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Industrialization of Existence as an Source of Malaise

A review of a book by Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*, trans. Stephen Barker, Stanford University Press 2011.

Bernard Stiegler is one of the most important philosophers of technics and media. His work have been continuation of this started by Gilbert Simondon, Andre Leroi-Gourhan, Jacques Derrida and Jean Francis Lyotard. I must admit that it is generally highly original focusing on problems that force us to reflect upon technological changes. In his view culture is an system of memory transmission (p. 131).

In my review I will focus only on problem, so in my view there will be no need for an detailed outline for Stiegler's views contained in all chapters. The goal of this review is to critically indicate selected main problems with strengths and weaknesses. I admire Stiegler's work, reading another his books is an challenge, but in this I'm very ambivalent with appraisal. First two volumes were concentrated on technics in their ontological meaning. Here technics is subsumed to speculations from history of philosophy. After innovative volume one and two of "*Technics and Time*" I have expected some newness, fresh thought at the level of Stiegler's previous work.

In the third volume of *Technics and Time* in the chapter *Cinematic Time* Bernard Stiegler starts with introducing human desire to tell stories; to fictionalize. As pointed in the previous volumes – this desire is overcome by industries. Stiegler introduces the concept of programming industries to distinguish his method and understanding from Frankfurt School critical theory. But in saying that everything is industrialized Stiegler omits one very important aspect of this process, which will be very important in further examining his work – programs in his view concern rather consciousness and mental activity than material technologies. Concluding – respecting all the originality of this work and freshness of ideas, we could say that did not place himself in the realm of industrialized existence. Instead he forges a critique from the point of view of distant philosopher and in Derridian fashion reduces programming industry to consciousness and literary devices – he stays with one foot in the Gutenberg Galaxy instead of being programmed by the global industrial markets.

I can't understand some transitions, which are in my view the effect of simplification. For example when Stiegler juggles with Edmund Husserl's theory of memory and consciousness he does it in the way that I find incomplete, because I don't understand the transition from the uniqueness of cinema to the implementing "the American way of life" (p. 17). I must here break this argument and say that in this volume Stiegler's political program is very visible. Of course mentioned "American way of life" relates to capitalism in general. Even assuming that American cinema industry has a large impact on millions of viewer we could not constrict it with such a simple conclusion. And here we have a basic inconsequence – once cinema serves as an example of economic critique and the other as an universal form of consciousness (p. 26).

In my opinion there is too little space placed for analysis what is thinking. For Stiegler the process of thinking is adequate for being awake (p. 28). It is another simplification, because this is very complicated phenomenon, which his philosophical predecessors such as Gilles Deleuze in *"Difference and Repetition"* and Martin Heidegger in *"What is Called Thinking?"* have put as a main topic of their concern. Important question arises – if our consciousness is dominated by industrial production of memory which is a basis for our existential experience, and in consequence it resembles (and therefore is) cinematic nature implying living according to the rules of contemporary consumption society, so where we could trace the beginning of thinking in such ontological bad circumstances? Unfortunately Stiegler does not promote here any answer. For me it is main problem missed in this volume of *Technics and Time*. It could take following shape: "Is it possible to

think with images, audiovisual and audiovirtual¹ objects?”. Answer to this could lay in industrialization of gestures of thought, which are not thought as technicized (p. 55). It is important to mention that Stiegler connects thinking as an mode of posing question with the aspects of searching for subject identity (s. 62). If, according to Stiegler, we are incomplete (s. 61), “cracked”, then what would be the relation of thinking in the space of constant flux of industrialized images of consciousness? Endless analysis of Immanuel Kant’s work “blurs” the basic and most important problematic of this work.

Bernard Stiegler poses also the question of “hidden process of individuation of human groups” (p. 126). He introduces the concepts of adoption – the capability of technics to acquire and absorb different domains of non-technicized reality. This creates an technological infrastructure for archi-flux – it allows to transfer meta-objects (p. 128) between complex nodes of industrial apparatuses. Technical media serves here as an geopolitical and geosocial skeleton. Considering world as an technical dispositif remain important in the sense, that every human existential activity is necessarily mediated by technology. Here Stiegler leans his analysis on data from American history and concludes that process of transindividuation and destructing of human memory by proletarianization and industrialization started even before industrialization, so there is underlined metaphysical aspect of technicization, which tendencies are present long before actual technological change. Basic assumption from this statement is that we could see the consequences in the future and counteract them. Stiegler expands this in his political program and other books, especially in *For a New Critique of Political Economy*.

Another very interesting problem is that of education. As it was told earlier – for Stiegler culture is a movement of constant learning. One cannot overestimate the role of education as an mode of culture transmission. We are obliged to consider also industries of communication (p. 133) as an primarily educational instrument of cultural adaptation. So memory, the basis of teaching and raising future generations, is captured by global technological systems, which arisen from merging of particular types of industries;

|195

¹ This term is used by Wojciech Chyła to accent revalorization of hearing in the aspect of technicization of human communication environment. See W. Chyła, *Media jako biotechnosystem. Zarys filozofii mediów*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2008 and R. Ilnicki, „Kultura audiowizualna jako źródło zaburzeń mowy. Wkraczając w erę post-oralności kultury audiowirtualnej”, w: „O utrudnieniach w porozumiewaniu się. Perspektywa języka i komunikacji”, Wydawnictwo Wydziału Nauk Społecznych UAM, red. M. Obrębska, Poznań (in print).

informatics, communication, mnemotechnical, cinematographic, calculation, existential. they all affect education in the way of commercialization and “*installing* of consciousness”. I must add – alien consciousness of techno-memory fluxes. It begins with redefining and configuring our time by changing coordinates stored in calendar (p. 146). Stiegler says that: “*Only* an educational institution can provide historical consciousness to collective consciousness” (p. 147), which plays the role of “the system responsible for the orienting of knowledge” (p. 147). The effect of this changes is constant lack of student’s discipline and progressive commercialization of knowledge and education as such. In this circumstances there is a little chance for changing education without reforming the school itself and general national institutions, because “International programming *industries* themselves tend to be substituted for national programming *institutions*”. For me is it isn’t clear how collectively education could be restored. Stiegler here is mixing theory with practice. I know that he unwinds this idea applied to concrete actions in *Taking Care of Young Generations*, but it would be necessary to focus rather on modes of education transmission, than metaphysical considerations, which aren’t directly connected to the main problem of schools industrialization.

I would like to focus on the chapter “*Technoscience and reproduction*” states that technoscience should be not considered as applied technology, but we have to look at technology as applied science (p. 189). This reversal means that our understanding of the world, progress and other domain of reality are circumscribed by technological development, which is limited to the dispositions of programming industries. Worth mentioning is the fact, that this indicates loss of ontological force, which is now shaped by technical media of cultural distribution of data, so that basic ontological mechanism – repetition (which Stiegler calls reproducibility) is therefore subjugated and lacks autonomy.

196|

The final conclusion is that where our memory is programmed and the fate of whole existence is dependent on technology, there could be nothing more than global malaise – a state of industrialized existence, which lacks basic ontological mechanism capable of making it human. We, as humanity, are feeling ill, because institutions does not guarantee successful transmission of culture. It is important book, maybe not so as previous titles of this series, but important enough to pose some worthy question about our everyday existence in intensive technicized world, existential territories where global synchronization and standardization by programming memory (an performative act).