Bernard Stiegler’s *Pharmacy*: A Conversation

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The following interview took place on June 27, 2010 at the home of Bernard Stiegler in Épineuil le Fleuriel, France. At the time, *Technics and Time 3* was about to be released in its first English translation and Stiegler was nearing the completion of *Taking Care 2*. The primary goal of the interview was to explore what might be called Stiegler’s “techno-thanatology,” a concept that guides his theoretical work in *Technics and Time*, just as it inspires his political and pedagogical activities with *Ars Industrialis* and the Institut de recherche et d’innovation at the Centre Georges Pompidou. The interview touches upon the topics of mnemotechnics, political engagement, cinema and psychoanalysis, economies of contribution, and educational reform, not to mention metadata, geocaching, flash mobs, and Twitter. It is fitting that Stiegler, who is allergic to wheat, currently lives in a converted flour mill, where the interview took place. Our discussion ultimately documents Stiegler’s pharmacological approach to the question of techne.

Marcel O’Gorman: The majority of the questions I want to ask today have to do with *Technics and Time 3: The Time of Cinema and the Question of Ill-Being*, which will soon be released in its English translation. But of course we will also move into your more recent work, including the work you do besides writing—in particular, with *Ars Industrialis*. First of all, on the way to cinema, let’s talk a little about other specific media technologies, beginning with parts 1 and 2 of *Technics and Time*. In part 1, you draw on the story of Epimetheus and Prometheus to frame an argument about what you call “the in-
vention of the human.” This is a theory of origins, but also a theory of ends—a thanatology.

Bernard Stiegler: What I tried to show in *Technics and Time 1* was supported in effect by the work of Jean-Pierre Vernant. He himself does not thematize thanatology, but he describes according to me—in particular by commenting about the meaning of the word “elpis,” which signifies in Greek hope and fear simultaneously, that is to say, positive and negative protention—he describes according to me the way in which the tragic Greeks, 2,600 years before Heidegger, already posed the problem that Heidegger called “Sorge” (anxiety). And they posed it as a relationship of origins with technics by saying look, our way of life is to be technical beings, and our schema—in the ancient sense of the term “skhema”—is Prometheus, whose liver is eaten by the vulture yet it regenerates every day. This is already for me, in the ancient Greece of Hesiod and Aeschylus, a tragic way of describing what Heidegger meant by “being-toward-death.” But it’s in a language that is poetic, tragic, theatrical, mythological, and the irony for me of this matter is that for the Greeks—because for Heidegger, as you know very well, it’s always the Greeks who are at the origin of thinking, we have to rediscover them, et cetera—the Greeks say to Heidegger, “thanatology” is technics. And thus technics is not what obscures the rapport with death, but rather that which opens up the rapport with death.

Now, of course, in this technics there is a pharmacology. And this is not made explicit by the Greeks in general, but nevertheless, when we read the work of Vernant, where in particular he comments on the result of the conflict between the Olympians and the Titans, between Zeus and Prometheus. The mortals are nothing, as we say, but the accidental result of this conflict. This is a result that Jean-Pierre Vernant calls an absolutely ambivalent situation, and that everything is good and evil. The example he uses is Pandora. It is very important that he uses this example, because this means that with being-toward-death comes sexual difference, which is to say, desire.

BS: And hope—because elpis also means hope.

BS: And hope. And this we do not find in Heidegger. There is also

1. In this case, Stiegler uses the French word “souci” to translate “Sorge”; elsewhere he uses the word “soin” (care).
2. See Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1990). Vernant sums up the matter as follows: “Henceforward, there is a reverse aspect to everything: contact can only be made with the gods through sacrifice which at the same time consecrates the impassable barrier between mortals and immortals; there can be no happiness without unhappiness, no birth without death, no abundance without toil, no Prometheus without Epimetheus—in a word, no Man without Pandora” (185).
no sexual difference in Heidegger’s work, as Derrida demonstrated regarding *Geschlecht*, and for me this is the most serious problem with Heidegger—there is no place for Freud, it’s impossible to think Freud.

MO: What I find very striking about your work is that you give us a way of thinking technics without Heidegger. There are many philosophers today who would like to think technics without Heidegger, and you offer a way of doing this. That is something that, if it is not recognized already, it surely will be, because beyond being lucid, your work is also very useful—

BS: Well, that’s very important for me!

MO: . . . because you give us a way of shaking off Heidegger. Now, *Technics and Time 1* is really a general, almost universalizing theory of being that goes back to the ancient Greeks, defines what makes us human—or, as you say, the “invention of the human”—in both senses of the expression. But you do begin to discuss the materiality of some specific media technologies. At the end of *Technics and Time 1*, for example, you briefly discuss the camera, and then you pick it up again, of course, in the beginning of *Technics and Time 2*, where you reference Barthes before moving on to a lengthy discussion of television.

BS: I took hold of this text by Barthes, because he describes photography as a thanatology. In a certain way, as I have noted, Walter Benjamin already opened this up. I was astonished that Roland Barthes does not speak of Benjamin, because Roland Barthes always takes care in citing the sources of his inspiration—and I find it strange that he does not cite Benjamin. In any case, for me, Barthes develops the reflections of Benjamin, and in these reflections he suggests that a fundamental aspect of photography is a change in temporality, which is a change in the rapport with death, and an experience of what he calls “mortification.” Because he says that each time we take a photo of a subject, we mortify it. You remember how he discovers this—in effect, he finds a photo of his mother. And, in fact, he realizes that his mother, from the moment she was photographed, was already dead. This is where he discovers it, but he finds it in all photography. So this interests me enormously, because—and this is what you said earlier—I try to distinguish within the field of technics in general what I call “mnemotechnics”—or, again, to use the Greek term, “hypomnemata.” And I consider that every technique is a memory aid. No matter the technical object, it is a memory aid, and it is because it is a memory aid that it functions as a technical

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object. To the extent that it is a memory aid, this technical object enables a repetition, and this is what accounts for technicity—it stabilizes a repetition. But evidently, for example, I have here some prehistoric, sharpened stone tools. We call this a “striker” \textit{[percuteur]}, we use it for striking \textit{[percuter]}. We repeat the action of striking—in fact, striker at that epoch meant the axe, the knife, the sharpener. But what interests me above all are technical objects that are made for repeating memory itself—that is to say, that are made to store mnemic traces. Because from the moment when we can store memory itself, whether it’s through prehistoric cave paintings, through Egyptian or Chinese hieroglyphic ideograms, through Greek alphabetic writing, through the photographs of Nadar, or whatever else, through computing, we have the possibility of the repetition of something mortal. And that is what interests me.

MO: Yes, that sums up your theory of technics very well. But in \textit{Technics and Time 3}, as well as in your more recent work, you seem to be moving toward a politics of technics. In volume 3, where you discuss at length the materiality of television and cinema, there is a certain sense of urgency that is not present in the preceding volumes. This may be witnessed, of course, in your expressed concern about the “ill-being” \textit{[mal-être]} of contemporary society at the hands of the cultural industry.

BS: Yes, it’s the beginning for me of—how shall I say this—a change of style in the way of actually working. This book, \textit{Technics and Time 3}, was not at all conceived from the beginning as part of \textit{Technics and Time}. Because \textit{Technics and Time} is, in fact, the publication of my thesis, which I am publishing slowly, because my thesis is extremely compact—very, very difficult to read. What’s more, it is a thesis that leans heavily on Derrida, in an extremely technical language, extremely academic, with very dense discussions on Heidegger, Husserl—very particular philosophical materials that philosophers like Derrida or the people on my jury knew very well. I wrote it almost thirty years ago. After writing the first two volumes, I had the impression that I could not yet publish the third and last part. I had to add new developments that I had not approached in the first two volumes and that are not in the thesis. In particular, three developments: one on the \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, another on Plato and the origins of Platonic metaphysics, and the third on psychoanalysis. That being said, to return to your question, during the period when I started working on the third volume, in which I speak of cinema, I had spent three years working in television. This proved to be a very difficult task, and, in addition, it was the moment when we really started to sense a movement toward the
right [droitisation] in France—the progressive conquest not only of conservatism, but of the extreme right even, the rise of the extreme right, and a moral state that started to be quite problematic. This drove me to put into question what I would call the “actual status of philosophy.” I told myself that we are not working sufficiently—we the philosophers—on political aspects, on economic aspects, on industrial aspects. And I must say quite clearly that with this third volume, I distanced myself a little from Derrida. This was not a rupture really, but at the same time I introduced this problematic that I call “la nouvelle critique.” And I started to suggest that we had to launch a new critical discourse. We could not ignore the Frankfurt school, we could not ignore what Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, et cetera, have to say, in particular about the cultural industry, because I myself passed through the cultural industry. I worked with all the big television networks, I saw up close how television works and it left me absolutely distraught. I told myself that we were headed toward a mental catastrophe, because I saw how the businessmen functioned, those who control television. So, from that moment on, I had a conflict with the industrial world of television. I had to quit the business, leave altogether.

MO: Here you mention the cultural industry, and what interests me is that in Technics and Time 3, you are trying to redeem, perhaps resurrect, the Frankfurt school, which requires you to adopt an epochal concept of modernity, and you even hold to a concept of hypermodernity, in opposition to postmodernity. You also note that philosophers must be more focused on industrial issues. My question then is: What do we do with Bruno Latour, who makes a similar argument without clinging to a concept of modernity? Your work relies on a certain urgency and also a sense of epochality, the idea that we are living through a very special time right now. What do we do with the idea that we have never been modern, that there is nothing special about our epoch?

BS: Yes, that’s a good question. In fact, I don’t do anything with Latour [laughs]. I know him a little. I don’t know his work very well, in truth. It interests me more and more. Right now I have a stylistic difficulty with Latour. If you will, for me, Latour—who I think is a very interesting person—is in a bad relation with philosophy. Latour is a high-ranking philosophy professor [agrégé de philosophie], a philosopher, but he is in a state of philosophical denial [une dénégation philosophique]. For example, he will not put up with phenomenology, he will not bear transcendental questions, etcetera. He asserts an empiricism, an associationism, which is certainly something very efficient and very fruitful. But at the same time, I always have the
impression, because of this denial, that there is a certain blindness, a certain naïveté even, in Latour’s reasoning process, a certain cynicism.

There you have it. I am wary when I come across someone who in one stroke is naïve and in the next, cynical. I never find him to be truly convincing. At the same time, he interests me more and more. I find that he is extremely intelligent and he often raises pertinent questions, but, moreover, he is interested in objects and things and this interests me. Honestly, I’ve always opposed the “thing” to the “verb,” because when I speak of technology, I speak of a verb that is already a thing. And so I think that the thing, the banal “thingness” of the thing, is something extremely important that philosophy has a tendency to reject. I therefore regret that in Derrida’s work, the critique of logocentrism does not lead in the end to a reconsideration of things. Here, Latour is very interesting; at the same time, I am not entirely convinced by Latour, in spite of everything I have said, because for me the question of the thing passes through Winnicot, through psychoanalysis, through das Ding, and through Freud. And I think that Latour, just as he is allergic to phenomenology, is also allergic to psychoanalysis.

MO: Since we are on the subject of things and psychoanalysis, let’s talk a little about cinema and the psyche, which is central to Technics and Time 3. You suggest that the cultural industry—in particular, Hollywood cinema—is able to control consciousness, because consciousness itself functions exactly like cinema. Isn’t there a danger of falling into tautology here? Or to ask the question in a different way: Isn’t saying that consciousness is like cinema similar to saying, for example, that the human brain is a steam engine or a computer for that matter?

BS: This is a very good question. In fact, as you know, I use the term “archi-cinema” just as Derrida used the term “archi-writing.” That being said, if we want to think this through—because in Derrida it also poses a problem—if we want to think this through in a really operative manner, such that it produces concepts capable of advancing thought, then we must think of cinema and writing within a more vast process, which I call “grammatization.” And this is truly what is at stake in Technics and Time 3. What is grammatization? It is reproducibility, such that it makes possible discretization and repetition.

The word “grammatization” was created by a French philosopher named Sylvain Auroux, who is not at all Derridean, who is even very anti-Derridean. He’s a language historian and a philosopher of science. He created the concept of grammatization to show that writing is not something that was invented by grammarians who
had a theory of language, and then translated that theory into a conceptually developed instrument. On the contrary, it is a technique that was developed through an entirely accidental manner, by empirical trial and error, and it is only much later, several centuries later, that logic and proper grammar appear. Thus he shows that in truth, it is always a technique that develops, and then a theory comes along to rationalize the technique.

Now, Hollywood at a certain moment takes control of the imagination—it’s not me who suggests this, but Adorno. This is certainly true. But if this is possible, it’s because our imagination is already structured in a cinematographic manner. What does this mean? It means that it is structured by a means of a potential of “rushes.” My memory is, in fact, a studio—a production studio. I like to say that there are two functional modalities in my archi-cinema. During the day, such as right now, it is, in fact, a form of television, because I am engaged in live, introverted editing. And so it is not really editing, it’s what we call “insert” [des inserts]. I insert shots into a scene that is playing in real time. That is to say, I am filming at the same time that I’m watching, recording at the same time that I’m living. And at the same time, I’m projecting things, even special effects. Then at night I’m doing cinema, because at night I’m dreaming. In my dreams I’m doing cinema, because I’m no longer in real time, I am engaged in editing after the fact, and it’s my unconscious that’s doing the editing. This is why I say that the unconscious is the producer of consciousness, in the sense of a Hollywood producer. He’s the one with the money, the power [laughs].

MO: That’s very well explained. And yet—

BS: But excuse me, I still have to add something—please allow me just another word. Just as empirical writing—that is to say, alphabetical writing—which is not archi-writing, modifies the regime of enunciation or speech, cinema and, moreover, Hollywood modify the regime of the functioning of my imagination. Imagination has always been cinematographic. But at the same time, the invention of cinema—as a technical invention this time, which is not the same thing—will modify the activity of my psyche, of my imagination and my memories. And that is obviously very important.

MO: And, of course, the important issue here is your distinction between technics, technology, and mnemotechnology, which you mention as a major lapse in Heidegger’s work. Some media theorists

4. The term “rushes” refers to sweatbox-editing sessions that are completed in the film studio after a day of shooting.
today suggest that perhaps we are storing too many memories, that
digital mnemotechnologies make it easier than ever to remember, to
call up what has been stored. How important is it to forget?

BS: That is also a very complicated question. For me, it’s a ques-
tion of what I call “transindividuation”: What is memory as I see it? You
know, because it’s in *Technics and Time* 3. Memory is forgetting—
Nietzsche said it; Freud said it; Borges said it. This means that there
is no memorization without forgetting, there is no memorization
without selection. The important question is to know who is doing
the selecting, and when the selection is made. There are, however,
levels of selection. For example, when I’m dreaming at night there
is selection, that which Freud called the “censor,” and this censor is
itself multi-criterial, multi-tiered. In part, it is also me who censors—
me, by way of my ego [*le moi*], which is constructed singularly as
a censoring system that is unique to me alone. This is what Freud
called “repression.”

And then there is a level that is moral—the superego. It provides
me with other criteria, which I inherit and internalize, and these
might be considered as meta-repressions. Gilbert Simondon, who is
a very important anthropologist in my work, maybe the most im-
portant today, with Freud, presents a theory of individuation that is
very concise, very dense, and also therefore very difficult to under-
stand. He shows that psychic individuation is never purely psychic;
it is always already social. I believe that if psychic individuation is
always already collective, it is because it is also a technical individu-
ation. I have tried to show, drawing on Simondon, that psychic in-
dividuation attains social individuation by means of technical individ-
uation, and by interiorizing technical individuation. And this is
what I call the phenomenon of transindividuation—it’s a phenom-
emon of selection.

MO: And what about this issue of over-stocking?

BS: You say that today some theorists propose that there is too
much memory storage. I believe that there is not at all too much
memory storage, because memory storage is never the problem. The
problem is not one of storage [*stockage*], to store [*stocker*], the prob-
lem is that of selecting—that is to say, of navigating. What are the
criteria of selection that are produced in the memory? And here, in
my view, we are in the midst of an enormous mnemotechnical revo-
lution. We are living in an epoch that, because of digital networks,
and in particular, of course, the web, the Internet, something is be-
ing produced that never before existed, in my view not since the ori-
gin of humanity. It’s that everyone can participate in the production
of metadata. Metadata have existed for over 3,000 years, when they
appeared in what is actually Iraq now, in Mesopotamia. And since then, up until the 1990s, there has never been a situation where everyone could produce metadata; it was always very particular and very centralized systems, systems of power, which took control over the production of metadata. And so, what is the primary issue in philosophy today? It’s how to produce anamnesis with hypomnesis; that is to say, how to produce a method that engenders significance, truth—philia, to speak with Aristotle—by drawing on the pharmakon that is hypomnensis, which is something that can engender exactly the opposite, including mistrust, lies, demotivation, etcetera. And so this is what’s at stake today: this issue is not that of producing too much memory; it’s a problem only if we do not produce criteria of navigation for accessing this memory, criteria that will allow for individuation.

MO: This is very important. I recently reviewed a book by Viktor Mayer-Schönberger called Delete, and this is, in part, why I posed the question. He repeats the idea that we remember too much, and that it is important to forget. But what he really means is that we store too much, and that it’s important to delete. Because if we’re always in the process of self-recording, self-archiving, exteriorizing our memories, we leave traces everywhere as a result. And this could be dangerous.

BS: Definitely.

MO: So when we speak of criteria of selection, we are not only speaking of individual psychical processes, but also of legal, judicial, or even political process. It’s also a question of who is doing the selecting. Your notion of transindividuation, which involves today the open production of metadata and therefore the production of even more traces, adds a layer of complexity to this question of forgetting and deleting in an age of mass digital storage.

BS: Yes, this is a very important issue. I would like to say one thing about it. There is this question of the traces that we produce. When I called you earlier today, I produced traces; every time I do a search on Google, I produce traces. But I do not believe anything that consists in saying we must prevent the development of trace-

5. Here, Stiegler is developing an argument laid out in Jacques Derrida’s Dissemination, which deconstructs the binary opposition of “living memory” (anamnesis) and “dead memory” (hypomnesis); see Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” in Dissemination, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Stiegler’s suggestion is that the role of philosophy today is to produce truth out of the vast external memory banks (hypomnemata) that are at our disposal. For an extensive explanation of these concepts in Stiegler’s work, see “Anamnesis and Hypomnesis” on the Ars Industrialis website (http://www.arsindustrialis.org/anamnesis-and-hypomnesis).
ability. We are now in an industrial society that rests on the recording of traces. And it is not worthwhile trying to make us believe that we should prevent it—it’s just wrong. That’s what I personally believe. The question is not how to prevent the recording of traces; the question is to create a consciousness of the recording of traces, a politics of the recording of traces.

Here in France, along with some students, in particular at l’Université de Compiègne, we’re developing work on how to become conscious of traceability, and how to open up debates about traceability, how to create new systems of traceability, for example, and how to create laws so that this traceability is actually individuated by what it is tracing. This does not mean that the conscious mind will be able to master all of this—I do not believe in mastery—because behind the trace there is always the unconscious, and the unconscious is multi-layered, which is what I was saying earlier. And so the question is: How do we reorganize the conscious and the unconscious? And I say that this is a question of technology—that which is able to link the conscious and the unconscious is always a technique. And, by the way, Freud speaks of the psychoanalytic technique. Psychoanalysis is a technique. But such a technique must be able to think through today’s industrial technics, and, sadly, psychoanalysis does not know how to do this.

MO: You write in *Technics and Time 3* that the education system has been able to remain in a stable state, because it works on a mnemotechnical system that is separate from the widespread mnemotechnics dominated by the cultural industry. And you are in the midst of examining the mnemotechnical system of education. Do you think that it is possible to innovate this mnemotechnical system of education, which you have said is rooted in the model of writing?

BS: Yes, that is something that we work on a great deal at Ars Industrialis. Before I go into the details of your question, I would like to say that what I invoked earlier on as a mnemotechnological revolution is also for me an industrial and economic revolution. I believe you know that at Ars Industrialis we believe that consumerism, as an industrial model, is finished. It continues to work, of course, in a very powerful way, but it has no future. We have entered into the crisis of this model. Now it’s another model, one that rests specifically on traceability, which is in the process of being developed, a new model of collective individuation. We suggest that it rests on a psychic *re*-individuation, the *re*-priming of a psychical individual. The examples that everyone knows on the web, which are the blue sky of all that is collaborative, Web 2.0, etcetera, demonstrate how
cybernauts are looking to reconquer knowledge in an enormous way, even if it is often in a way that may seem weak or derisory—which is not my point of view, but I can see how one might think this way.

That being said, we believe at Ars Industrialis, and I have written about this in several books that will be translated into English, that this distinction between the *otium* and the *negotium* that existed among the Romans, or among the Greeks as *skole* and work, or let’s say subsistence, is in the process of being reconstituted. But it is being reconstituted in a new way. Capitalism has confused the *otium* and the *negotium*. That is to say, for capitalism, knowledge—the *otium*—has become a factor of production, a *negotium*. To put it otherwise, knowledge has become an economic function just like any other—and this will continue. On the other hand, Ars Industrialis believes that there is a new economy, a new *oikonomia*, that is being constituted, and it will distinguish itself from other economic modes. There will be an economy of the *otium*—a new *otium* that will be developed, that is already in the process of being developed. This is not a monetary economy, an economy that functions on the current market, but on other models.

MO: On contribution.

BS: An economy of contribution, yes. And we believe that it can’t entirely inscribe itself within a consumerist model, because the consumerist model rests on what we call in French the “immediate monetization of value” [la monetarisation immédiate de la valeur], and we think that value, even when it is an economic value, is not immediately monetizable—in particular, the notion of *otium*. That being said, to return directly to your question, we are working, in particular with another group created by Ars Industrialis called sk-hole.fr, which specializes in school programs and, in particular, the teaching of philosophy in school; we are thinking about new models of knowledge transmission that do not rest entirely on writing and that draw, in part, on analog and digital media. What we are saying is that today, analog and digital media are used in the construction of knowledge. For example, the people who work on twentieth-century history use audiovisual archives; anthropologists, ethnologists, archaeologists use photography and cinema in a massive way, maybe more than text now; in the field of biology, they work with computation—almost all of biology is computerized; since the beginning of the twentieth century almost all of physics takes place by means of extremely elaborate media techniques. And the Galilean revolution is a revolution of instruments; still, this is not at all theorized in the transmission of physics.
So there is an enormous problem, which is that knowledge was founded in truth, on a mastery of a mnemotechnics. The academy of Plato, which is the origin of the university, was conceived as a way of battling against the way sophists used books, and to construct a new way of using books. This is the veritable role of the academy of Plato. And we think that today we have to continue this tradition, because books continue to be a danger. They have always been dangerous and always will be—all mental techniques are dangerous. But at the same time as they are dangerous, they carry new forms of knowledge. Evidently, photography, cinema, radio, television, the Internet are all dangerous, but so are the eyeglasses of Galileo, the microscope, all kinds of instruments that we don’t study, such as the geographic map. It’s very important to study how maps are created. This is not taught in school, because we only teach the end results. We don’t teach the process of the production of knowledge. It’s a mistake.

Today, there is a very big problem in the schools of France. It’s surely the same in Canada and the U.S. Children of 10 or 15 years [of age] arrive with a technical knowledge that is far superior to that of their teachers. The teachers don’t know how to integrate this into academia, and the moment it creates instability, it is discredited. At Ars Industrialis, we have a project that involves creating a school and a research center that focuses on these questions, and it will be launched progressively on the Internet. The idea is to start with metadata that we will produce collectively about Plato and with Plato, with a Platonic theory of metadata, because I believe there is a Platonic theory of metadata. The question of ontology, Aristotle’s question of ontology, in fact comes from the question ti esti—“what is it?” It’s the question of a definition. How do you define virtue, truth, beauty, etcetera? And each time the goal of Plato is to produce a definition. So, what is the production of this definition? It’s what we call a “metadata” in contemporary language. We believe it’s necessary to revisit the history of the construction of occidental knowledge, integrating these new technologies not just as a means of transmitting knowledge, but as actual objects of knowledge, as both objects to be explored and instruments for exploration.

MO: This is all very interesting, since you express a kind of hopeful vision in what you are doing with education, with Ars Industrialis, etcetera. In fact, you are using some of the same terms that cyber-zealots and -enthusiasts have used, a language of revolution. But what you are proposing is a careful revolution—it’s very soigné as you might say, “care” being the operative term here. At the same time, Technics and Time 3 is a very apocalyptic book: you write about
the end of desire, referencing Hegel/Kojève and the denial of master/slave relations; you talk about the end of time, the death of art, and so on. And yet, this isn’t a cynical book.

BS: I would like to say something about the apocalyptic and enthusiastic aspects of my work. I have a pharmacological way of thinking: the more an object evokes in me an excited enthusiasm or zeal—you spoke of zealots—the more I am anxious about the danger of that thing. Because I believe that everything that has produced the most interesting discourses, the most generous, has also generated the most horrible and inhumane results. Now this is a situation that I generally call “pharmacology.” I have tried not to be non-inhuman, that’s all. If I arrive at being human somehow that’s fine, but what is important is to be non-inhuman. Everyone knows what it means to be inhuman; it is more difficult to agree upon what is truly human. That being said, I practice negative anthropology, in the same way as we speak of negative theology. I believe that the situation of the non-inhuman beings we are trying to be is a pharmacological situation. We are always at risk of becoming inhuman, because that which establishes us as human also establishes us as inhuman—it is technics. It is the technics of Auschwitz, as well as all other technics; it is the technics of Warhol, the technics of Michelangelo. All of this is technics—and pharmacology. Today, I think that the question of the unity of the nous [us] is really being posed, because we observe in our ourselves, at times, certain behaviors—at least I observe it in myself, where I have the impression that I am no longer able to be like the people of Lascaux who once stood before the cave paintings, where I have become so inhuman, so cretinized, so proletarianized, or where, at times, I am in such a state, because of traceability, because of mental recording [la captation mentale] of mental destruction that I no longer have the capacity to relate to these paintings.

MO: This inability to relate reminds me of something you said earlier about the new school you are creating. Together with your students and colleagues, you are going to write with Plato, and not just about Plato. This is a crucial distinction, and it is a question of care.

BS: Yes, absolutely. And this brings us back to the question of selection that we had discussed earlier. I always tell my students that when I attend a conference, I must always take notes or else I can’t follow along. But later I throw away my notes most of the time. Now I store them in the computer. The point is that the notes serve me less as something to keep than as a way of selecting and of be-
ing with, of doing something with the person who is speaking—and thus to individuate myself along with his individuation. These are practices of care [soin].

At Ars Industrialis, we have created a group based on technics of care. I have written a book about Foucault called Taking Care [Prendre Soin], in which I analyze all of these technics of care with Foucault, and our group is continuing to develop these technics. This is what I was talking about earlier when I mentioned working with students to develop technics of care with Plato—but with Plato and digital media. Because studying Plato with the technics of Plato today might be interesting, but I would call this a form of archaeology. Today, we need to do philosophy with Plato; not just archaeology, but philosophy—and politics. I feel that we are in an epoch in which collaborative instruments for this are being developed. I like this word “collaborative,” because it contains the word “laboratory,” which comes from the word “work.”

MO: There is a word being used today, “collaboratory,” which is becoming more and more popular.

BS: Absolutely, and what I would like to do now is collaborative philosophy. This does not mean that everyone becomes equal, but that everyone becomes different—that it produces differentiation, individuation, and then later come the rules and disciplines.

MO: I will confess that I took over forty pages of notes, direct transcriptions from Technics and Time 3, in preparation for this interview. I make all of my students do this sort of transcribing and commenting with the texts I teach, and then they submit the notes for a grade. I’m not looking to see if they take good notes—I’m simply giving them a chance, a mandatory opportunity, for them to internalize, to think with the readings. It creates a space and a time for this sort of activity, to which they would otherwise not have access in their cut-and-paste culture.

BS: Exactly.

MO: We are nearing the end [of this interview] and I want to change the tempo a little, in the hope of injecting some spontaneity into this exercise. Because you mention the role of social media in transindividuation, I want to present you with three separate technocultural phenomena, all linked to social media, and I would like you to comment on each, using only a few sentences. I suppose this is a form of Rorschach test. The first phenomenon is “geocaching.” Have you heard of this?

BS: I’m not sure.

MO: You hide an object somewhere, in the forest or by the roadside, and you publish its GPS coordinates on the web. People go and
find your object, and there is usually a little notepad with it, all in a container of some sort. It could be something simple like the small Lego piece I gave your son just now. When people find it they write their name in a logbook and they take a picture to post on their blog, indicating that they have found the geocache. You might call this an exurban activity.

BS: I would like to have some time to reflect on this.
MO: But these questions are supposed to be spontaneous.
BS: This type of exercise interests me. What I would say about geocaching is that, if it inspires me, it’s because I believe that objects are beginning to take on new dimensions, and that the status of objects is going to change. Because, for a very long time, about a century ago in North America and about fifty years ago in Europe, the object became an object of consumption. The normal trajectory of the object was the trash can; it was the disposability of the industrial object and that’s all. Now, I think that the object is in the process of becoming a site of inscription, to be precise, and that it will cease to be condemned to disposability.

MO: That’s actually a very good answer, since what is left in the geocache container is usually a disposable trinket of little value. You don’t take the trinket from the cache, or if you do, you replace it with something else that would have otherwise been thrown away. But by documenting its existence, you allow it to take on a new dimension. Of course, you can now purchase official geocaching trinkets . . . The second technocultural phenomenon I want you to consider is the “flash mob.” Do you know about this?
BS: I know a little.
MO: Here in France it has taken on the form of the “Super Apero.” People who don’t know each other, strangers, meet on the Internet, mostly on Facebook, and organize a physical meeting for no particular reason, for a completely ludic purpose—or rather for the purpose of being ludic.
BS: This would have to be compared to more ancient practices such as happenings, which are processes that are associated with moments of exception that are quite generational and that in my opinion are not unlike initiatory rites, which share a similar process. This is generally accompanied by excess, excessive behavior, a little like carnival, etcetera. A human society without festivities [fêtes] is not possible. And yet, the psychotechnologies of the twentieth century have destroyed festivities, because all festivities have become an opportunity for marketing. And so there are no more festivities. We can no longer be festive today. Moreover, all of these relational technologies of the cultural industry have destroyed rela-
tionships and true social networks. Then digital media comes along, and it seems to be able to construct new forms of social networks. Evidently, this is exploited by traceability, and this can immediately lead to a new form of marketing for festivities, a new marketing of the encounter, etcetera.

So we have something very complex and ambiguous here. But I think that these phenomena are signs of an initiative to reterritorialize, because they involve finding oneself somewhere, in presence not only in the virtual but in the real, thus to rearticulate virtual reality, to find ourselves together physically, and to reconstruct spaces of collective individuation. I have looked at this quite closely, because recently in Nantes there was an accident in one of these flash mobs—there was a death, a tragedy that provoked me to find out more about the topic. But I think after all that these are indicators that something very important is in development at this moment in the area of what we call “relational technologies,” and that this is another type of relation that is inventing itself.

MO: To borrow your terms, a form of resistance to the synchronization of cardinality and calendarity imposed by the cultural industry?

BS: Absolutely.

MO: The last technocultural phenomenon I want you to consider is “twittering celebrities,” in both senses of the expression. Celebrities who are followed by people on Twitter, and who twitter back to the people who are following them—or at least create this illusion.

BS: It’s difficult for me to answer, because up until now on Facebook, Twitter, and other social networks, there are many people who are trying to get me to enter. And I have not wanted to join, although it interests me. I would have to be a lurker, not because I want to hide my identity, but because I wouldn’t be able to reply all of the time. And for me, not replying is something very difficult. I receive a great deal of e-mail and I force myself to answer all of it. If I were on Twitter, that would be impossible. And so I have very little practice with Twitter and I cannot speak about it easily. What Twitter is, according to me—and maybe I am completely mistaken—is a system to create around oneself—that is, to intensify the concentric relational circles, linked to activity, linked to what I am doing. And I relate this to what the Greeks called “kleos.” Socrates often said that the only thing we can obtain is kleos. We can translate it with the terms “reputation,” “glory,” “posterity,” etcetera. In more modern terms, we speak of “recognition,” “acknowledgment.” At the same time, I think that this is not only recognition, because recognition, according to Hegel, takes place in frontal relations with others, face-
to-face, while *kleos* does not. At the end of Socrates’ trial he says, “I’m going to drink this hemlock, and I don’t give a damn. Because tomorrow I’ll attend a banquet with Homer and Orpheus.” And what does he mean by this? He means: “You don’t recognize me, and I don’t care. I will be with Homer and Orpheus, and that means that people will still be talking about me in 1,000 years. And all you who don’t recognize me, I don’t give a damn about.” So it’s not just about recognition, it’s also about what comes after [*l’après-coup*].

MO: Immortality.

BS: And so we call this “immortality.” I think that it’s Plato who is thinking of immortality. But I don’t think that Socrates thinks of immortality.

MO: Yes, of course. These elements of recognition and immortality are very important in my work right now, and so I wish selfishly that we could discuss them at greater length. But I want to finish by making a more general observation. Here, we have been talking about metadata, Twitter, Facebook, and flash mobs. And yet we find ourselves at a century-old flour mill in a small rural village. Looking forward a little, you told me that part 2 of *Taking Care* is concerned very much with agriculture. Why agriculture? It’s a huge question, I know, but I want to finish by looking forward.

BS: There are a thousand reasons. I think that we who are occidental, let’s say, large imperial and post-imperial societies, we are societies of cultivators. And this is very important. What is a cultivator? It’s someone who modifies nature. And I think that a cultivator has cults. For me, the Bible is above all a book about agriculture, as I told you in a previous conversation, because it is a book that replaces rituals with a cult. A cult is not only a ritual, a cult is a certain regime of care that we take from a nature that we transform. Whereas in ritual societies—in shamanistic society, for example—they do not transform nature, they remove things from nature. They negotiate with animals, which are often totems—that is to say that they place themselves almost on an equal level with animals. And that is an entirely different rapport with nature.

This does not mean that it’s a rapport without violence, since the hunter is armed, he’s a predator, and even a super-predator. He knows it. So even the hunter must take care, which is exactly what Alain Schnapp says, [who is] a French specialist on the history of hunting.6 He must take care of what we call the “*agrion*,” which means the “wild.” The agriculturalist is he who cultivates the wild.

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This means that he takes care of the wild in a certain way that consists of transforming the wild. The hunter/gatherer transforms the wild also, not by cultivating it, but, on the other hand, by protecting it—that is to say, he protects his prey. This is very complicated. There are rules of hunting.

Now, why do I discuss agriculture in this book? I don’t only talk about agriculture, I talk about what we call “transformational technologies.” We are in the midst of an industrial revolution in agriculture, which emerges evidently from GMO [genetically modified organisms], biotechnology, all the industrial modifications, and this is a question of a new reproductibility, in which the one doing the selecting is no longer the agriculturalist, but the global capitalist enterprise. And this must be an object of criticism, of a new political economy that concerns not only agriculture, but, for example, mememotechnology and all that we call transformational technology.

What I mean by all of this is that we are no longer in the agricultural epoch of Cain and Abel. We are in an epoch of a new relation to the organic and inorganic [mineral] world, and this demands a new form of care. We therefore have to invent something that I call a “therapy” for this pharmacology.