserl stated that ‘conscious time is woven from *retentions* and *protentions*’, or in other words: by what has passed and by what still has to come.<sup>93</sup> In his work *Pour une nouvelle critique de l’économie politique* (2009), Stiegler explains how he interprets Husserl’s concepts to form his own notion of ‘tertiary retention(s)’, saying that primary retentions are those first impressions that are immediately formed at the moment of the experience itself and secondary retentions are the ‘memorial contents’ or *souvenirs* via which our memory saves these first impressions. Now tertiary retentions are the exteriorizations of secondary retentions in technical memory aids, such as the script, the Internet or the content on our mobile phones; Stiegler speaks of a ‘*mnemo*-

technical exteriorization’.<sup>94</sup> So what he basically says is that all technical objects, *as* tertiary retentions, preserve our experiences and memories, forming an external memory support that functions across generations, throughout the history of mankind and determining our current learning processes, brain activities and ways of understanding. Every human being born into this world already finds himself in a sphere constituted by tertiary retentions and will also produce tertiary retentions, that is, exteriorizations of his individual mind, which then become part of the collective mind or ‘spirit’ as well.<sup>95</sup>

Now what Stiegler wants to emphasize is that, since the nineteenth century, this ‘*mnemo*-technical retentional layer’<sup>96</sup> has altered in an unprecedented way, as an industry of new technologies arose that was capable of grammatizing audiovisual experiences, thereby incorporating all spiritual, psychic, motoric and aesthetic functions of the human being into one system ‘devoted to the production of tertiary retentions’.<sup>97</sup> In chapter six it will become clearer how this industry, propelled by a capitalist growth dynamic, transformed ‘culture’ into a profit motivated ‘culture industry’ and how it led our Western society into a ‘herdsh *hyper*-synchronization in which individuals become disindividuated’ and in which the process of adoption and integration of new technologies, which is essential for the continuation of the Western grammatization process, is frustrated, also through the continuous acceleration in which the

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<sup>92</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 41.

<sup>93</sup> Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 8.

<sup>94</sup> Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, 8-9.

<sup>95</sup> Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, 9.

<sup>96</sup> Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, 9.

<sup>97</sup> Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, 11.

technological becoming of our epoch, through this production system, became involved in.<sup>98</sup> Obviously this development is what according to Stiegler led to the *current* decadence and disorientation in our Western society, one of the symptoms being that its culture and individuals are being overwhelmed by the process of technical individuation instead of co-constructively forming and influencing each other in a transductive movement.

### 4.3 Freud's unawareness of the constitutivity of technics

Stiegler often emphasizes how Freud 'repressed' the role of technics in his thinking of the evolution of mankind and the emergence of desire as a consequence of the 'organic repression' that resulted from mankind's 'adoption of an upright position'.<sup>99</sup> According to Stiegler, Freud couldn't understand the human system of inheritance, as he wasn't able to access the idea of *epiphylogenesis*: the idea that mankind's primary and secondary retentions are always inherited *only through* their relation with human *prostheses* or 'artifacts'.<sup>100</sup> It is because of this 'failure' that Freud had trouble thinking the relation between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of the human consciousness and the way in which our memories – and thus the traumas they inflicted – were developed but despite this, Freud *did* have some revolutionary

insights, which Stiegler surely noticed as he highlighted them in a lecture he gave at a conference in London on the thirteenth of May in 2004, under the title 'Desire and Knowledge'.<sup>101</sup> Namely, 'Freud understood, in particular with respect to the organ of olfaction ... that the physiological organology of the human body unceasingly transforms itself throughout the genealogy of what he calls libidinal economy [and thus that] every human organ is constantly in a meta-state of functional re-definition'.<sup>102</sup> Freud just didn't realize how this system in which all the human organs are inscribed, only exists 'within a systemic relationship with another organological level which is that of ... human artifacts'.<sup>103</sup> So Freud was quite aware of the way human organs – and thus also the human brain – were constantly evolving and redefining themselves through the changing social, geographical and familial functions within the human civilization and that it was necessary to understand this 'historicization' of these organs in order to understand their working, but the fact that this organological dynamic always happens *and is only possible* by means of and in co-evolution with human artifacts, remained unthought with Freud, which is why he wasn't able to produce an adequate theory to go along with his insights.<sup>104</sup> Mankind did not, as Freud reasoned,

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<sup>98</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 43.

<sup>99</sup> Bernard Stiegler, "Desire and Knowledge: The Dead seize the Living", lecture at a conference at Tate Modern, London, 13 May 2004, <http://arsindustrialis.org/desire-and-knowledge-dead-seize-living>.

<sup>100</sup> Bernard Stiegler, "Desire and Knowledge".

<sup>101</sup> Bernard Stiegler, "Desire and Knowledge".

<sup>102</sup> Bernard Stiegler, "Desire and Knowledge".

<sup>103</sup> Bernard Stiegler, "Desire and Knowledge".

<sup>104</sup> Bernard Stiegler, "Desire and Knowledge".

first ‘rose himself from the ground’<sup>105</sup> and subsequently his hands became free to develop tools. No, *mankind did not walk on his hands anymore as he started to make things with them* and collaterally his hands evolved in an unprecedented way.

But although Stiegler *does* theorize this co-evolution of the human organology and that of technics, Freud greatly inspired him, for instance with his then revolutionary hypothesis of how the human consciousness is not in control of its own activities but that it is driven from within by unconscious, uncontrollable powers. Furthermore he obviously inspired Stiegler with his ideas of the human being as an open and continuously transforming being, driven by his – mostly unconscious – libidinal energies and desires.<sup>106</sup> One could even argue that in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* Freud in a way already sketches, though maybe unconsciously, what Stiegler would later call our ‘technical milieu’ – a term Stiegler derives again from Gilbert Simondon – , with which he refers to the successive, sedimented layers of technical exteriorization that always exists, prior to the birth of every new individual life. When Freud addresses the problem of ‘preservation in the sphere of the mind’ by analogy of the genesis of the city Rome, stating that nothing that has ever been formed can become lost and all ancient layers of the city – or our mind – are still ubiquitous in the present, he in fact describes the essence of Stiegler’s notion of the ‘technical milieu’: all existing *mnemo-*

technics, forming the pre-individual milieu that all individuals are born into, together condition our relationship with space and time. So through the existence of the video camera, we experience the past as visible, or through the existence of axes, we experience trees as choppable.

But ironically, as Freud discusses this analogy of the city Rome, with which he refers to the preservation of all layers *in the mind*, he does not seem to grasp the parallel with the memorial preservation in the outside world through tertiary retentions, since he *does* go through some of the technical exteriorizations that function as extensions of our body and memory, but *only* speaks of how these auxiliaries ‘remove the limits of [man’s] functioning’ and how man has, through them, become a ‘prosthetic God’. So although he comes close, he never links his idea of preservation to the technical artifacts or mnemonics in the outside world, nor does he conceptualize them altogether as a technical, pre-individual milieu, like Stiegler does.<sup>107</sup> Striking is also the fact that Freud, in his discussion of the technical artifacts and auxiliaries of mankind<sup>108</sup>, never mentions the new audiovisual technologies of radio, cinema and early television that were emerging in his time. This is especially remarkable since Freud wrote his book during the rise of Hitler, who made clever use of these new technologies to gain power by influencing the spirit of the people; something that a psycho-analyst like Freud must have noticed and gotten inspired by.

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<sup>105</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 46.

<sup>106</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 432.

<sup>107</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 37, 39.

<sup>108</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 37-38.

Thus, because of Freud's inability to think *anthropo*-genesis as a *techno*-genesis and to conceptualize the preservation of our experiences via technical artifacts and their formation of a pre-individual, technical milieu, Freud wasn't able to think the discontent in our civilization as an *onto-phylogenetic* discontent: a discontent that is related to the evolutionary mutual development of human individuals, their external technical memories and their civilization. The next chapter will concentrate more on the dynamics of this evolution, as it is focused on understanding Stiegler's notion of 'individuation'.

## 5. ON ELEVATION: THE WESTERN PROCESS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL INDIVIDUATION AS DISCUSSED BY STIEGLER AND FREUD

'Individuated being is not substance but rather the putting into question of being, being through a problematic, divided, reunited, carried in this problematic, which sets itself up through it and causes it to become. *Becoming is not the becoming of individuated being but the becoming of the individuation of being*: what happens occurs in the form of a putting into question of being, in other words, in the form of the element of an open problematic, which is the individuation of resolved being: the individual is contemporary of its becoming for this becoming is its individuation; time itself is

essence, not as development starting from an origin or tendency towards some end but, rather as resolute constitution of being.'

*Gilbert Simondon, 1989*<sup>109</sup>

### 5.1 The origin and history of the concept of individuation

As a consequence of mankind's original default and corresponding accidental mode of being, Stiegler postulates that mankind is involved in a process of permanent becoming and condemned to a continuous journey towards wholeness and oneness that will

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<sup>109</sup> David Scott, *Gilbert Simondon's Psychic and Collective Individuation: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2014), 6.

never be complete, since the very *proprium* of man is that he is essentially and fundamentally accidental, prosthetic and incomplete, or 'lacking' (cf. Heidegger's *Sein zum Tode*). Stiegler based his ideas on this process of permanent becoming on the theory of 'individuation', that was developed by French philosopher Gilbert Simondon (1924-1989), – who in his turn was inspired by the Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung (1875 - 1961) – which states that there is no fixed idea of individuality and therefore 'individuals do not precede the process of their individuation', thereby obviously also revolting against the metaphysical primacy of substantialism.<sup>110</sup> The term 'individuation' can more or less be understood in the same way as Michel Foucault's term 'subjectivation', with which he referred to the construction processes of subjects, in which internal and external forces are at work as transforming powers, with the subject as an always temporal and provisional result. Both Foucault and Simondon emphasize how an individual is not an entity but an ongoing process or a temporal 'crystallization of movement', that never stops becoming.<sup>111</sup> According to Simondon, an individual's individuality always has to emerge out of something 'pre-individual' – a term Stiegler also borrowed from him – and will never reach a final form because it will always

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<sup>110</sup> Romaniuk and Marlin, *Development and the Politics of Human Rights*, 112.

<sup>111</sup> Gilbert Simondon, "The Genesis of the Individual," in *Incorporations*, eds. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 302-305.

continue to change up until the death of the person, from where the individual will simply stop to individuate. For Simondon, this process is not only a feature of humans, but also of physical phenomena and therefore the human subjectivity will never be complete since it always and only develops itself in conjunction with other living and non-living beings surrounding it, thereby already hinting at an interaction between humans and technics, as Stiegler will further develop in his work.<sup>112</sup>

Carl Gustav Jung, who inspired Simondon with his ideas on the notion of individuation, was a close friend to Freud for a certain time and shared similar ideas with him on subjects as the psyche, the unconscious and the human libido. But Jung was the one to coin the term 'individuation', referring to the inner transformational process of a human that, in optimal conditions, leads to the development of an *in-dividual*: a separate, indivisible unity or 'whole' that is characterized by a synthesis between the conscious ego and the unconscious, instinctive processes of the mind.<sup>113</sup> He also described it as the process to become aware of oneself or as the path of ascension. Jung also postulated that the human soul is several millions years old and that the individual temporal ego is merely a small part of it, funded on this ancient basis, as he wrote: 'Individual consciousness is only the flower and

<sup>112</sup> Simondon, "The Genesis of the Individual," 302.

<sup>113</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious (Collective Works of C.G. Jung Vol. 9 Part 1)*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, ed. Gerhard Adler (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980) 275.

the fruit of a season, sprung from the perennial rhizome beneath the earth; and it would find itself in better accord with the truth if it took the existence of the rhizome into its calculations. For the root matter is the mother of all things.<sup>114</sup> Now according to Jung ‘modern man’ – Jung’s designation of the current Western man who is alienated from his former (religious) beliefs – has lost its awareness of and connection with this ancient foundation and so he is marked by a stagnation of the individuation process. This modern stagnation of the individuation process is something that Stiegler thematized as well, but since he particularly envisions this process of individuation as something which evolves around individuals, the collective *and technics*, he does not so much relate the stagnation of the process to a ‘loss of awareness of and connection with an ancient soul foundation’ but to the incapability of modern mankind to keep up with the rapidly changing technological advancements and to integrate them into his own system, or *adopt* them, as Stiegler would say.

## 5.2 On Stiegler’s concept of ‘individuation’

With Simondon, Stiegler states that ‘the psychic individual can only individuate itself within and relative to a collective’, together forming a process of co-individuation of the *I* or the psyche and the *we* or the collective and thus stating that ‘individuation is always

a process of psychic-collective individuation’.<sup>115</sup> But with Foucault, Stiegler’s focus is on the role of technics within this human process of individuation.<sup>116</sup> So, as is clear by now, what Stiegler basically does is that he adds a third strand to the co-individuation process of the psyche and the collective, namely ‘technics’ or the process of technical individuation.<sup>117</sup> Stiegler moreover states that this technical individuation *precedes* the other two, as it is always technical innovation that is the trigger for the human individuation process; this is the main reason why Stiegler refers to the technical organs as ‘pre-individual milieu’, although this milieu is simultaneously shaped by the collective and its individuals as well.<sup>118</sup> The fact that technics, collective and individuals are simultaneously shaping, influencing and *composing* each other back and forth, means that the dynamic of this techno-psycho-collective individuation process has a *transductive* character: a relation whereby the identity of each is determined by their mutual relationship.<sup>119</sup>

As prosthetic beings, we constantly need to internalize the technical individuation process in order to be able to *become* at all. Vice versa, this technical process needs to be adopted by the *I*s and the *we* if it wants to make progress; it needs to be integrated in the process of psychic and collective individuation.<sup>120</sup> Now according to Stiegler, in our epoch this appropriation of technics

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<sup>114</sup> Carl Alfred Meier, *Personality: The Individuation Process in Light of C. G. Jung’s Typology* (Einsiedeln: Daimon, 1995), 149.

<sup>115</sup> Lemmens, “Bernard Stiegler,” 299.

<sup>116</sup> Lemmens, “Bernard Stiegler,” 299.

<sup>117</sup> Lemmens, “Bernard Stiegler,” 299.

<sup>118</sup> Stiegler, *Technics and Time 2*, 2.

<sup>119</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door Techniek,” 422.

<sup>120</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 482.

– which are the new technologies ‘working and installing themselves through our spirits’ – is *absent*, because of the fact that the *mnemo*-technical system is subjected to a capitalistic production system with the aim of synchronizing and controlling individuals, thereby reducing them to consumers and frustrating the processes of psychic and collective individuation.<sup>121</sup> It is this blockage caused by the way technology is developing in our era, that causes the discontent in our current modern epoch.<sup>122</sup> This brings us to Stiegler’s main thesis again: in the Western industrial world, the constitutivity of technics is being repressed, where it should actually be integrated in the process of psychic and collective individuation, if it wishes to develop.<sup>123</sup> The absence of this integration – or *adoption* – of technics inevitably leads to a disbalance, *de-composition*, *de-sublimation* (the elimination of the transformation of our libidinal energy to spiritual energy) and eventually liquidation of the psycho-social individuation process and the desire that underlies this process, where then the social system is merely able to *adapt* to the techno-capitalistic system and to the consuming lifestyle that is being promoted worldwide.<sup>124</sup> Stiegler worries about this structural manipulation and controlling of the desires and motivations of individuals by the current marketing strategies, as they exploit these desires in order to optimize the capitalistic system of production and consumption,

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<sup>121</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 482.

<sup>122</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 479.

<sup>123</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 482.

<sup>124</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 423-424, 482.

speaking with Foucault of a ‘surveillance society’.<sup>125</sup> Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was one of the first philosophers to explicitly point to this claiming, controlling and systematic character of modern technologies, referring to it with the term *Gestell*.<sup>126</sup> We might be able to say – and Heidegger would affirm this – that the pressure of current societies to adapt, at all costs, to the process of permanent innovation, indicates that the evolution of technics doesn’t originate from human drives but is a process with its own logic and dynamic, that increasingly imposes itself upon the human way of being.<sup>127</sup>

### **5.3 Freud’s theory of libidinal economy as foundation for Stiegler’s critique of contemporary capitalistic society**

Stiegler’s ideas on the exploitation and channeling of the human desire in fact have their roots in Freud’s theory on the notion of libidinal energy. Namely, it is this desire of individuals or their libidinal energy on which capitalism thrives according to Stiegler, causing this system to be primarily interested in catching, channeling and controlling these desires of the individual consciousnesses of entrepreneurs, producers and investors as well as of consumers, which ultimately leads to a synchronization of the singular, existential time of individual consciousnesses with the

<sup>125</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 22.

<sup>126</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 6.

<sup>127</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 8.

‘real’ time of the capitalistic production system.<sup>128 129</sup> This means that in essence, our current capitalistic economy is a libidinal economy, whereby catching the attention of all consciousnesses is of vital importance for the preservation of the capitalistic system, since it is its most important merchandise.<sup>130</sup> Stiegler argues that capitalism has become a serious threat for the future of human civilization *as such*, as it structurally destroys the most essential precondition for it, namely the human desire itself.<sup>131</sup> By doing so, it reduces humans to mere consumers, robbing them from their most fundamental characteristic: their individuality and singularity, or *existence*, thereby changing the human’s way of ‘Being-in-the-world’ and reducing it to a mere satisfaction of egoistic desires; to a *subsistence*.<sup>132 133</sup>

It is interesting to note how Freud was also worried about the loss of libidinal energy that he diagnosed the human civilization with, although according to him, this was *inherent* to the development and progress of human society *as such*: ‘What we call our civilization is largely responsible for our misery, and we should be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions’ as ‘civilization demands sacrifices of our sexual satisfaction’ since ‘a man does not have unlimited quantities of psychical energy’ and thus has to make an ‘expedient distribution of his libido’.<sup>134</sup> It is not only the sexual energy or libido that is

suppressed by civilization; it is also the human tendency towards aggression that is suppressed in order to maintain our civilization. So Freud already noticed how libidinal energy is the primary driver of our civilization – as it initially induced human beings to form families and live together in groups – , but how it is also an inherent part of our society to suppress this same energy and to transform or *sublimate* it into socially accepted behavior or ‘substitutive satisfactions’ like art and ‘scientific activities’, which unfortunately eventually is never satisfying enough, leading to a discontent in our civilization.<sup>135</sup>

After these analyses it seems fair to say that it are Freud’s concepts of libidinal energy, drives and sublimation that allow Stiegler to think the discontent in our modern capitalistic epoch. With Freud, he does believe that the discontent is also an inherent part of the human way of being, but he does not believe that it is simply a consequence of the human libidinal energy and its inevitable suppression by our civilization. As the next chapter will point out, Stiegler’s thinking goes beyond Freud with his concept of the fundamentally technical origin of the human spirit and its desires and it will become clear how it is precisely *because* of this technical basis that they can be controlled and channeled through the digital technologies of our current capitalistic economy.

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<sup>128</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 36.

<sup>129</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 36.

<sup>130</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 36.

<sup>131</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 423.

<sup>132</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 423.

<sup>133</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 91.

<sup>134</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 33, 55, 50.

<sup>135</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 22.

## 6. ON THE CAPITALISTIC EPOCH OF WESTERN GRAMMATIZATION PROCESS

‘If we want meaningful transformations to happen in the future of the planet in terms of the climate, for example, individual behaviors need to be transformed. These individual behaviors must become more conscious, more attentive, more caring towards that which surrounds them. And they must turn that which surrounds them into an object of desire. This happens through an elevation of collective intelligence, that is to say through a re-launching of desire. We ingest more and more sugar and fat, we eject and produce more and more CO<sub>2</sub> because we are in this situation of symbolic misery, and we try to make up for it through things that make us consume an enormous amount of materials, and materials that, when consumed under those conditions, produce an enormous amount of toxins. But this toxicity is first of all that of the destruction of the symbolic through the industrial populism that is the enemy of the beautiful and all things like it.’

*Bernard Stiegler, 2012*<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Bernard Stiegler, “Interview: From Libidinal Economy to the Ecology of the Spirit”, by Frédéric Neyrat, trans. Arne De Boever, *Parrhesia* 14, 2012, 14,

### 6.1 The birth of the Western industrial model

In his work *Mérecadence et Discredit, tome 1: La décadence des démocraties industrielles*, which was first published in 2004, Stiegler argues that the technological developments since the Industrial Revolution in combination with the rise of capitalism have caused some major changes in our lives, in particular a frustration of the psycho-collective individuation process. Stiegler mainly criticizes the Western industrial model that was implemented in the United States at the beginning of the previous century and is built on the ideology of consumerism and the control of culture. Namely, this new industry placed ‘cultural control’ at the heart of its development process, through which culture became ‘a strategic function of industrial activity’ and hence the ‘culture industry’ was born.<sup>137</sup> With the emergence of radio and television in the period around the Second World War, this industry evolved into the ‘programme’ industries, which are all about programming, marketing and channeling the minds of individuals.<sup>138</sup>

[http://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia14/parrhesia14\\_stiegler.pdf](http://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia14/parrhesia14_stiegler.pdf)

<sup>137</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 4.

<sup>138</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 4-5.

The development of this culture industry opened up a new era in the Western grammatization process – the history of the exteriorization of memory in all its forms, as I have discussed – which has now evolved into a process of mass-industrialization or *hyper*-industrialization and an accompanying digitalization that peaked with the birth of the Internet at the end of the twentieth century. This digitalization contributed to the dissemination of information and the exponential growth of new technologies and industries around the world, up to the point where we are now: living in a society in which permanent innovation, or as Stiegler says ‘continuous acceleration’, is commonplace and the industrial production model is used not only to produce material products, but also to produce ‘immaterial’ services, entertainment, knowledge and culture on a massive scale.<sup>139 140</sup>

Stiegler argues that this current exponential growth or permanent acceleration of technological development has its roots in the Industrial Revolution. Let’s have a closer look at his argument. According to him, the Industrial Revolution commenced with the invention of the steam engine by James Watt and its application by entrepreneur Matthew Boulton; what’s important is that this was the first marriage between technology and science.<sup>141</sup> With historicist Bertrand Gille (1920-1980) he states that technological systems have always been ahead of ‘other systems’ – a term of

Gille, mainly referring to the social system – and that before the Industrial Revolution, technological systems evolved quite slowly, with long stable phases in which one technology was dominant for a while, giving the other systems time to adjust to the new technological system.<sup>142</sup> But with the invention of the steam engine, for the first time a collaboration was established between science and technology, two fields that were hitherto thought of as separate domains. This, together with the economic exploitation of this marriage in the form of capital accumulation through financial investments in more techno-scientific projects, marked the start of the Industrial Revolution and it jumpstarted the technological innovation process, which from then on grew exponentially.<sup>143</sup>

According to Gille, every period of adjustment [*ajustement*] to a new technical system is necessarily preceded by a period of *désajustement*: a stage of divorce between the old and the new system. However, since the Industrial Revolution, technical systems succeed each other at such a fast pace, that it is causing a *permanent* technical revolution, which in turn leads to a *permanent* condition of *désajustement* for the social system; this means that our current society is, at best, able to passively adapt to this permanent innovation of technics, instead of actively and creatively adjusting itself to and in dialogue with the new technical structures.<sup>144</sup> Stiegler speaks of a permanent state of *adaptation*, instead of the

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<sup>139</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 43.

<sup>140</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 5-6.

<sup>141</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 4.

<sup>142</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 4.

<sup>143</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 13.

<sup>144</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 5.

rational and wholesome *adoption* of the new technical enhancements by the social system. As an additional effect of this permanent adaption, Stiegler also speaks of a *contemporary disorientation* that currently seems to be a universal experience. This is in fact nothing more than the ‘re-experiencing’ of our *original disorientation*: the condition of fundamental prostheticity and accidentally that until now, through long and stable periods of technical development, had always been very well concealed and forgotten.<sup>145</sup>

One might think that all these innovations in principle serve the purpose of creating more happiness amongst all beings, or at least amongst humans, but this doesn’t seem to be the case. To speak with Freud: ‘Men ... seem to have observed that this newly won power over space and time, this subjugation of the forces of nature, which is the fulfillment of a longing that goes back thousands of years, has not increased the amount of pleasurable satisfaction which they may expect from life and has not made them feel happier’, although ‘we ought not to infer from it that technical progress is without value for the economics of our happiness’.<sup>146</sup> Stiegler has also noticed this seemingly paradoxical result of technical progress, which according to him currently even threatens our cultural development as he mentions that ‘with technological evolution having become incessant ... societies and the individuals composing them regress to their most archaic

stages, and withdraw to a state of herdish hyper-synchronization in which they become disindividuated’.<sup>147</sup> Why the ‘incessant technological evolution’ has become a threat to our culture, has everything to do with the fact that other systems – in particular the social system – cannot keep up with it, culminating in a state whereby the integration and absorption of technics is not happening spontaneously any more and has to be organized and stimulated in order to guarantee a market for the output of the *hyper-productive* industry that is been driven by the fast-paced technological en scientific inventions and their investors.<sup>148</sup> This stimulation of the absorption of the industrial output is called the phenomenon of *consumption*, which today has become characteristic for the lifestyle of many individuals.<sup>149</sup>

## 6.2 Consumerism as a new phase in the process of proletarianization

What is important to understand is that it is not necessarily the acceleration of technological development that is problem, but the fact that the social system is no longer able to integrate these technologies and form a composition with them; a dynamic that is at the core of the (techno-)psycho-collective individuation process. Instead, the social system is being subjected to the imperatives of the capitalistic industry and its marketing and advertising strategies to stimulate the markets. This industry is

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<sup>145</sup> Stiegler, *Technics and Time* 2, 7-8.

<sup>146</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 34-35.

<sup>147</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit*, Volume 1, 43.

<sup>148</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 411.

<sup>149</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 411.

focused on capturing, channeling and controlling the desires of individuals, since this is what it thrives on with its aim to maximize the mass production of consuming behavior. And in order to appeal to the masses quickly and efficiently, its purpose is the synchronization of all singular individuals with the capitalistic production process. But, by synchronizing and standardizing the behavior of individuals, trying to appeal to their – unconscious – desires, these individuals are being reduced to mere ‘consumers’. For Stiegler this consumerism is not the way to go if we want to truly elevate the development of technology, the collective and its individuals in a sustainable way, even apart from the question whether this consumerist lifestyle does justice to the human’s way of being *at all*.<sup>150</sup> To put it even more strongly, Stiegler says this consumerist lifestyle is catastrophic for the development of the human spirit and for the *noosphere* as such: the layer of knowledge and technology with which the human being surrounds itself and in which he flourishes as the ‘knowing’ creature.<sup>151</sup> It threatens the *noo*-diversity – or heterogeneity of knowledge – , leading to a moral and spiritual crisis, since consumerism submits the human existence into a mere subsistence, characterized by its herdish behavior and it thereby frustrates or even destroys the human’s singularity – his ‘being-unique’ – and the art of life – or *savoir-vivre* as Stiegler calls it – by which mankind is constituted.<sup>152 153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 380.

<sup>151</sup> Bernard Stiegler, “De mens is een probleem voor de mens geworden,” interview by Florentijn van Rootselaar, *Filosofie Magazine* 10, vol. 24, October 2016, 31.

Stiegler thus argues that this consumerism destroys mankind’s own conditions of existence and that it is a further step in the process of ‘proletarianization’, on which Karl Marx (1818-1883) wrote about first.<sup>154</sup> Marx already foresaw how the new machines that occurred since the Industrial Revolution, gained power over knowledge; a power that used to be solely with the craftsman who *knew* his trade. But the modern laborer no longer *knows*, as he is reduced to his workforce.<sup>155</sup> It is this loss of knowledge and reduction of the individual due to the increase of industrial automation in our *hyper*-industrial society that keeps pushing the synchronization of the social system with the technical system, resulting in a further proletarianization of the individual – as consumer he is now even further reduced to his mere buying power – and in a reduction of the human existence as such, or as Stiegler phrased it: “This becoming [of techno-logy and its permanent innovation under the pressure of capital investment], that presents itself in the first place as progress, separates capital and labour by investing in machinery, enabling the formalization and exteriorization of the processes of production, that is, the grammatization of the production process, and, thereby, the massification of labour and the reduction of production costs. This is how the figure of the proletarian comes to be drawn ... [and

<sup>152</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 28.

<sup>153</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 421.

<sup>154</sup> Stiegler, “De mens is een probleem ... geworden,” 31.

<sup>155</sup> Stiegler, “De mens is een probleem ... geworden,” 31.

it is] the proletarianization of work that Simondon analyses as a loss of individuation, as I have frequently recalled.<sup>156</sup>

### 6.3 *Otium and negotium*

In *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies*, Stiegler writes how essential it is ‘to investigate without delay in the enormous problems of mental environments that are in *disequilibrium* and that create *disequilibrium* [and which] constitute an industrial development of cognitive, relational and cultural technologies that aim solely for short-term and unbridled profit’.<sup>157</sup> To better explain these problems, he elaborates upon the distinction between *otium* and *negotium*, ancient Latin terms roughly referring to ‘leisure time’ (*otium*) and to the opposing ‘daily business’ (*negotium*), which Stiegler uses to characterize the contrast between his notions of ‘existence’ and ‘subsistence’. For Stiegler, *otium* represents ‘the culture of that of which we must take care’, the practices that transform and elevate the self, like writing and contemplating, while *negotium* stands for ‘the rationalization of all layers of existence’.<sup>158</sup> In his view, ‘the spirit of capitalism changes the meaning of elevation, of the desire to raise oneself up’ as it becomes a mere ‘work ethic’ or ‘an ethic of *negotium*’.<sup>159</sup> Furthermore ‘the absorption of the practices of *hypomnemata* – previously devoted to *otium* as cult of the absoluteness of the singularity of existence – into *negotium* as efficiency of calculation

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<sup>156</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit*, Volume 1, 62.

<sup>157</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit*, Volume 1, 22.

<sup>158</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit*, Volume 1, 83, 86.

<sup>159</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit*, Volume 1, 85.

rationalizing all layers of existence, [causes] existence to become nothing more than the struggle for survival, reduced to the business of subsistence.’<sup>160</sup>

With the capitalistic industry pushing individuals towards a consumerist lifestyle, the very idea of culture has changed in the sense that it leads to a ‘cultural capitalism’ which is the equivalent of ‘the liquidation of culture’ as it destroys ‘that which dedicates a cult or cultivates and *practices* a difference ... of which the distinction between *otium* and *negotium* was the great historical figure in Roman Christianity’.<sup>161</sup> Furthermore it creates a world that is no longer capable of individuation, as without individuals or singularities, desire itself is attenuated since ‘the object of desire is always a singularity’. This results in the further elimination of singularity, creating a downward spiral.<sup>162</sup>

So desire is necessary for the future, since without it, there is also ‘no longer desire for the future’<sup>163</sup>, and the common projection of a desire for the future is necessary to reform capitalism and the cultural industries into a system which is no longer based on the maintenance of subsistence but on the stimulation of alternative forms of existence, of singularity, and which *is* integrated in the psycho-collective individuation process. It is Stiegler’s solution for all the current problems caused by the frustration of individuation to establish a rethinking of the status and function of the cultural

<sup>160</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit*, Volume 1, 86.

<sup>161</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit*, Volume 1, 85.

<sup>162</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit*, Volume 1, 23.

<sup>163</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit*, Volume 1, 23.

industries, which *can* surely also *contribute to* instead of merely *frustrate* the practices of *otium*, the production of existence and the

process of individuation as I will try to envision in the next chapter.

## 7. A NEW BELIEF AS THE TASK OF FUTURE EUROPE: STIEGLER'S FAITH AND FREUD'S PESSIMISM

‘An extraordinary shiver ran through the marrow of Europe. She sensed, through all her thinking centres, that she no longer recognized herself, that she was no longer herself, that she was about to lose consciousness – a consciousness acquired from centuries of bearable misfortunes, from thousands of first-rate men, from geographical, ethnic, historical, countless chances. Then, as if desperately seeking to defend her physiological being and assets, her whole memory came back to her confusedly. She remembered her great men and her great books all mixed up together. We have never read so much or with such passion as during the war – ask the bookshops. We have never prayed so much or so deeply – ask the priests. We called upon all the saviors, founders, protectors, martyrs, heroes, great leaders, holy heroines and national poets.’

Paul Valéry, *La Crise de l'esprit*, 1919

### 7.1 A renaissance of the spirit through a reformation of capitalism

According to Stiegler the proletarianization of our *bodies*, of which Marx spoke in the context of labor, has evolved in our current digitalized world into a proletarianization of our *spirits*. However, the purpose of the fight that both thinkers have called for has remained the same, namely: it is the dignity of the human

being, his autonomy and freedom of mind: what is needed is a ‘renaissance of the spirit’.<sup>164</sup> When Stiegler speaks of ‘the spirit’ [*l'esprit*], he does not refer to the mind of an individual, but to the more Hegelian concept of a ‘collective mind’ or ‘spirit of the people’, in particular ‘the European Spirit’, as the future of Europe is something that greatly concerns him and that he wrote about extensively. To illustrate what he means with the notion of spirit, he refers to the French poet Paul Valéry (1871-1945), from whom the quote at the beginning of this chapter originates. And although Stiegler does think that it is the *logos* of the human spirit that makes us human and that needs to be rehabilitated, he emphasizes – like

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<sup>164</sup> Hans Schnitzler, “Het knagende digitale ego,” *De Groene Amsterdammer*, March 4, 2015, <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/het-knagende-digitale-ego>.

Freud, Marx and Nietzsche – that this spirit is not the substantial and autonomous human consciousness of which the humanists spoke, but a spirit that is being driven by inner and outer ‘unconscious’ powers, on top of which he emphasizes the unconscious *technical* conditioning of the human spirit through our technical system of inheritance.<sup>165</sup> The human spirit may be driven by unconscious powers, Stiegler nevertheless believes that it is possible to actively fight against the dominant capitalist and economic powers that try to synchronize and thereby recruit human consciousnesses through the annexation of ‘the technologies of the spirit’, as Stiegler calls the new digital technologies, that capture our attention and thus our conscious time to bring it in alignment with the temporal objects that these technologies produce.<sup>166 167</sup> And it is largely the time of industrial production and consumption with which the temporality of our consciousnesses is being aligned with via these temporal objects. This auto-heteronomous vision on human consciousness and technics is also reflected in his notion of the *pharmakon*, on which I will come back in the next paragraph.

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<sup>165</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 432.

<sup>166</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 432, 382.

<sup>167</sup> Pieter Lemmens, “Liefdeloze wereld - Bernard Stiegler over de strijd om de geest in het hyperindustriële tijdperk,” *HTV De Ijsberg*, vol. 76, 2009, 2.

[http://www.academia.edu/922008/Liefdeloze\\_wereld.\\_Bernard\\_Stiegler\\_over\\_de\\_strijd\\_om\\_de\\_geest\\_in\\_het\\_hyperindustriële\\_tijdperk](http://www.academia.edu/922008/Liefdeloze_wereld._Bernard_Stiegler_over_de_strijd_om_de_geest_in_het_hyperindustriële_tijdperk)

In his work *La Décadence des Démocraties Industrielles*, but even more in his series *De La Misère Symbolique*, Stiegler explicitly shows his political engagement and his concern for the spirit of our civilization as he writes that the purpose of his work is to ‘serve struggles’ to ‘win the battle of the mind’.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, he believes that it is the duty of philosophy as such to start dealing with the question of technics and to put up a fight against the auto-destructive system of capitalism that has taken hold of our spirit and thus of our psycho-collective individuation process and cultural inheritance. This battle presumes a new way of understanding or thinking, which means that in the first place philosophy should be rehabilitated to become a renewed (techno-)critical discourse in order to develop a new critique of reason (*nouvelle critique*) that explicitly recognizes the technical constitutivity of the human spirit.<sup>169</sup> Subsequently, philosophy can fight against the regressive tendencies of the economization of the human culture and spirit, similar to the way in which Plato in his time fought against the sophists.<sup>170</sup>

<sup>168</sup> ‘Mes livres veulent servir des luttes’, he writes at the beginning of his work *De la Misère Symbolique 2. La catastrophe du sensible* in a ‘warning for the reader’. Bernard Stiegler, *De la Misère Symbolique 2. La catastrophe du sensible* (Paris: Galilée, 2005), 14.

<sup>169</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 384.

<sup>170</sup> Lemmens, “Gedreven door techniek”, 433.

## 7.2 The pharmacological character of technics and its potential for individuation

Stiegler envisions this battle as the realization of a new – civil, spiritual, cultural and political – consciousness; a new spirit of the people with the development of culture as one of its primary values, which will be able to counter the liquidation of our psycho-collective individuation process. In practice, this development will happen exactly *via* the mobilization of *mnemo*-techniques, the very same technologies that also play an important role in the annexation and synchronization of individuals. Here the heteronomous character of technics, which Stiegler emphasizes, emerges. Our human existence is but possible through technology, especially through *mnemo*-technics that together shape our pre-individual milieu and thus serve as a precondition for the existence of our cultural inheritance and spirit. So if a mutation occurs in the technical milieu, it will most certainly have an impact on the development of society and its individuals; therefore it is also *through* the transformation of this mutated technical milieu that the current frustration of the individuation processes has to – and indeed *can* – be dealt with.

It is this belief in the transformative power of technics that led Stiegler to think of technics in the sense of a *pharmakon*: a term

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<sup>171</sup> Carel Peeters, “De mens is een en al techniek,” *Vrij Nederland*, August 8, 2014, <https://www.vn.nl/de-mens-is-een-en-al-techniek>.

already used by Plato in his dialogue *Phaedrus* to refer to the technique of ‘writing’ – one of the first *mnemo*-technics of mankind – as (capable of being) both a poison and a cure; enabling us of both *forgetting* and *remembering*. For Stiegler, the development of technics will always be the cause of structural contradictions: it creates new inventions, wealth, scientific discoveries and smart solutions, but it also causes climatological, biological, economical, psychological and philosophical discontent. This *pharmacological* character of technics – technics can aid, compensate or cure the ‘deficient’ human but may also poison him, function as an obstacle or undermine his existence – , is the reason why any new technique has to be *taken care of*, by which Stiegler means that its impact, possibilities, applications, consequences and integration should be thoroughly assessed.<sup>171</sup> Stiegler poses that it is *necessary* to believe that we *can* influence this double-sidedness of technics for the better, by actively contributing to the ‘*pharmacological* turn’, as he calls it.<sup>172</sup> It is necessary ‘to believe in the hands of the intellect, to believe that the intellect has some hands ... and that it will still and always have

<sup>172</sup> Pieter Lemmens, “Eros en techniek: De ambivalente rol van de techniek,” *Wijsgerig Perspectief* 3, 2014, 21, <https://www.filosofie.nl/nl/artikel/41476/eros-en-techniek.html>.

hands, that nothing has yet been lost – because having hands ... means being able to do something.<sup>173</sup>

Stiegler has not only shown his belligerence through his numerous books and essays, but also by practicing what he preaches. In 2005 he established an organization called *Ars Industrialis* in Paris, which promotes ‘a new politics of the technologies of the spirit’, a ‘re-enchantment of the world’ and a ‘reanimation of the spirit in order to fight against its depreciation and brutalization by the capitalistic and industrial populism’ of today’s society.<sup>174</sup> They practically try to diminish the opposition between production and consumption by constituting communities of knowledge through *relations between peers*, hence promoting peer-to-peer-technologies in order to reconstitute knowledge; that is to say, to reconstitute *savoir-vivre* (life skills), *savoir-faire* (know-how) and *savoir théorique* (theoretical knowledge).<sup>175</sup> In 2010 this organization founded a new school of philosophy called *Pharmakon*, which is in principle open to the wider public. Stiegler has also written an open letter addressed to the French government during the elections in 2007 in which he announced the necessity of a battle against the current ‘telecracy’ that is threatening our democracy and furthermore, he is involved in an organization that is engaged in the reform of the French

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<sup>173</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 132.

<sup>174</sup> Lemmens, “Liefdeloze wereld”, 5.

<sup>175</sup> Bernard Stiegler, “Preface,” in *Sauver le monde. Vers une société post-capitaliste avec le peer-to-peer*, Michel Bauwens and Jean Lievens (Paris: Les liens qui liberent, 2015)

educational system.<sup>176</sup> With his explicit engagement and critique of the modern techno-culture and technophobia of his colleagues, it is obvious that Stiegler is no longer part of the generation of postmodern, relativistic philosophers. His goal is clear. He fights for a new *otium* of the people: ‘the *practice* of *otium* is what, since the sixteenth century, is called in French, *culture*: as the “development of the intellectual faculties through appropriate exercises” ... it aims for the best and is therefore a form of *eris*, a culture of *ariston* – a concern with elevation [that we have to] cultivate by taking care of it through practices that foster trust and hope, for this is the best guarantee we can have of avoiding the installation of fear.’<sup>177</sup> I think it is fitting to conclude this paragraph with a quote derived from Heidegger’s complex, dense but insightful work *Die Frage nach der Technik*, in which he also showed his awareness of the twofold impact and potential of technics when he cites his favorite poet Hölderlin<sup>178</sup>:

‘Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst / Das Rettende auch’  
Hölderlin, 1802

### 7.3 Freud’s pessimism

<http://www.samkinsley.com/2015/03/31/to-save-the-world-preface-by-bernard-stiegler-for-michel-bauwens-new-book>.

<sup>176</sup> Lemmens, “Liefdeloze wereld”, 5.

<sup>177</sup> Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, 100.

<sup>178</sup> Martin Heidegger, *De vraag naar de techniek*, trans. Mark Wildschut (Nijmegen: Uitgeverij Vantilt, 2014), 36.

In contrast to Stiegler's optimism, belief and fighting spirit, Freud's overall tone in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* is quite pessimistic, as he for instance poses that 'one feels inclined to say that the intention that man should be 'happy' is not included in the plan of 'Creation' and 'it is no wonder, under the pressure of these possibilities of suffering ... if a man thinks himself happy merely to have escaped unhappiness or to have survived his suffering, and if in general the task of avoiding suffering pushes that of obtaining pleasure into the background'.<sup>179</sup> One can of course wonder if Freud's pessimism was indeed caused by the trans-historical character of the human discontent, or if it rather derived from the pain he experienced due to the throat cancer he was fighting with or from the overall dark time of the interbellum years and the accompanying rise of anti-Semitism in his hometown Vienna and the rest of Europe.<sup>180</sup> Based on Freud's own words however, his pessimism is the result of his conclusion that the modern human being will always have to deal with a feeling of discontent, since our (Western) culture inevitably produces feelings of guilt and suffering as a by-product. And this suffering threatens us from three directions: 'from our own body, which is doomed to decay and dissolution and which cannot even do without pain and anxiety as warning signals; from the external world, which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction; and finally from our relations to

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<sup>179</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 23-24.

<sup>180</sup> Mark Kinet, Marc De Kesel and Sjeff Houppermans, *Het nieuwe onbehagen in de cultuur* (Antwerp: Garant, 2011), 7-14.

other men'.<sup>181</sup> Freud poses the paradox that we *need* civilization in order to protect ourselves against the threats of the state of nature, but that civilization is at the same time *hostile* to the human being, especially to his drives, which unavoidably causes frustration and suffering: '[the contention that] what we call our civilization is largely responsible for our misery, and [that] we would be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions ... [is] astonishing because, in whatever way we may define the concept of civilization, it is a certain fact that all the things with which we seek to protect ourselves against the threats that emanate from the sources of suffering, are part of that very same civilization'.<sup>182</sup> So although Freud is quite pessimistic about the discontent in our civilization, regarding it as a *permanent* and *inherent* discontent, and – unlike Stiegler – doesn't thoroughly review the modern, industrial society with its specific discontent, his work definitely contains ideas that can be interpreted for the contemporary issues of our society. For example, Freud wrote that 'life, as we find it, is too hard for us ... [as it] brings us many pains, disappointments and impossible tasks [and] in order to bear it we cannot dispense with palliative measures [like]: powerful deflections, which cause us to make light of our misery; substitutive satisfactions, which diminish it; and intoxicating substances, which make us insensitive to it'.<sup>183</sup> Now isn't it the case that in our modern world digital entertainment, real life television, numerous consuming goods and

<sup>181</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 24.

<sup>182</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 33.

<sup>183</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 22.

party drugs ensure our daily distractions, substitutes and anaesthetics?<sup>184</sup>

Furthermore, Freud's statement that 'man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God [that] when he puts on all his auxiliary organs ... is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times', could be kept in mind when discussing the current question of cybernetics and artificial intelligence; technologies thanks to which mankind seems to be able to evolve, in time, – according to for instance 'transhumanists' – into a divine creature, but of course, at the same time, many ethical issues are raised.<sup>185 186</sup> So in summary, although Freud's work can be illuminating for the issues of our modern times and the discontent that is currently sensible in our society, it is, as opposed to Stiegler's work, *not* focusing on these modern issues in the sense that it is trying to analyze or even solve these matters, and there is definitely a certain pessimism tangible

in Freud's work, due to his idea that the human discontent is of a trans-historical and permanent nature. Stiegler can also be interpreted as a 'tragic' thinker as he adheres to a pharmacological view of the human being wherein *anthro*-pogenesis is essentially a *patho*-genesis and the *pharmakon* will always remain poisonous, even if we succeed in making it into a medicine. But in contrast to Freud, he believes that the human discontent that is specific for our current epoch *can* indeed be transformed through our own thoughts and actions, which is why Stiegler could perhaps be characterized as a 'tragic idealist'<sup>187</sup>.

In the following, concluding chapter I will reflect one more time on the parallels between Freud and Stiegler as discussed in this thesis and make my final remarks on the discontent of our human civilization that I longed to better understand through the writing of this thesis.

## 8. CONCLUSION

'Meanwhile man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the impression

comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one

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<sup>184</sup> Kinet, De Kesel and Houppermans, *Het nieuwe onbehagen in de cultuur*, 7-14.

<sup>185</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 38-39.

<sup>186</sup> Kinet, De Kesel and Houppermans, *Het nieuwe onbehagen in de cultuur*, 7-14.

<sup>187</sup> As Pieter Lemmens pointed out to me in one of his remarks on this thesis in December, 2017.

final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself... In truth, however, precisely nowhere does man today any longer encounter himself, i.e. his essence. Man stands so decisively in attendance on the challenging-forth of 'Enframing' that he does not apprehend 'Enframing' as a claim, that he fails to see himself as the one spoken to, and hence also fails in every way to hear in what respect he ek-sists, from out of his essence, in the realm of an exhortation or address, and thus can never encounter only himself.'

*Martin Heidegger, 1977*<sup>188</sup>

### **8.1 Concluding remarks on the relation between the diagnoses of Stiegler and Freud on our society**

Now that I have thoroughly discussed the diagnoses of both Stiegler and Freud on the discontent in our civilization, it is time for the final reflection on their ideas and on the influence of Freud on Stiegler. They both postulated the human discontent as something that is inherent to the human being and wrote their work in turbulent times, but Freud did not thematize the fundamental technicity of the human being as extensive as Stiegler and never *really* treated the modern era following the Industrial Revolution as differently than the time before this era, as opposed to Stiegler. In any case, he certainly did have great influence on Stiegler with his ideas on the human desire or libido and his account of the way in which our human civilization has evolved.

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<sup>188</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1977), 27.

It seems to me as if Stiegler connected most with Freud's ideas about *Eros* and *Thanatos* – the life and death drives or 'pleasure' and 'necessity' principles, like some would translate these notions – as the conflicting terms through which our civilization has been evolving, interpreting the terms of course not as an *opposition*, but as a *composition* between the inevitable development of technics and the ongoing movement of adoption by human collectives and their individuals. This antagonism of Freud is also reflected in Stiegler's discussion of the ancient distinction between *otium* and *negotium*; between leisure devoted to the singularity or individuality of our existence and the necessary occupations of mankind like labor, business and pursuits of a governmental nature. In fact, it is the whole process of techno-psycho-collective individuation of Stiegler's thinking in which the dualities that Freud already plotted in his work with his theory of *Eros* and *Thanatos* are exhibited, showing how one component inevitably has an effect on the other components and vice versa, and showing how they need each other to *become*, but simultaneously have the power to dominate or even liquidate the other components. In essence: Freud diagnosed the process of human civilization as fundamentally antagonistic, saying that it is 'the very consistence of the symbolic order [that] intensifies the frustration of instinctual life [which is] the cause of neurosis and violence'.<sup>189</sup>

<sup>189</sup> Ross Abbinnett, *The Thought of Bernard Stiegler: Capitalism, Technology and the Politics of Spirit* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 75.

Stiegler also maintains this thesis when he states that the constitution and development of the *I* initiates cultural activity and thereby the *I* contributes to the *we* as a whole of individuating *I*'s, but simultaneously this process maintains the development of cultural inheritance and the creation of a pre-individual milieu through the ongoing production of *mmo*-technics and this completes the circle of the tension between 'the symbolic' and 'the primordial', as these new technics need to be properly integrated and adopted again by all the individuals of our society in order for them to be able to properly individuate themselves.<sup>190</sup> In other words, the development and accumulation of technological and symbolic supports for our civilization, gives rise to a tension between our primordial drives and our attachment to the group, whereby the obstruction of our primordial drives, necessary to be able to libidinally attach to the group, can be associated with *Thanatos* and the form of love that allows us to participate in the collective can be associated with *Eros*. So it seems as if Freud, as well as Stiegler, would agree that 'the symbolic life of human society takes place between *Eros* and *Thanatos*, between the processes of individuation and of social identification.'<sup>191</sup>

This tension between the individual drives and the social demands definitely affected Stiegler's ideas on the process of industrial

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<sup>190</sup> Abbinnett, *The Thought of Bernard Stiegler*, 82.

<sup>191</sup> Abbinnett, *The Thought of Bernard Stiegler*, 82.

<sup>192</sup> Stiegler, "Interview: From Libidinal Economy to the Ecology of the Spirit", 9.

capitalism, which started with the Industrial Revolution and has since then developed exponentially. Namely, this industrialization is not so much about 'machines, smoke and the transformation of raw materials' according to Stiegler, but much more it is about 'standardization, economy of scale and calculability applied to all processes and individuals' and this industrialization of capitalism manifests itself in all realms of society, even the cognitive and immaterial realms, leading Stiegler to speak of a *cultural* capitalism.<sup>192</sup> This radical synchronization of individuals pushes them to their limits when it comes to their capability of adapting to the group and thereby puts pressure on their ability to individuate themselves, while at the same time this individuation is indispensable in order to maintain our civilization and to prevent it from becoming a herd condemned to merely 'consume their lives'.

In our current epoch, this tension between synchronization and individuation is obviously being pushed to its limits to such an extent that Stiegler argues that we are in the midst of a 'crisis of capitalism [that] necessitates the invention of a new capitalism'.<sup>193</sup> According to him, the problem is that 'capitalism is a *libidinal economy*' that is 'founded on machinic processes [which], in its current form, has reached the exhaustion of desire [and] as a result, has become auto-destructive'.

<sup>193</sup> Stiegler, "Interview: From Libidinal Economy to the Ecology of the Spirit", 9.

As is clear by now, it is also Freud who inspired Stiegler to think of our civilization as built on the human libido or desire. But according to Stiegler, this libido is *constituted by technics*, ‘prostheses or fetishes’, namely ‘it is the *artifactualization* of the living that constitutes the libido’ and this is something Freud wasn’t able to think.<sup>194</sup> Stiegler explains the crisis of capitalism, which has everything to do with the human libido, by analogy with the current ecological problems: like the way we have exploited and thereby destroyed oil fields and coalmines, we have exploited desire by treating it industrially, which has now led to the destruction or ‘exhaustion of desire’ and therefore, Stiegler says, ‘we must find a renewable energy of the libido’.<sup>195</sup> Capitalism tried to capture the human libido by developing what Stiegler calls ‘the fetishism of the commodity’. However, by doing so, it *desingularized* the libido and thereby the libido has been regressed into *drive*; a power which the capitalistic industry is ultimately unable to control, as this energy is like a loose cannon: ‘the destruction of desire is the liberation of the drives’, Stiegler warns, and this is, to return to Freud, exactly what is the main topic of Freud’s work *Das Unbehagen In Der Kultur*, where Freud speaks of ‘the liberation of the death drive’, diverted towards the external world or society as an ‘instinct of aggressiveness’.<sup>196 197</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Stiegler, “Interview: From Libidinal Economy to the Ecology of the Spirit”, 10.

<sup>195</sup> Stiegler, “Interview: From Libidinal Economy to the Ecology of the Spirit”, 10.

## 8.2 Final notes on the discontent in our human civilization and Stiegler’s battle for the spirit

All in all it is clear that Stiegler is an engaged, activist thinker who believes it is the duty of philosophy to fight against the current vigorous liquidation of the processes of individuation to reanimate the human libido and to energize a renaissance of the spirit in the current hyper-industrial age. It is this liquidation of individual processes that causes the current discontent in our society and what is necessary to dissolve it is a whole new industrial model or culture in which the proletarianizing opposition between producers and consumers will gradually vanish.<sup>198</sup> The precondition for this new model is that the digital *control*-technologies are transformed into *individuation*-technologies or *spiritual* technologies, of which certain, emancipatory and autonomizing uses of Wikipedia, Youtube, blogs, vlogs and blockchain technology are examples; Stieger would call these uses the ‘weapons in the battle for the spirit’.<sup>199</sup>

Stiegler founded the *Ars Industrialis* institute to contribute to this battle and he speaks on behalf of this institute when he says that ‘it is not a question of seeking to pose limits to industry, but of

<sup>196</sup> Stiegler, “Interview: From Libidinal Economy to the Ecology of the Spirit”, 11.

<sup>197</sup> Freud, *Beschouwingen over cultuur*, 310, 313.

<sup>198</sup> Lemmens, “Liefdeloze wereld”, 5.

<sup>199</sup> Lemmens, “Liefdeloze wereld”, 5.

thinking industry otherwise'.<sup>200</sup> The relation between mankind and technology is of an *organological* kind, meaning that there exists a co-individuation between human organs and technical organs and the possibility to individuate within this system of psycho-social and technological exchange all depends on a certain political care (*otium*) for the technological tendency of our society as a constitutive element of human civilization and on a new form of public power to counteract against the absorption of human desire by current capitalism.<sup>201</sup> This new public power and industrial politics of spirit 'require skills and knowledge of all types and from all horizons: economic agents and public institutions, research foundations and associations, economists, artists, scientists, philosophers, investors and partners in the talks of government at all echelons'.<sup>202</sup> We are currently in the middle of this mutation – or sublimation – of our libidinal economy and I agree with Stiegler that what we need are long-term investments in the new infrastructure that is necessary to support the 'new economy of spirit'; Stiegler compares it with the railroads of the late nineteenth

century that were also long-term investments, built to support the new upcoming industrial world.<sup>203</sup>

But is it really possible to build this new economy, to make 'a politics of singularities'?<sup>204</sup> Stiegler admits that an *economical* system of *singularities* is a paradox, but he believes this paradox is necessary for our human society to function, since it is essential for mankind – living in the era after the death of God – to *reconstruct* the sphere of the spirit that used to be of a religious kind, but it should now be reanimated as an intrinsically technological and industrial spirit. So we need to initiate the production of singularities starting from the industrial, which might seem counterintuitive, but is possible, since 'the standard is not opposed to the singular' according to Stiegler.<sup>205</sup> To compare, he points at the development of the standardization of all the Greek languages in the past, which caused many languages to disappear, but did not eliminate singularity. On the contrary: it is what made the emergence and increase of singularity possible.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Stiegler, "Interview: From Libidinal Economy to the Ecology of the Spirit", 9.

<sup>201</sup> Abbinnett, *The Thought of Bernard Stiegler*, 75.

<sup>202</sup> Bernard Stiegler, George Collins, Marc Crépon, Catherine Perret and Caroline Stiegler, *A manifesto for an international association Ars Industrialis for the promotion of an industrial politics of spirit*, 7, <http://www.arsindustrialis.org/node/1472>

<sup>203</sup> Stiegler, "Interview: From Libidinal Economy From Libidinal Economy to the Ecology of the Spirit", 10.

<sup>204</sup> Stiegler, "Interview: From Libidinal Economy to the Ecology of the Spirit", 13.

<sup>205</sup> Stiegler, "Interview: From Libidinal Economy to the Ecology of the Spirit", 13.

<sup>206</sup> Stiegler, "Interview: From Libidinal Economy to the Ecology of the Spirit", 12-13

It is refreshing to encounter a philosopher that is so passionate and hopeful about the future in this time of crisis, where it seems as if many individuals have been transformed into consumers who have lost their identity and are being controlled by the hand of the market, or rather by ‘marketing’: a situation that provides a fertile breeding ground for the rise of extremist and populist movements, of which the phenomenon ‘Donald Trump’ is one of the latest shocking examples. Indeed, Stiegler thinks big as he pleads for nothing less than a ‘new Enlightenment’ and for a reconquest of the empowerment that we have lost in our society of control at a time when the world is on fire and suffers from many sorts of crises. But for Stiegler, this time is a time of hope *par excellence* as it is *through crisis* that a transformation of the world can take place – think of Hölderlin, who said that the salvation is always there where the danger is. Ultimately, for Stiegler, it is about the freedom of the human spirit, which he claims can only be achieved *through*

the new technologies, by transforming them into technologies of the spirit.<sup>207</sup>

‘I believe in the world: my belief is a belief in the world. But the world cannot be reduced to calculability. Many people have understood the immanent character of the world as “everything can be calculated”. That’s not true: within a calculated whole, there is only no-world [*il n’y a que de l’immonde*]. That’s precisely the objective of the societies of control. When Deleuze says we must try to invent an art of control, however, he means that we must *depart* from control, that is to say from calculation, to produce incalculable objects: incomparable and infinite singularities.’

*Bernard Stiegler, 2012*<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Lemmens, “Liefdeloze wereld”, 5.

<sup>208</sup> Stiegler, “Interview: From Libidinal Economy From Libidinal Economy to the Ecology of the Spirit”, 13.

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