

SUFFOCATED DESIRE, OR HOW THE CULTURAL INDUSTRY DESTROYS THE INDIVIDUAL: CONTRIBUTION TO A THEORY OF MASS CONSUMPTION

Bernard Stiegler, translated by Johann Rossouw

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Bernard Stiegler (b.1952) is one of the major French philosophers of the generation which succeeded that of figures like Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard, all of whom are to varying degrees references in Stiegler's work. After a relatively long philosophical apprenticeship Stiegler established his name in France in 1994 with the publication of the first of three volumes that have so far appeared in the series *Technics and Time*, all three of which have now been published in English translation by Stanford University Press.

Since *Technics and Time* Stiegler has remained a prolific author who tends to publish his major books in series. Series that have so far appeared are the three volumes of *Mécréance et discrédit* ("Disbelief and Discredit") (2005, 2006), *De la misère symbolique* ("Of Symbolic Misery") (2004, 2005), *Constituer l'Europe* ("Constituting Europe") (2005), while two volumes in a series called *Prendre soin* ("Taking Care") (2008, 2009) have so far been published. The latter has also been published in English translation by Stanford University Press. Besides these serial publications about ten or so smaller individual or co-authored books by Stiegler have also appeared, of which two have been published as *Acting Out* by Stanford, while another has been published by Verso as *For a New Critique of Political Economy*.

English-speaking readers interested in knowing more about Stiegler's work are faced with the problem that besides a handful of English academic journal articles focusing on various aspects of his work, a more general introduction to his work has not yet been published in English. It is with the aim of at least the partial fulfilment of such a need that this translation has been done. By virtue of the fact that Stiegler wrote it for the June 2004 edition of the in-depth monthly French newspaper *Le Monde diplomatique*, this essay is something of a condensed overview of key concepts in Stiegler's thought, with the last paragraphs applied to the rather sombre state of French politics—a reality with which most readers living in Western democracies will be familiar.

The essay takes issue with two major contemporary "myths", respectively that of the post-industrial society and that of the autonomous, individual consumer. According to the first myth Western countries were supposed to enter a post-industrial phase where the continued mechanisation of production and the growing part of services in the national income would leave citizens with more leisure time. This prediction did not take account

of a key development in Western countries after World War II, namely the attempt to not only control the means of production (industrial capitalism), but also and simultaneously the patterns of consumption—what Stiegler refers to as hyper-industrial capitalism. A media conglomerate that produces, markets, and broadcasts its own content is a good example of a hyper-industrial company.

Readers familiar with the work of Adorno and Horkheimer the cultural industry will perhaps recognise the similarity of their analysis to that of Stiegler. Indeed, in this essay and in much of Stiegler's other writings Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis—like the work of Walter Benjamin—is an important reference. However, Stiegler makes it his explicit goal to revise and strengthen their work in the light of the technical and economic developments that have taken place since they wrote.

One of the ways in which Stiegler builds on Horkheimer and Adorno is through his concept of the program industry, which is a key component of the cultural industry. The programs that are produced industrially and broadcast through various audiovisual media today modify our experience of time, notably through our consciousnesses adopting the time of programs, for example by watching the same daily programs, or the same global live broadcasts. For Stiegler this is a demonstration of how the program industry in fact constantly solicits our attention, tries to modify our behaviour—especially our patterns of consumption—and in fact uses “leisure” as a means of control, thus leaving us with very little genuine free time. That is why, for Stiegler, attention is to the hyper-industrial economy what fossil fuels are to the industrial economy.

With regards to the myth of the autonomous, individual consumer over against the group Stiegler draws on Gilbert Simondon's theory of individuation as exposed in *L'individuation psychique et collective* (1989), which shows how the individual and the group co-constitute each other through the intergenerational transmission (synchrony) of the pre-individual fund and its individual adoption (diachrony). The pre-individual fund is that collective of knowledge, experience, and tradition that a group has accumulated over time, and it has to be continually reactivated through its simultaneous transmission from one generation to another (for example in schools), and through the singular way in which each receiver of the fund adopts it, which is also the process through which the receiver becomes a singular individual. Hence, in the transmission and adoption of the pre-individual fund, the synchronic and the diachronic operate in tandem, while that which is transmitted and adopted is that which has stood the test of time. Stiegler writes in this article: “As heritage of the accumulated experience of previous generations, this pre-individual fund exists only to the extent that it is singularly appropriated and thus transformed through the participation of psychic individuals who share this fund in common.” In other words, the pre-individual fund is the precondition of the existence of autonomous individuals, and if such a fund was to be destroyed it would lead to the loss of individuation and the increase of herd-like behaviour, which Stiegler sees as the result of what he calls the program industry.

For Stiegler the threat of the program industry to pre-individual funds is due to us adopting the time of the program industry. This stems from the development of “industrial temporal objects”, which is another of his key concepts. Such an object is industrially produced and exists only for as long as it passes, for example a film or a television program, where the attention of the viewer is also vital to the existence of the object. By virtue of the fact that the market of industrial temporal objects takes short term profit and newness as its norms, it inevitably clashes with the production and selection processes of pre-individual funds, where longevity and the old are central norms. Whereas simultaneous transmission of the pre-individual fund and its adoption by the receiver in his/her own good time meshes synchrony with diachrony, the program industry aims to have all its receivers at the same time receive and adopt its content and its time. This is what Stiegler refers to below as the program industry's systematic opposition of synchrony to diachrony.

In order to better understand what is at work here, Stiegler introduces another key concept, that of the tertiary or third retention, which is his further development of Husserl's notions of the primary and secondary retention. The primary retention is what I retain in my consciousness of an event during its unfolding. The secondary retention is what I remember of the event after the event. The tertiary retention is an exact “remembering”

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of the event outside any consciousness, such as a music recording. For Stiegler one of the key implications of the industrial production of tertiary retentions (DVD, film, MP3, video, CD, etc.) is that they enable the global spread of cultural content selected for short-term profit motives, as well as for their potential to affect consumptive behaviour. In order to achieve this they must capture our most basic existential energy, our desire for that which is singular, what Stiegler calls our primordial narcissism. This systematic economic interference with vital psychic processes has to lead to all sorts of pathologies, of which the transformation of politics into a branch of marketing is for Stiegler in this essay a particularly disturbing example. On the reading that he gives here French voters in the first half of the past decade are all too aware of what sort of betrayal takes place in contemporary politics, which is why they react with massive apathy and rejection, the latter having played a major part in the shock of the far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen receiving more votes than the socialist premier at the time, Lionel Jospin, in the first round of the 2002 French presidential election.

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Hyper-industrial capitalism has developed its techniques to the point where millions of people are connected every day simultaneously to the same television, radio, or play console programs. Cultural consumption, methodically massified, is not without consequences for desire and consciousness. The illusion of the triumph of the individual is fading, while the threats to the intellectual, affective, and aesthetic capacities of humanity are becoming clearer.

A fable has dominated the last decades, and to a large extent deluded political and philosophical thought. Told after 1968, it wanted to make us believe that we have entered the age of “free time”, “permissiveness” and the “flexibility” of social structures, in short, the society of leisure and individualism. Theorised under the name of the post-industrial society, this tale notably influenced and weakened “postmodern” philosophy. It inspired the social democrats, claiming that we have passed from an epoch of laborious, consumptive masses, which was the industrial age, to the time of the middle classes, while the proletariat was supposedly disappearing.

Not only does the proletariat remain very significant, as the numbers tell us, but it has in fact grown as employees have been largely proletarianised (subjugated to a machine-like system that deprives them of initiative and professional knowledge). As for the middle classes, they have been pauperised. To speak of the growth of leisure—in the sense of time free from all constraints, of an “absolute availability”, says the dictionary—isn’t at all evident, since current forms of leisure do not at all function to *free* individual time, but indeed to *control* it in order to hypermassify it: they are the instruments of a new voluntary servitude. Produced and organised by the cultural and program industries, they form what Gilles Deleuze called societies of control. These societies develop these services and cultural capitalism, which fashions ways of living out of nothing, moulds daily life to conform to its immediate interests and standardises individual lives by means of “marketing concepts”. An example is that of *lifetime value*, which refers to the *economically calculable* lifetime of an individual whose *intrinsic* value is thus desingularised and disindividuated.

Marketing, as Gilles Deleuze saw, has indeed become the “instrument of social control”.¹ The so-called “post-industrial” society has in fact become hyper-industrial.² Far from being characterised by the domination of individualism this epoch turns out to be one of the *herd-becoming* of behaviour and of the generalised *loss of individuation*.

LOSS OF INDIVIDUATION

The concept of the loss of individuation introduced by Gilbert Simondon describes what happened in the nineteenth century to the worker subjected to the service of the machine tool: he lost his know-how and thus his very individuality, eventually finding himself reduced to the condition of a proletarian. These days it is the

consumer whose behaviour is standardised through the formatting and artificial manufacturing of his desires. Here he loses his life knowledge (*savoir-vivre*), that is, his possibilities of living. Norms are substituted by the latest fashionable brands as considered by Mallarmé in *La Dernière Mode* (“The Latest Fashion”). “Rationally” promoted through marketing, these brands are like those “bibles” that govern the functioning of fast-food franchises, which the franchisee must follow to the letter under the threat of contract breach or even a lawsuit.

This *deprivation of individuation*, that is, of *life*, is extremely dangerous: Richard Durn, who assassinated eight municipal councillors of Nanterre in November 2002, confided in his diary that he needed to “do harm (*mal*) to, at least once in his life, feel that he is alive”.³ Freud wrote in 1930 that for all that he is equipped with industrial technologies with divine attributes, “modern man does not feel happy with his god-like nature”.⁴ This is exactly what the hyper-industrial society makes of human beings: by depriving them of their individuality it engenders herds of beings lacking being—and lacking becoming, that is, lacking a future. These inhuman herds will tend more and more to become *ferocious*—already from 1920 onwards Freud in his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* sketched the analysis of these crowds tempted to return to a horde state, inhabited by the death drive discovered in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and which *Civilization and its Discontents* revisited ten years later, while totalitarianism, Nazism and anti-Semitism were spreading throughout Europe.

While he does speak about photography, the gramophone and the telephone, Freud evokes neither the radio nor—and this is more surprising—the cinema utilised by Mussolini and Stalin, then by Hitler, and about which an American senator also said in 1912 “Trade follows films”.⁵ It seems like he also didn’t imagine television with which the Nazis experimented in a public broadcast in April 1935. During the same period Walter Benjamin analysed what he called “mass narcissism”: totalitarian governments taking control of these media forms. But he seems as unable as Freud to consider the *functional* dimension—in all countries, including democratic ones—of the up and coming cultural industries.

PSYCHOLOGICAL MASS MISERY

On the other hand, Edward Bernays, Freud’s double nephew, did theorise them. He exploited the immense possibilities of control of what his uncle called the “*libidinal economy*”. He also developed public relations, that is, persuasion techniques inspired by the theories of the unconscious that he put into the service of the cigarette manufacturer Philip Morris around 1930—at the time that Freud felt the death drive against civilisation rising in Europe. But the latter was not interested at the time by what was happening in America, except for a very strange remark. He said that he felt obliged to consider:

the danger of a condition that we may call ‘the psychological misery of the mass’. This danger is most threatening where social bonding is produced mainly by the participants’ identification with one another, while individuals of leadership calibre do not acquire the importance that should be accorded to them in the formation of the mass.” He goes on to affirm that the “present state of American civilisation would provide a good opportunity to study the cultural damage that is to be feared. But I shall avoid the temptation to engage in a critique of American civilisation; I do not wish to give the impression of wanting to employ American methods myself.”⁶

We had to wait for Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s denunciation of the “American way of life” before the function of the cultural industries were really analysed over and above the media critique that appeared from the 1910s with Karl Kraus.

Even if their analysis remains insufficient,⁷ they understood that the cultural industries form a system with industry as such, of which the function consists in manufacturing consumption patterns by massifying life styles. The aim is to ensure the flow of new products ceaselessly generated by economic activity, for which consumers don’t feel a spontaneous need. This leads to an endemic danger of overproduction and thus of economic crisis, which can only be fought through what Adorno and Horkheimer see as barbarism—unless the whole system

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is questioned.

After World War II, work on public relations theory is taken up by “research on movables”, destined to absorb excess production—estimated to be 40%—with the return of peace. In 1955 an advertising agency wrote that what makes North America great “is the creation of needs and desires, the creation of distaste for all that is old and out of fashion” – the promotion of taste thus presupposes that of distaste, which ends up affecting taste as well. All of this appeals to the “unconscious”, notably to overcome difficulties industrialists faced in pushing Americans to buy what their factories produced.⁸

From the nineteenth century onwards in France various organs facilitated the adoption of industrial products—which began disrupting ways of living—and struggled against the resistance brought about by these disruptions: the creation of advertising (*réclame*) by Emile de Girardin and of information by Louis Havas. But we had to wait for the appearance of the cultural (cinema and records) and especially program (radio and television) industries so that *industrial temporal objects* could develop. These would allow for *intimate* control of individual behaviour, transformed into mass behaviour—while the viewer, *isolated in front of his screen*, unlike the cinema, maintains the illusion of solitary entertainment.

This is also the case with the activity of so-called “free time”, which, in the hyper-industrial sphere, extends the mimetic, compulsive behaviour of the consumer to all human activities: everything must become consumable—education, culture and health, just like washing powder and chewing gum. But the illusion that must be maintained to achieve this can only provoke frustrations, discredit and destructive instincts. Alone in front of my television I can always say to myself that I behave individually, but the reality is that I do exactly as the hundreds of thousands of television viewers watching the same program.

With industrial activities having become global, they intend to create gigantic economies of scale and thus, through appropriated technologies, to control and homogenise behaviour. The program industries take this upon themselves through the temporal objects that they buy and broadcast in order to capture the time of consciousness that forms their audiences, and that they sell to advertisers.

A temporal object—a melody, film or radio broadcast—is *constituted* by the time of its passing, what Edmund Husserl called a flux. It is an object that passes. It is constituted by the fact that *like the consciousnesses that it unites*, it disappears as it appears. With the birth of public radio (1920), followed by the first television programs (1947), the program industries produce the temporal objects that *coincide in the time of their passing with the time flow of the consciousnesses of which they are the objects*. This coincidence enables consciousness to *adopt* the time of these temporal objects. The contemporary cultural industries can thus make masses of viewers adopt the time of consumption of toothpaste, cold drink, shoes, cars, etc. This is nearly exclusively how the cultural industry finances itself.

However, a “consciousness” is essentially a *self-consciousness*: a singularity. I can only say *I* because *I give myself my own time*. As enormous systems of synchronisation the cultural industries, especially television, are machines to liquidate this *self*, of which Michel Foucault studied the techniques towards the end of his life. When tens or hundreds of millions of viewers simultaneously watch the same program live, these consciousnesses around the world internalise the same temporal objects. And if they repeat every day at the same time and highly regularly the same consumptive audiovisual behaviour because everything pushes them to, these “consciousnesses” end up becoming that of the same person, that is, of *nobody*. The unconscious of the herd releases a collection of drives that no longer form a desire—for a desire presupposes a *singularity*.

During the 1940s American industry began to employ marketing techniques that would only intensify. These are the producers of a symbolic misery, which is also libidinal and affective. The latter leads to the *loss* of what I call *primordial narcissism*.⁹

The post-industrial fable does not understand that the power of contemporary capitalism rests on the *simultaneous* control of production and consumption regulating the activities of the masses. The fable rests on the false idea that the individual is the opposite of the group. Simondon has shown clearly that the individual is on the contrary a process that doesn't stop *becoming what it is*. Only *collectively* is it *psychically* individuated. What makes this *intrinsically* collective individuation possible, is the fact that the individuation of various individuals results from the appropriation by each singularity of what Simondon calls a *pre-individual fund* common to all these singularities.

As heritage of the accumulated experience of previous generations, this pre-individual fund exists only to the extent that it is singularly appropriated and thus transformed through the participation of psychic individuals who share this fund in common. However, it is only shared inasmuch as it is each time *individuated*, and it is individuated to the extent that it is *singularised*. The social group is constituted as *composition* of a synchrony inasmuch as it is recognised in a common heritage, and as a diachrony inasmuch as it makes possible and legitimises the singular appropriation of the pre-individual fund by each member of the group.

The program industries tend on the contrary to *oppose* synchrony and diachrony in order to bring about a hyper-synchronisation constituted by the programs, which makes the *singular* appropriation of the pre-individual fund impossible. The program schedule replaces that which André Leroi-Gourhan called socio-ethnic programs: the schedule is conceived so that my lived past tends to become the same as that of my neighbours, and that our behaviour becomes herd-like.

An *I* is a consciousness consisting in a temporal *flux* of what Husserl called *primary retentions*, that is, what the consciousness *retains* in the *now* of the flux in which it consists. For example, the note resonating in another note presents itself to my consciousness as the passing point of a melody: the previous note remains present, maintained in and by the present. It *constitutes* the following note by forming a link with it, the interval. As phenomena that I *receive* and *produce* (a melody that I *play* or *hear*, a phrase that I *pronounce* or *hear*, gestures or actions that I *carry out* or *undergo*, etc.), *my conscious life consists essentially in such retentions*.

However, these retentions are *selections*: I don't retain *everything* that can be retained.¹⁰ In the flux of what appears the consciousness makes selections that are in fact retentions: if I listen twice to the same melody, my consciousness of the object changes. And these selections are made through *filters in which the secondary retentions consist*, that is, the memories of the previous primary retentions that the memory conserves and that constitutes the experience.

THE RUINING OF NARCISSISM

The life of consciousness consists in such arrangements of the primary retentions, filtered by the secondary retentions, while the links between primary and secondary retentions are in turn determined by the *tertiary* retentions: memory support objects and mnemotechniques that make the recording of traces possible—notably those photograms, phonograms, cinematograms, videograms, and digital technologies that form the technological infrastructure of the societies of control in the hyper-industrial epoch.

Tertiary retentions such as the alphabet are those things that undergird every collective and psychic individuation's access to pre-individual funds. They exist in all human societies. They condition individuation as symbolic sharing, which is made possible by the externalisation of the individual experience in traces. When they become industrial, tertiary retentions constitute the technologies of control that alter symbolic exchange fundamentally. Resting on the opposing of producers to consumers, they allow for the hyper-synchronisation of the time of consciousnesses.

The latter are thus increasingly woven by the same secondary retentions and tend to select the same primary retentions, which all become alike. Then these consciousnesses notice that they no longer have much to say to

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one another and they meet one another less and less. See them sent back to their solitude, in front of those screens where they can devote less and less of their time to leisure—time *free from all constraint*.

This symbolic misery leads to the ruin of narcissism and to political and economic disarray. Before being a pathology, narcissism conditions the *psyche*, desire and singularity.¹¹ However, if marketing is no longer only about guaranteeing the reproduction of the producer, but also about the control of the manufacturing, reproduction, diversification and segmentation of the needs of the consumer, then it is *existential energy* that ensures the functioning of the system as the fruit of, on the one hand, the desire of the producers and, on the other hand, that of the consumers. In this case work, like consumption, represents captured and canalised *libido*. Work is generally both the sublimation and the principle of reality. But industrially divided work contributes less and less sublimatory, narcissistic satisfaction, and the consumer whose *libido* is captured finds less and less pleasure in consuming: he *slackens*, paralysed by the compulsion of repetition.

In the modulation societies that the societies of control are,¹² the aim is to condition the time of consciousness and the unconscious of bodies and souls with the audiovisual and digital technologies of the *aisthesis*.¹³ In the hyper-industrial epoch aesthetics as a dimension of the symbolic, which has become both weapon and theatre of the economic war, replaces the sensory experience of social or psychic individuals with the conditioning of hyper-masses. Hyper-synchronisation leads to the loss of individuation through the homogenisation of individual pasts by ruining primordial narcissism and the process of collective and psychic individuation. What allowed for the distinction of an *I* from a *Wē* is now confounded in the symbolic infirmity of an amorphous *One*.¹⁴ Not everyone is equally exposed to control. In this respect we are experiencing an aesthetic fracture, as if the *Wē* is divided in two. But *we all*, and the more so our children, are delivered to this sombre destiny—if nothing is done to overcome it.

The twentieth century optimised the conditions and the articulation of production and consumption with calculation and information technologies for the control of production and investment, and with communication technologies for the control of consumption and social behaviour, including political behaviour. Presently these two spheres are becoming integrated. Now the great delusion is no longer the “leisure society”, but the “personalisation” of individual needs. Félix Guattari spoke of the production of “dividuals”, that is, the particularisation of singularities through their submission to cognitive technologies.

Through the identification of users (user profiling) and other new methods of control these cognitive technologies allow for the subtle use of conditioning, invoking Pavlov as much as Freud. For example, services that encourage readers of one book to read other books read by readers of the same book. Or those internet search engines that promote the most consulted references, thus at once multiplying their consultation and constituting an extremely refined form of viewer rating.

Presently the *same* digital machines by means of the same norms and standards steer the production processes of the programmable machines of flexible workshops under remote control, industrial robotics having become essentially a mnemotechnology of production. Employed in the service of marketing they also organise consumption. Contrary to what Benjamin believed this is not the spread of a mass narcissism, but rather the massive destruction of collective and individual narcissism through the constitution of hyper-masses. Strictly speaking it is the *liquidation of the exception*, that is, the *generalised herdification* induced by the elimination of primordial narcissism.

The industrial temporal objects replace collective imaginaries and individual stories knotted together in the collective and individual process of individuation with mass standards, which tend to shrink the singularity of individual practices and their exceptional characters. However, the exception is the rule, but a rule that can never be formulated: it only exists in the event of an irregularity. That is, it cannot be formalised or calculated with an instrument of regular description applicable to all cases that are constituted by the different occurrences of this *rule by default*. This is why for a long time it referred to God, who constituted the absolutely irregular as

rule of the incomparability of singularities. The latter are rendered comparable and categorisable in marketing by transforming them into empty particularities, adjustable through the hyper-segmented, hyper-massified capturing of libidinal energies.

It is an *anti*-libidinal economy: only that which is singular is desirable, and in this regard exceptional. I only desire what seems exceptional to me. There is no desire for banality, but a compulsion for repetition that *tends* to banality: the *psyche* is constituted by Eros and Thanatos, two tendencies that ceaselessly compose with each other. The cultural industry and marketing strive for the development of the desire for consumption, but in reality they strengthen the death drive to provoke and exploit the compulsive phenomenon of repetition. In this way they thwart the life drive. In this regard, and since desire is essential for consumption, this process is self-destructive or, as Jacques Derrida would have said, auto-immune.

I can only desire the singularity of something to the extent which this thing is the mirror of the singularity that I am, about which I am still ignorant and which this thing reveals to me. But to the extent that capital must hyper-massify behaviour, it must also hyper-massify desires and herdify individuals. Consequently it is the exception that must be battled, which Nietzsche anticipated by declaring that industrial democracy can't but engender a herd-society. This is a genuine *aporia of industrial political economy*, since the subjection to control of the screens of projection of the desire for exception induces the dominant thanatological, that is, entropic tendency.¹⁵ Thanatos is the subjection of order to disorder. As a nirvana Thanatos tends to the equalisation of everything: it's the tendency to the negation of every exception—the latter being *that which desire desires*.

THE QUESTION OF SINGULARITY

Hence what we in France called the “cultural exception” is the sad disguise of the depth of the misery relating to these questions. As indispensable as the measures that this exception imply may be, it is nevertheless instrumentalised as a pure and simple political slogan. And it hinders those using it from reflecting on the exception in general as much as from taking stock of the question asked by the unfolding of the hyper-industrial society and the symbolic misery that results from it. Of this question that is so essential for the fate of global society this political cant makes a secondary, regional and sectorial, even “corporate” question, just as much as arguments in the context of international commercial accords aiming at the liquidation of any measure of exception.

The question is not limited to the life of what is called “culture”, with which the ministry of that name for example occupies itself: daily life in all its aspects is subjected to the hyper-industrial conditioning of daily ways of living. This is the most worrying problem of industrial ecology that there could be:¹⁶ the mental, intellectual, affective and aesthetic capacities of humanity are threatened massively, at the same moment that human groups have unprecedented means of destruction at their disposal.

The disarray in which this ruin of the libido consists is also political. To the extent that political leaders adopt marketing techniques to transform themselves into products, voters experience the same disgust for them as for all other products.

It is time that citizens and their representatives wake up. The question of singularity has become crucial, and there will be no politics of the future that is not also a politics of singularities—otherwise extreme nationalisms and fanaticisms of all kinds will flourish. How can desire in the hyper-industrial society of tomorrow be produced? How can the organisation of disarray be avoided in advance? Politicians themselves will have to be exemplary producers of desire. French voters who voted against the government in the regional elections of 28 March 2004 and not for a party that has no program suffer from a generalised destruction of the libidinal economy and from a political desire that is no longer fulfilled. The *philia* with which Aristotle defines the relation between citizens is evidently a highly refined and patiently cultivated fruit of the libidinal economy.

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From 21 April 2002 to 28 March 2004¹⁷ a movement has appeared that enjoins the political class in general to battle psychological and symbolic misery, which inevitably also becomes political misery. And it is no accident that the political debacle of the French government crystallised around questions linked to culture and research. The cultural question is not politically marginal: it is at the very heart of politics. For culture is also the libido, which industrial activity essentially tries to capture. Policies must henceforth first of all be cultural policies, not in the sense that a ministry of culture serves diverse cultural clienteles and professions, but rather as a critique of the limits of a hyper-industrial capitalism, which has become destructive of the social organisations in which collective and psychic individuation processes consist.

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NOTES

This article first appeared in *Le Monde diplomatique*, June 2004. The editors express their gratitude to *Le Monde diplomatique* for their kind permission to publish the text in an English translation. The English edition of *Le Monde diplomatique* can be found at www.mondediplo.com.

1. Gilles Deleuze, and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 2002).
2. Bernard Stiegler, *De la misère symbolique. 1. L'époque hyperindustrielle* (Paris: Galilée, 2004).
3. *Le Monde*, 10 April 2002, Paris. See also Bernard Stiegler, *Aimer, s'aimer, nous aimer. Du 11 septembre au 21 avril* (Paris: Galilée, 2003).
4. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2004), 37.
5. Jean-Michel Frodon, *La projection nationale. Cinéma et nation* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1998).
6. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 66-67.
7. In my book *Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise* (trans. Stephen Barker, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010, chapter 1) I have tried to show why their analysis remains insufficient: they adopt the Kantian idea of schematism without realising that the cultural industries in fact require a critique of Kantianism.
8. Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (London: Longmans, 1957).
9. Stiegler, *Aimer, s'aimer, nous aimer*.
10. The primary retentions form relations. For example, in a melody, where the notes and the arpeggios form intervals and chords or, in a phrase, semantical and syntactical links.
11. This term is applicable to “the recognition that the ego itself is occupied by libido, that it is in fact the libido’s original home and remains to some extent its headquarters.” Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 69.
12. Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*.
13. The perceptible that forms experience.
14. As in “one thinks” or “one does”—Trans.
15. That which has to do with death.
16. See also my book *Philosopher par accident. Entretien avec Elie During* (Paris: Galilée, 2004).
17. That is, from the first round of the French presidential election when the far right Jean-Marie Le Pen received more votes than the socialist Lionel Jospin, to the French regional elections in which massive voter dissatisfaction with government was made clear—Trans.