

technology and media: the press of sensations¹

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translated by haipei zhang

The press of sensations [*la presse à sensations*]² is the technological *dispositif*³ of the impression of memories. Memory is always already instantiated in the memories (books, stones, madeleines, institutions, individuals: all kinds of media supports [*médiathèses*]⁴), and it's the memory of a body which is not simply sensitive, but sensational.

The medium (milieu, element) of the sensational is the logos. The sensational body is always already logical. In the sensational, the body coheres [*le corps fait corps*] with its “outside”—and discovers itself outside of itself. “The outside is sensational!” The sensational is the outside. Logos, as the sensational outside, is

duplicitous [*duplice*]. The press of sensations is Proust and *Ici-Paris*, *Minute* and *Capital*. The sensational is the moving insofar as it is the movement of the interpretation of memory.

Capitalism is the power of the head over the body⁵ insofar as the body is political, and insofar as the political body is an epoch of the technological body. Cybernetics is the enterprise by which capitalism effectively extends its power over the political body. This body, corporeal, is textual and contextual, unmasterable, improbable, *irregular*.

The enterprise of the cybernetization of the body consists in the elimination of its textuality, that is, of its political character and corporeality qua heterogeneity. The issue is the understanding of the rule.

To the extent that it is a matter of a grammatical rule, it is a question of understanding the “use” of the rule as interpretation, that is, as the production of the rule (the grammar is performative, that is, speculative at the same time as normative).

The understanding of the rule is based on the understanding of the sign. In cybernetic conception, the sign is understood as a signal, that is, whose functioning (its “use”) is as a discrete element of a systematically organized and self-regulated code. This “use” is self-regulated to the extent that the “rule of use” [*règle d’usage*]⁶ is given. Thus, it is not, properly speaking, a matter of “use,” but a univocal response to a stimulus. “Use,” on the other hand, is plurivocal: the interpretation of a rule that is interpretable in its turn, having in its turn the force of a rule. “Use” is shaped by an irreducible indefinite, a constant alterability, a primordial irregularity: the ‘rule of use’ always calls for another “rule of use.” It is not given. The rule is and remains to be made. This means that the “use” of the sign is not systematic but textual; if there is a system, then it is not signals. The sign belongs to an irregular, asystematic text, which does not exclude the possibility that systems (codes, programs, grids) may systematically process the text. The sign is

textual as such, and it is as such that it makes signs [*fait signe*], that it signifies.

Cybernetics seeks to impose a univocal rule that establishes the self-regulation of the textual body through the systematic organization of the power of the head, which is thereby opposed to the body and cut off from it. Cybernetics is, above all, a science of government.

The very development of cybernetic means—which have primarily become the means of telecommunications, that is, of the inscription and dissemination of memory, and understood in this sense as media—has engendered effects contrary to the initial project of the cybernetic enterprise in its ideal phase, as a key theory.

These “new technologies” engender heterogeneous logics, which we will call techno-logics. The counter-effects, generating a *krisis*, may not necessarily signify the failure of capitalism’s accomplishment, but instead represent an opportunity for the body: they deprive real capitalism of its metaphysical foundation, the ideal capitalism.

Linear writing, as it developed in Greece and gave rise to secular books, is the first ‘new technology,’ the first techno-logic. These ‘new technologies’ are over three thousand years old. However, their modern occurrences (the printing press, the development of roads, mail, machines and transportation) and especially contemporary (photography, telegraphy, telephony, cinema, the whole set of electronic means) harbor a specific novelty: they urge the homo politicus to consider his/her primordially techno-logical (in-human), textual, mortal, non-predestined, and indefinite condition.

It is this whole that we call the press of sensations, as it extends from linear writing as a secular and political means of conservation, inscription, production, and dissemination of memory (a means which is thus not merely a means), to cultural industries, the entertainment business, as well as to artificial intelligence, the whole of these constituting the knowledge industries.

The press of sensation is destined toward a primordial and indefinite technological condition, a Promethean one. Hermes comes from Prometheus; the press of sensations is a hermeneutic enterprise.⁷

The first ‘new technology’ provokes a crisis, reaching its peak in sophistry, though it was already prefigured since the pre-Socratics. Sophistry reveals that the Promethean condition, once it becomes political, simultaneously becomes critical; that technological destiny consists in non-predestination and threat, and is destined by default [*par défaut*]; that the political body [*le corps politique*] is unpredictable and that the cohesion [*faire-corps*] of the city is never settled; that Epimetheus shadows Prometheus at each step; that the hermeneutic condition is sensational to the precise extent that the attraction to strong sensations is duplicitous.

Sophistry reveals all this through facts, taking advantage and even abusing what it discovers: it is unholy [*impie*]. The pre-Socratics had already prefigured this duplicity before the sophistic moment. But they declared it was irreducible and that any attempt to reduce it was impious: to attempt to reduce duplicity still and more than ever stems from this very duplicity.

To reveal that the politico-technological condition is critical means: to reveal that it is ultimately undecidable; that there are always things to be done, that it is necessary [*qu’il faut*] to constantly decide, but by default [*par défaut*], and that the issue, what it is that is necessary, is to cohere. The mortal, corporeal condition, failing to cohere [*faute de faire corps*], is missing [*fait défaut*]. The challenge is to create a sensation in public attractions (in the theater, courtroom, council, market, dining table) and to exhibit, to show (*deiknumi* [δείκνυμι] vs *apodeiknumi* [ἀποδείκνυμι])⁸ regularly the absence of the (a) rule [*l’absence de (la) règle*], the irregular.

The unholy project of philosophy is to reduce this duplicity revealed in factuality, by redeeming it through *critique* while causing the meaning of this word to shift,

so that it would soon designate an ultimate crisis that would amount to an operation of provident discernment.

Philosophy denies writing and its coalescence with all *phonē* (in the sense of J. Derrida⁹), denies *tekhnē* and its coalescence with all logos (here, technics and writing become synonymous), and thereby at the same time denies the body, its coalescence with the head, and the mortality of the latter, which thus becomes psycho-logical in opposition to techno-logical. It claims to state the universal rule (which nonetheless consists only in being missing [*faire défaut*]), to self-regulate the life of the political body from a head that has been served from this crisis-producing body [*corps fauteur de crise*]. Body and soul, it is a loss of the head.¹⁰

Recent technological development has resulted in a radical change in the process of intellectual production, linked to the new modes of inscribing collective memory and to the new publication procedures in which this inscription consists: the inscription of memory is its impression, and it is through publication processes (public interpretations) that publicity is both imprinted and makes an impression (sensationally).

This is the question of media, of mediators interpreting impressions from the public medium, of their performances and of performativity in general, which authorizes and even requires the dis-positivity¹¹ of available supports. This implies a reflection on the structure of new technological supports of memory. Supports in which the ‘reproduced [*reproduit*]’ has never existed before its reproduction, nor the impression (in the sense of feeling [*sentiment*]) before its publication. ‘Reproduced’ is what the support produces [*pro-duit*] in effect: there is no impression of the medium except imprinted in effects. The medium demands its intermediaries, requires and even requisitions them; it is always already the media, and everything is always already (only) its intermediary. There is an irreducibility of the media dimension.

The change in the process of intellectual production implies that we must fun-

damentally rethink the original relationship between philosophy and technics, and reconsider the semantic distributions, uses, and contexts shared by the terms *tekhnē*, *poiēsis*, *sophia*, *logos*, *hypokeimenon*, as well as author and authority¹².

This shift from a psychological to a technological conception of the intellect calls for a careful reading of theories of the soul in Plato and Aristotle.

The relationship between rationality and the empirical here presents itself in new terms (the performativity of supports makes the break between them problematic). The instrument, once conceived as an empirical means in the service of a rational end, now presents a new opacity harboring unpredictable finalities (better called outcomes), which *theorein*¹³ cannot fore-see [*pré-voir*]. There is no longer a predestining [*prédestinante*] pro-vidence to decipher and confirm. Previously, retroactive power seemed to belong to reason. Even though technics chronologically preceded science, the latter appeared to precede technics ontologically and retroactively. Today, retroactivity returns to the empirical: such is the performative question of techno-logics. Retroactivity would no longer be rational if it implied teleology and predestination, and science itself proves to be fundamentally instrumental and technical. The instrument has no a priori defined use. It is the exceptional [*insigne*] indefiniteness of its ends, that is, impropriety, availability and unavailability, that characterizes it. Yet the instrument effectively instructs, in effect, truth (or error), whether it is considered rational in the current sense (the instrumentality of contemporary sciences) or the political sense (the media apparatus of being-together¹⁴). ‘New technologies’ impose the question of the empirical in a pressing and original way.

The question of the medium and the media is that of the *logos* as technological foundation or capital. The question of memory, foundational of all publicity, is to be understood as the ancient question of the *hypokeimenon proton* [ὑποκείμενον πρῶτον]¹⁵. This problem seems to us to be concealed under the theme of *Gestell* in Heidegger. However, we think that Heidegger constantly retreats from the question insofar as he maintains an opposition between *logos* and *tekhnē*. In Heidegger,

there is a question of the support as memory, beginning from *Being and Time*, and which *Time and Being* returns [*reprise*]¹⁶ to in a remarkable way. It is the question of the meaning of being as the having-to-be [*avoir-à-être*] of the there-being [*être-là*] (feeling, impression) within its traditional medium. To have-to-be, for the there-being, means that it is not predestined [*prédestiné*] to be what it is, and that here lies its destiny [*destin*]. Destiny is a default of essence [*défaut d'essence*], that is to say, of a sender [*destinateur*]. But as J.-F. Lyotard¹⁷ insists, it is also a default of a receiver [*destinataire*]¹⁸, and of a human receiver (there is no essence of human-ity, there is a differend). This default [*défaut*] of a predestined destiny and this metaphysical defeat [*défaite*] are experienced today in the effects of technics, and in the absence of effect from the initial technological project of modern reason. It is centered on the question of the authority of the support (*Gestell*) in the absence of the author, of what this authorizes, and the conflict that results from it.

Intelligence has always already been artificial, ‘delegated’ to technics. What is called artificial intelligence is merely the manifestation of this intellectual condition, and it brings to the social body [*corps social*] this question: what are its relations with the head, and what is the intellect under this relation? And even, what is reason as a motive qua forming a body [*faire corps*]?

Certainly, we should not confuse, within artifice, the cybernetic (self-regulated) order with the semiotic (textual, irregular) disorder. But intelligence presupposes a technical “exteriority” (inter-legere¹⁹ is a being-among-texts [*être-parmi-les-textes*]), the world, and public-ness [*public-ité*]. World as non-pre-destined technicity is the intellective support. “New technologies” are not new in the sense that they make [*rendraient*] artificial intelligence, but rather in the sense that they return [*rendent*] intelligence to this artificiality, and reveal its techno-logics, putting in question the very notion of artifice, that is, mediation inasmuch as we oppose it to an “immediacy” of thought. Thinking is elementarily instrumental. It is a matter of thinking about the instrument otherwise, as an instrument of interpretation, which is construmantal²⁰ rather than merely instrumental. This means thinking intellection as a process of publication, of editing, as a press of

sensational ideas: there is no good idea that is not sensational – regardless of the duplicity of this sensationality.

New memories, new modes of recording, these technologicisms inaugurate the era of new grammars, other relationships to texts, of (re)readings which are as much unprecedented writings. These are promises of idioms to come, along with the feeling of pain and pleasure that accompanies them.

NOTES

1. Translator's note: This essay was published as "Technologie et media: la presse à sensations," *Le Cahier* (Collège International de Philosophie), no. 1 (1985): 168-172. I am grateful to Daniel Ross for his attentive feedback and crucial suggestions on this translation.
2. TN: Stiegler uses the phrase "*presse à sensations*" in a double sense: on the one hand, in its literal meaning of sensational press as a specific genre of news media; and on the other, to refer more generally to every technical medium. The sensational press (or tabloid press) is characterized by its focus on scandals and inflammatory discourses. For example, *Ici-Paris* and *Minute*, mentioned in the next paragraph, are two French sensational newspapers. More significantly, Stiegler uses this phrase to emphasize the artificiality of the noetic soul, which has a sensational (and exclamatory) quality constituted technically, in contrast to the merely sensitive soul in the Aristotelian sense. To retain Stiegler's open-ended use of this phrase, it is translated here as "press of sensations." For further discussion of this concept, see Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 2: Disorientation*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 113-122; Bernard Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit 1: Decadence of Industrial Democracies*, trans. Daniel Ross and Suzanne Arnold, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 133-134; and Bernard Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery, Volume 2: The Catastrophe of the Sensible*, trans. Barnaby Norman (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).
3. TN: I have followed Ashley Woodward and Amélie Berger Soraruff in retaining this French term untranslated, to avoid unnecessary shifts in meaning, as in their translation work Bernard Stiegler, "Technologies of memory and imagination," *Parrhesia* 29, (2018): 25-76. Additionally, the term "*dispositif*" is crucial for understanding Stiegler's critique of modern technologies here, as he recognizes it as a possible translation of the Heideggerian terminology *Gestell*, which is discussed extensively in the following paragraphs. For Stiegler's explanation of "*dispositif*" as a translation of *Gestell*, see Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 23-24.
4. TN: "*Médiathèses*" is Stiegler's own coinage, combining "media" and the suffix "-theses," This suffix functions in the same sense as his key term "prostheses" [*prothèses*], where the prefix "pros-" (Ancient Greek: πρῶς) denotes both in front (spatially) and in advance (temporally), and the suffix "-theses" (the plural form of *thesis*, θέσις) refers to an external placement. In this context, I translate the suffix as "supports," which preserves the sense of artificiality and exteriority found in "prostheses," while not distracting from Stiegler's emphasis on media in this essay. For more explanation of the term "prostheses," see Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1*.
5. TN: The reference to "capitalism is the power of the head over the body between the head and the body" derives from Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), chapter 3. In this work, Lyotard argues that capitalism produces a scission between the head and the body, most typically manifested in the cybernetic machine. He criticizes Marxist misunderstanding that industrial production merely divides the organic body into parts; rather, it is the whole body that is reduced to a productive machine, while the head is separated as a computational center. Lyotard also emphasizes the irreducibility of the political body when analyzing the productive body, particularly given that, since Ancient Greek, "the appearance of speech as political *tekhnē*" has already constituted "a process of cephalization and even of capitalization reducing each manual task to a fragmentation subordinated to the political body." (121)
6. TN: "*Le règle d'usage*" is an idiomatic French expression that can be understood as "rule of thumb" or "standard practice." For Wittgenstein, when he discusses language games, a "rule of

use” is the “ostensive definition” of a word (for example, the word “yellow”) given to someone who is being taught its meaning. As he writes, “the teaching may have supplied us with a rule which is itself involved in the processes of understanding, obeying, etc” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Preliminary Studies for the “Philosophical Investigations”. Generally Known as The Blue and Brown Books*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), 12). Lyotard further defines a language game as constituted by its rules, which “do not carry within themselves their own legitimation, but are the object of a contract, explicit or not, between players; if there are no rules, there is no game, that even an infinitesimal modification of one rule alters the nature of the game” (Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 10).

7. TN: For the mythical origin of Hermes in relation to Prometheus, see Plato, *Protagoras*, 322b-d. For further discussions of this theme in Stiegler, see *Technics and Time* 1, 200-203.

8. TN: In Greek, “*deiknumi*” is less formal than “*apodeiknumi*” (which is usually translated as “to demonstrate”), as the latter carries the prefix “apo-” [ἀπό-] meaning “from,” indicating that evidence is presented from the subject to others. See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*.

9. TN: See Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), and Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

10. TN: The original sentence is: “c’est corps et biens perdre la tête,” which contains the phrase “perdre corps et biens,” a French idiom that literally refers to a shipwreck in which all sailors and cargo are lost, and is usually used to indicate a catastrophic situation where everything is destroyed—similar to the English expression “lost with all hands.” Stiegler here uses this phrase to echo his earlier discussion of the head’s dominance over the body in capitalist-cybernetic context.

11. TN: Stiegler plays on the expression “dis-positivity” [*dis-positivité*] here, based on *dispositif*. It is worth noting that Lyotard also uses the same wordplay, though in a different context, in “Sur une figure de discours,” *Des dispositifs pulsionnels* (Paris: Galilée, 1973), 129-130: “the positivity of these investments must be affirmed rather than the gap, exclusion, etc., that they produce—the ‘-positif’ rather than the ‘dis-’ in *dispositif*[...] What is positive in this figure is the production of new libidinal operators, rather than the ‘effects of meaning,’ which are always relative to the exteriority chosen to describe the *dispositif*.”

12. TN: The relation between author and authority is discussed in Stiegler, “Technologies of Memory and Imagination”: “Given the problems posed, for example, by artificial intelligence, and notably by the automatic generation of literary texts, we evidently cannot bypass the question of the subject, of what was called the ‘author.’ However, this subject-user of instruments, the performer and/or author of programs, is neither the author nor the performer of the promise which carries the authority of the program in its text. The question is one of knowing where this authority—the authority of an idiom—comes from. We posit the principle that the author is a derived, rather than originary.” (57)

13. TN: “Theorein” [θεωρεῖν], the Greek root of “theory,” literally means “to look at” or to see.”

14. TN: “Being-together” [être-ensemble] is what Lyotard uses to refer to the form of state, society and organization—the “we.” He emphasizes the role of “new technologies” in this context in a 1982 essay: “As for state control, the technologies of language touch its domain in regard to all aspects of its responsibility for the Idea of being-together: the multiplication of organizations for management and administration (ministers, agencies, missions); the constitution of memories (files, archives, etc.); the relationship to the new media; and so forth. The important fact is this: in

handling language, the new technologies directly handle the social bond, being-together.” (Jean-François Lyotard, “New Technologies,” *Political Writings*, trans. Bill Readings and Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), 17)

15. TN: “*Hypokeimenon proton*” means “primary substrate,” as in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (1028b 33-29a2): “The substrate is that of which the rest are predicated, while it is not itself predicated of anything else. Hence we must first determine its nature, for the primary substrate is considered to be in the truest sense substance.” (Aristotle, *The Metaphysics Books I-IX, Vol I*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1933))

16. TN: “Reprise” is a compositional technique that, in this metaphorical sense, Stiegler attributes to Heidegger’s 1962 lecture *Time and Being*, which, although planned as the third section of Part One of *Being and Time*, was never published within it. This reprise is a revisiting and revising—like the recapitulation in sonata form.

17. TN: See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

18. TN: This family of words (*destinateur, destinataire, destin, destination*) was something that Lyotard and Derrida were particularly fond of discussing in the 1980s. For example, there are numerous discussions in Lyotard’s *The Differend* (originally published in French in 1983) and Derrida’s *The Post Card* (originally published in French in 1980), with the latter clearly carrying a more Heideggerian sense. When it comes to the sending and destining of the post, Derrida associates them with *Geschick* and says that it is the unavoidable Freiburg—that is, Heidegger’s place. As Heidegger points out in *Being and Time* and *On Time and Being*, Derrida also reiterates the relationship between *Geschick* and *schicken*: “*Geschick* is destiny, of course, and therefore everything that touches on the destination as well as on destiny, and even on ‘sort.’ [...] I also like that this word *Geschick*, which everything ends up passing through, even the thinking of the history of Being as dispensation, and even the gift of the ‘*es gibt Sein*’ or ‘*es gibt Zeit*.’ [...] And *schicken* is to send, envoyer, to ‘expedite,’ to cause to leave or to arrive, etc. [...] Destination, the destinality, sorry, of an envoi which, of course, does not send this or that, which sends nothing that is, nothing that is a ‘being,’ a ‘present.’” (Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 63)

19. TN: “*Interlegere*” in Latin means “to read between the lines.”

20. TN: The word “construmantal” is Stiegler’s own coinage, derived from the verb “to construe,” which comes from the Latin *cōstruō*, meaning “to gather together” and “to construct,” but most importantly, “to connect grammatically.” By contrast, “instrumental” lacks the sense of “with” (“con-”).