

## Stiegler reading Derrida: the prosthesis of deconstruction in technics

Article (Accepted Version)

Roberts, Ben (2005) Stiegler reading Derrida: the prosthesis of deconstruction in technics. *Postmodern Culture*, 16 (1). ISSN 1053-1920

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/57021/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

### **Copyright and reuse:**

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

This is a pre-press version of:

Roberts, B., 2005. Stiegler Reading Derrida: The Prosthesis of Deconstruction in Technics. *Postmodern Culture*, 16(1). Available at:

[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern\\_culture/v016/16.1roberts.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v016/16.1roberts.html)

DOI: 10.1353/pmc.2006.0009

# Stiegler Reading Derrida: The Prosthesis of Deconstruction in Technics

Ben Roberts, University of Bradford

## 1 Between Derrida and Stiegler

In his massive multi-volume work *Technics and Time* Bernard Stiegler explores a history of technics as epiphylogenesis—the preservation in technical objects of epigenetic experience. Epiphylogenesis for Stiegler marks a break with genetic evolution (which cannot preserve the lessons of experience), a break which also constitutes the “invention” of the human. As Stiegler puts it in the general introduction to *Technics and Time*: “As a ‘process of exteriorisation,’ technics is the pursuit of life by means other than life.” (*Technics and Time* 17)

Since the “human” is constituted through its exteriorisation into tools, its origin is neither biological (a particular arrangement of cells) nor transcendental (to be found in something like consciousness). The origin of the human as the prosthesis of the living is therefore fundamentally aporetic: one should speak, for Stiegler, of a non-origin or default of origin.<sup>1</sup> Stiegler develops these arguments through a reading of Rousseau and Leroi-Gourhan, showing on the one hand how the empirical approach of the palaeo-anthropologist cannot avoid the transcendental question of origin and, on the other, how Rousseau’s transcendental account of the question of origin inscribes inside its account, despite itself, the thought of the human as contingent or accidental (*Technics and Time* 82-133).

I will not expand on Stiegler’s reading of Leroi-Gourhan and Rousseau here. What I intend to discuss is rather the relationship between Stiegler’s work and that of Jacques Derrida. In particular we will examine Stiegler’s discussion of Derrida in the latter half of the first volume of *Technics and Time* and then move on to discuss some other points from the interviews between the two men gathered in the *Echographies* collection.

The context of Stiegler’s disagreement with Derrida in the first volume of *Technics and Time* is the discussion in chapter 3 of the palaeo-anthropologist Leroi-Gourhan and the “invention of the human”. At the opening of the chapter Stiegler argues:

We are considering a passage: a passage to what is called the human. Its “birth,” if there is one ... To ask the question of the birth of the human is to pose the question of the “birth of death” or of the relation to death. But at stake here will be the attempt to think, instead of the birth of the human *qua* entity relating to its end, rather its invention or even its embryonic fabrication or conception, and to attempt this independently of all anthropologism ... (*Technics and Time* 135)

---

<sup>1</sup> On the aporia of the origin of the human in relation to the work of Leroi-Gourhan see particularly (*Technics and Time* 141–2). Stiegler develops the argument around the ‘default of origin’ (*défaut d’origine*) through a reading of the ‘fault’ of Epimetheus in Plato’s *Protagoras*, concluding ‘[humans] only occur through their being forgotten; they only appear in disappearing’ (*Technics and Time* 188). See also Bennington and Beardsworth’s exposition of this argument in Stiegler: (“Emergencies” 180–1); (“From a Genealogy of Matter to a Politics of Memory” 95n16).

Here then is the place of Leroi-Gourhan in Stiegler: the chance to understand the emergence of the human in a non-“anthropologicistic” manner. The key to this approach is the role Leroi-Gourhan assigns to technics in the evolution of the human. For Leroi-Gourhan the evolution of the human—unlike that of animals—is not only a question of the evolution of a biological entity but also, crucially for Stiegler, the evolution of technical objects (or “organised inorganic matter” as Stiegler has it). As a result of this, Leroi-Gourhan opens up the possibility of an understanding of the human which is no longer simply that of either a biological entity *or* a biological entity with some transcendental quality (consciousness, free will, etc.) added to it. Unfortunately, for Stiegler, Leroi-Gourhan will not be quite able to deliver on the promise of a non-anthropologicistic or non-anthropocentric account of the human. For although Leroi-Gourhan has an account of the process of hominization as the exteriorisation of the human in its tools, he still requires what Stiegler calls the “artifice of a second origin” in order to account for the passage from “technical” to “creative” consciousness. What lies behind this failure is an inability to understand that the origin of the human is not merely obscure but fundamentally *aporetic*. For the exteriorisation of the human into technics—writing, tools and so on—raises a fundamental aporia of origin: “The paradox is to have to speak of an exteriorization without a preceding interior: the interior is constituted in exteriorization” (*Technics and Time* 141). It is at this point, in order to elucidate this aporetic structure, that Stiegler calls on the Derridean term *différance*:

The ambiguity of the invention of the human, that which holds together the *who* and the *what*, binding them while keeping them apart, is *différance* ... *Différance* is neither the *who* nor the *what*, but their co-possibility, the movement of their mutual coming-to-be, of their coming into convention. The *who* is nothing without the *what* and conversely. *Différance* is below and beyond the *who* and the *what*; it poses them together, a composition engendering the illusion of an opposition. The passage is a mirage: the passage of the cortex into flint, like a mirror proto-stage. (*Technics and Time* 141)

For Stiegler only *différance* as a structure of differing and deferral *without* origin can describe this aporetic relationship between the interior and exterior that is the “human”. *Différance*, here the co-possibility of the *who* and the *what*, is what makes possible the *who* and the *what*, “below and beyond” them as Stiegler puts it, and as such is what makes possible the non-origin or what he calls here the “proto-mirage” of the human, that is “the passage of the cortex into flint”. However, the status of this passage is what is problematic here and what is at stake in Stiegler’s dispute with Derrida. On the one hand, this emergence or passage is a “mirage”, “aporetic” or “paradoxical”. The tool, the “work in flint” is no more an effect or product of the human being than the human is an effect or product of the appearance of flint tools. On the other hand, something, however “aporetic” it may be, *happens*, “is accomplished” or *commences*, that is this “beginning of “exteriorization””. Put otherwise: what happens, what is suspended inside these quotation marks may remain paradoxical or aporetic, but *that* it happens, that there *is* a “passage” is not in question. For Stiegler this passage is crucial because it marks the emergence of what Stiegler calls from the beginning of *Technics and Time* “organised inorganic matter”, “the prosthesis of the human” or what he will later call, in relation to the discussion of Husserl, “tertiary memory”. It is precisely this passage that, for Stiegler, is “remaining to be thought” in Derrida’s work. This point seems to be demonstrated most clearly for Stiegler in Derrida’s own reading of Leroi-Gourhan in the chapter of *Of Grammatology* entitled “Of Grammatology as a Positive Science” and in particular in the following passage, which, since it seems to mark such a crucial point of distinction between Stiegler and Derrida, we will quote here at length:

Leroi-Gourhan no longer describes the unity of man and the human adventure thus by the simple possibility of the *graphie* in general; rather as a stage or an articulation in the history of life—of what I have called *différance*—as the history of the *grammē*. Instead of having recourse to the concepts that habitually serve to distinguish man from other living beings (instinct and intelligence, absence or presence of speech, of society, of

economy, etc. etc.), the notion of *program* is invoked. It must of course be understood in the cybernetic sense, but cybernetics is itself intelligible only in terms of a history of the possibilities of the trace as the unity of a double movement of protention and retention. This movement goes far beyond the possibilities of “intentional consciousness.” It is an emergence that makes the *grammē* appear *as such* (that is to say according to a new structure of nonpresence) and undoubtably makes possible the emergence of systems of writing in the narrow sense. Since “genetic inscription” and the “short programmatic chains” regulating the behaviour of the amoeba or the annelid up to the passage beyond alphabetic writing to the orders of the logos and of a certain *homo sapiens*, the possibility of the *grammē* structures the movement of its history according to rigorously original levels, types and rhythms. But one cannot think them without the most general concept of the *grammē*. That is irreducible and impregnable. If the expression ventured by Leroi-Gourhan is accepted, one could speak of a “liberation of memory,” of an exteriorization always already begun but always larger than the trace which, beginning from the elementary programs of so-called “instinctive” behaviour up to the constitution of electronic card-indexes and reading machines, enlarges difference and the possibility of putting in reserve: it at once and in the same movement constitutes and effaces so-called conscious subjectivity, its logos and its theoretical attributes. (*Of Grammatology* 84)

Now, from Stiegler’s point of view, the important point here in Derrida’s reading of Leroi-Gourhan is that the exteriorisation of the human into tools or graphical marks is only a stage in difference as the “history of life” in general. Thus Derrida emphasises here the continuity of the “notion of *program*” from “genetic inscription” up to and beyond alphabetic writing. The possibility of the *grammē* as program is prior to any particular type of program, be it genetic or nongenetic and even if one must pay attention in the history of the *grammē* to “rigorously original levels, types and rhythms” Derrida insists that “one cannot think them without the most general concept of the *grammē*. That is irreducible and impregnable”. Stiegler’s response to this seems to be as follows:

Différance is the history of life in general, in which an articulation is produced, a stage of difference out of which emerges the possibility of making the *grammē* as such, that is, “consciousness,” appear. The task here will be to specify that stage ... The passage from the genetic to the nongenetic is the appearance of a new type of *grammē* and/or program. If the issue is no longer that of founding *anthropos* in the pure origin of itself, the origin of its type must still be found. (*Technics and Time* 137–8)

Thus even if Derrida is right in thinking that the notion of program in Leroi-Gourhan challenges all the traditional distinctions that mark the difference and origin of the human, of *anthropos*, it is nonetheless the case that with the human we see the emergence of a new type of program, and that new type of program is exactly what *Technics and Time*, in its understanding of technics as the prosthesis of the human, is concerned with. For Stiegler it is crucial therefore to distinguish genetic evolution from the non-genetic evolution which he calls epiphylogenesis and which involves the evolution not of the biological entity which the human being is, but of its technical supports, in which the human’s epigenetic experience is preserved and accumulated.

For Stiegler it is the significance of epiphylogenesis, or the fact that Dasein “becomes singular in the history of the living”, that Derrida fails to think. This is not simply because difference, which Stiegler establishes, on the basis of the quote from *Of Grammatology*, as the “history of life in general” is not developed far enough to have an account of the specificity of epiphylogenesis which Stiegler is outlining, but also, curiously, because Derrida’s arguments about difference are in some sense inconsistent with themselves. After quoting at length the passage from the essay “Différance” on the temporal and spatial dimensions of the French verb *différer*, Stiegler comments as follows:

All of this points primarily to life in general: there is time from the moment there is life,

whereas Derrida also writes, just before the Leroi-Gourhan quotation [i.e., the passage from *Of Grammatology* we have cited above], that “the trace is the différance that opens appearing and the signification (which articulates) the living onto the non-living in general, (which is) the origin of all repetition” ... To articulate the living onto the nonliving, is that not already a gesture from after the rupture when you are already no longer in pure *phusis*? There is something of an indecision about différance: it is the history of life in general, but this history is (only) given (as) (dating from) after the rupture, whereas the rupture is, if not nothing, then at least much less than what the classic divide between humanity and animality signifies. The whole problem is that of the economy of life in general, and the sense of death as the economy of life once the rupture has taken place: life is, after the rupture, the economy of death. The question of différance is death. (139, translation slightly modified)

In other words, it is incoherent for différance to constitute both “the history of life in general” and the specific stage in the history of life—which Stiegler associates with the invention of the human and technics as epiphylogenesis—when the living is articulated upon “the non-living in general”, i.e., inorganic organised matter. However, one might wonder if it is not because Stiegler is *himself* operating from within such a rigorous distinction between *phusis* and *tekhnē* that he is able to convince himself that it is only *after* the “rupture” of the technical that death is the economy of life. For Stiegler it is only after such a rupture, i.e., “the invention of the human”, that the trace articulates the living on the non-living in general. It is only after this point that the evolution of a particular living being (the human) becomes bound up with the evolution of something that is not living, that is, what Stiegler calls “inorganic organised matter”, in the form of tools, writing and so on. But there is no reason to suppose that Derrida is working with the same set of assumptions when he talks of the possibility of the *grammē* embracing not only alphabetic writing but also “genetic inscription”, indeed it seems to be clearly the case that Derrida is precisely challenging such a classical set of distinctions (which is indeed what they are, for the opposition between epigenesis and epiphylogenesis only reproduces in a different form the more traditional opposition between nature and culture). It would seem perfectly reasonable for Derrida to argue that the reason for regarding genetic inscription as a species of the *grammē* is precisely because genetics *does indeed* articulate the living upon the non-living in general: the DNA of a biological entity binds it to its non-living ancestors just as much as their written or technical legacy; genetic codes preserve the legacy of the nonliving in the living in a way which is analogous to (though obviously not the same as) alphabetic writing. Moreover it is not immediately obvious why genetic evolution should be regarded simply as an “economy of life”, when death and genetic non-survival is in part the criterion of selection: genetics, it might be argued, is equiprimordially an economy of life and an economy of death. It is only if one thinks, like Stiegler, that there is first an economy of life, then a rupture that coincides with the arrival of the human, and that then, as he argues above, “life is, after the rupture, the economy of death” that one is forced to regard genetic inscription as in some way rigorously distinct from all later forms of—no doubt, “epiphylogenetic”—inscription.

In part the problem here is Stiegler’s attachment to the category of “organised inorganic matter” and the assumption that the organic/inorganic distinction maps in a straightforward, unproblematic manner onto the distinction between living and nonliving that Derrida invokes with respect to the trace. In fact, Stiegler often takes inorganic (*inorganique*) and non-living (*non-vivant*) to be simply synonymous.<sup>2</sup> In other words he reads the ‘non-living in general’ of the quote from *Of Grammatology* as solely consisting of in very *specific* form of non-living he associates with inorganic matter. Having construed Derrida’s thinking of the trace in this manner, Stiegler is then

2 This can be seen in the following definition of the organised inorganic from the article “Leroi-Gourhan: *l’inorganique organisé*”: ‘...Leroi-Gourhan fournit les concepts fondamentaux, et à partir desquels il est possible de faire apparaître un *troisième* RÈGNE, à côté des deux règnes reconnus depuis longtemps des êtres inertes et des êtres organiques. Ce nouveau règne, qui a été ignoré aussi bien par la philosophie que par les sciences, c’est le règne de ce que j’appelle les *êtres inorganiques* (non-vivants) *organisés* (instrumentaux)’: (“Leroi-Gourhan: *l’inorganique organisé*” 188–9).

puzzled by the question of why Derrida isn't more interested in the relationship between organic and inorganic matter (living and non-living) and more specifically why he isn't more interested in the 'rupture' of the human which Stiegler understands, as we have seen, as the point at which the evolution of the living becomes bound up with a relation to the non-living in the form of tools. Stiegler therefore makes the mistake of assuming that the trace requires one to think of this new category of *organised* inorganic matter when in fact the trace challenges (without erasing) the very categorial distinctions Stiegler is relying on. Indeed precisely what makes the trace, or the idea of the *grammē* as program, radical is that it exists on either side of Stiegler's imagined rupture and therefore challenges both the opposition between nature and culture and "the name of man". As Richard Beardsworth comments:

The risk Stiegler runs in differentiating the historical epochs of arche-writing, and in thinking them in terms of technical supplementarity, is precisely that of considering technicity in the *exclusively exteriorized terms of technics which befit the process of hominization* ... The major theses in *Technics and Time* according to which the technical object represents a third kind of being ..., that hominization emerges through the technical suspension of genetic, and that, therefore, the human lives through means other than life ... all such theses, while brilliantly articulated by Stiegler in their own terms, end up having the following somewhat ironic consequence: biological life prior to, or in its difference from anthropogenesis is removed from the structure of originary technicity; as a result biology is naturalised and the differentiation of technicity *qua* technics is only considered in its exteriorized form in relation to processes of hominization. ("Thinking technicity" 81)

Indeed it might seem here that it is not so much Derrida's account of *différance* that is confused as Stiegler's reading of it. This point can be illustrated by Stiegler's reading of a different passage about *différance*, a passage this time drawn from the essay "Différance":

Thus one could consider all the pairs of opposites on which philosophy is constructed and on which our discourse lives, not in order to see opposition erase itself but to see what indicates that each of the terms must appear as the *différance* of the other, as the other different and deferred in the economy of the same (the intelligible as differing-deferring the sensible, as the sensible different and deferred; the concept as different and deferred, differing-deferring intuition; culture as nature different and deferred, differing-deferring; all the others of *physis*–*tekhnē*, *nomos*, *thesis*, society, freedom, history, mind etc.—as *physis* different and deferred, or as *physis* differing and deferring. *Physis* in *différance*...). (*Margins of Philosophy* 17)

Having cited a section of this passage, Stiegler comments: "Now *physis* as life was already *différance*. There is an indecision, a passage remaining to be thought" (*Technics and Time* 139). What he seems to mean by this is that *différance* cannot be simultaneously "the history of life in general" (the definition from *Of Grammatology* which Stiegler is taking here to be synonymous with "the history of *physis* in general")<sup>3</sup> and the differing-deferring of *physis* and *tekhnē* which Stiegler assumes can only be the case after the "rupture" of the technical. But it seems fairly clear from this passage that Derrida sees the thought of *différance* as that which first of all challenges the philosophical opposition between *physis* and *tekhnē*, establishing them as "different and deferred in the economy of the same". It is not surprising therefore that Derrida does not have an account of the invention of the human as a "rupture" in *différance*, because this rupture would seem to risk affirming on a different level the very philosophical oppositions that such a *différance* disrupts. For it is indeed difficult not to see in Stiegler's opposition of phylogenesis and epiphylogenesis a reproduction of a most classical opposition between nature and culture, where the "nature" of

3 See Geoffrey Bennington's comments on the problematic nature of this equation of *physis* and "life": ("Emergencies" 189).

phylogenetic evolution, which can never preserve the experience of the individual entity, is opposed to the “culture” of *epiphylogenetic* evolution which would preserve such epigenetic experience in its exteriorized prostheses (tools, writing and so on).<sup>4</sup> On this reading, Stiegler would add to this traditional division the twist that such a culture would no longer be understood as the *product* of the human but as that which *invents* the human in an exteriorisation of the organic living being into inorganic technical objects.

Of course, Stiegler would certainly not agree with the suggestion that the phylogenesis/epiphylogenesis divide or “rupture” simply reproduces the opposition between nature and culture; such a resistance would probably centre around his linking the idea of epiphylogenesis to *différance*. For the role which *différance* seems to play in Stiegler’s theoretical setup—especially in the first volume of *Technics and Time*—is to show that as soon as there is anything like epiphylogenesis—i.e., culture—there is a *différance*, that is, a differing deferral without origin, which means that one can no longer think the rupture of the technical as an *origin*, either an origin of the human or an origin of culture. It is exactly on this point, after all, that Stiegler sees himself as deviating from Rousseau and Leroi-Gourhan, who must both ultimately rely on the artifice of a second origin or coup in order to explain the deviation from nature (Rousseau) or the arrival of “symbolic consciousness” (Leroi-Gourhan). Epiphylogenesis as *différance*, on the other hand, allows for a new non-anthropocentric concept of the human and of “culture”. Such a concept would displace the question of the origin of the human and of culture, whether that question is framed in transcendental or biological terms. Indeed this seems to be exactly how Stiegler understands Derrida’s own reading of Leroi-Gourhan, as is evident from this (as we shall see, rather imprecise) *précis* of the passage from *Of Grammatology* we previously cited:

In other words, Leroi-Gourhan’s anthropology can be thought from within an essentially non-anthropocentric concept that does not take for granted the usual divides between animality and humanity. Derrida bases his own thought of *différance* as a general history of life, that is, as a general history of the *grammē*, on the concept of program insofar as it can be found on both sides of such divides. Since the *grammē* is older than the specifically human written forms, and because the letter is nothing without it, the conceptual unity that *différance* contests the opposition animal/human and, in the same move, the opposition nature/culture. “Intentional consciousness” finds the origin of its possibility before the human; it is nothing but “the emergence that has the *grammē* appearing as such.” *We are left with the question of determining what the conditions of such an emergence of the “grammē as such” are, and the consequences as to the general history of life and/or of the grammē. This will be our question.* (137, Stiegler’s emphasis)

For many readers of Derrida, this must seem like a rather strange way of understanding *différance*. For it is not easy to understand how a Derridean understanding of *différance* would allow one to oppose a “non-anthropocentric concept of the human” to an anthropocentric one, or to contest the opposition of concepts such as nature and culture by referring them to the “conceptual unity” of *différance*. Such a reading seems problematic that Derrida says, both in the essay “*Différance*” and elsewhere, to the effect that *différance* is *not* a concept, “neither a word nor a concept”, a point that is repeated many times in the essay “*Différance*”.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, such remarks are not mere qualifications, caveats or platitudes which Derrida attaches to an otherwise orthodox semantic exposition of what *différance* is: they are rather at the heart of his argument. *Différance* is

---

4 It should be noted that this clean separation between phylogenetic and epiphylogenetic evolution is challenged for Stiegler by modern technology in the form of genetic manipulation: “Dès lors que la biologie moléculaire rend possible une manipulation du *germen* par l’intervention de la main, le programme reçoit une leçon de l’expérience. La loi même de la vie s’en trouve purement et simplement suspendue” (“Quand faire c’est dire: de la technique comme *différance* de toute frontière” 272). See also (*La technique et le temps II* 173–187).

5 “...*différance* is literally neither a word nor a concept...”; “...*différance* is neither a word nor a concept...”; “...*différance*, which is not a concept...”: (*Margins of Philosophy* 3,7,11).

not a concept because it is “the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general” and “as what makes possible the presentation of the being-present, it is never presented as such” (*Margins of Philosophy* 6,11). Deconstruction can therefore never proceed by opposing *différance* as a new concept to a series of old metaphysical concepts, for example, by opposing a “non-anthropocentric” concept of the human to an anthropocentric one. It is also for this reason, as Derrida also makes abundantly clear, that one can never simply think *différance* as naming some kind of conceptual unity which would be prior to all conceptual oppositions. Since that which makes conceptuality possible can never in itself be made present as a concept, it is in principle “unnameable” (and this is the sense of “*différance*” being “neither a word nor a concept): indeed the choice of the term *différance* is, as Derrida points out, only a strategic or provisional one, which, as he also points out, does not mean that a better term (for example, “technics”, or “epiphylogenesis”),<sup>6</sup> or a real name, is waiting in the wings.<sup>7</sup> Far from a conceptual or nominal unity, Derrida’s choice of the neographism “*différance*” is motivated not by a desire to unite the two meanings of the verb *différer* but by that of maintaining it as being “immediately and irreducibly polesemic” (8).

In this sense it might seem as if the problem with Stiegler’s argument of *Technics and Time* is, as Geoff Bennington has argued, is Stiegler’s desire to think technics in both quasi-transcendental and positivistic terms.<sup>8</sup> In other words there is a question about the relationship between historical or theoretical understanding of technics and the argument that Stiegler also wants to advance about technics as a quasi-transcendental structure (what Bennington refers to as “originary technicity”). This problem concerning the relationship between positive knowledge about technology and the quasi-transcendental understanding of technics also seems to arise in the series of interviews between Stiegler and Derrida presented in *Echographies*:

The origin of sense makes no sense. This is not a negative or nihilistic statement. That which bears intelligibility, that which increases intelligibility, is not intelligible—by definition, by virtue of its topological structure. From this standpoint, technics is not intelligible. This does not mean that it is a source of irrationality, that it is irrational or that it is obscure. It means that it does not belong, by definition, by virtue of its situation, to the field of that which it makes possible. Hence a machine is, in essence, not intelligible. (*Echographies of Television* 108)

It is difficult not to read this as a direct challenge to the logic of *Technics and Time*. For what is Stiegler’s project here if it is not to make technics visible and intelligible?

Stiegler responds to Derrida at this point, making it clear that he has not taken Derrida’s basic point on board “It [i.e., technics] constitutes sense if it participates in its construction ...” (109) To which Derrida responds in turn, reiterating:

Yes, but that which constitutes sense is senseless. This is a general structure. The origin of reason and of the history of reason is not rational. (109)

In his own reading of this interview—an interview which he admits he finds ‘disappointing’ since ‘Derrida’s responses to [Stiegler’s] questions and interventions remain too much within the

6 Geoff Bennington criticises Stiegler for his “confident identification of ‘technics’ as *the* name for a problem which he *also* recognizes goes far beyond any traditional determination of that concept” (“Emergencies” 190).

7 “‘Older’ than Being itself, such a *différance* has no name in our language. But we “already know” that if it is unnameable, it is not provisionally so, not because our language has not yet found or received this *name*, or because we would have to seek it in another language, outside the finite system of our own. It is rather because there is no *name* for it at all, not even the name of essence or of Being, not even that of “*différance*,” which is not a name, which is not a pure nominal unity, and unceasingly dislocates itself in a chain of differing and deferring substitutions.”: (*Margins of Philosophy* 26).

8 “[Stiegler’s] compelling, and at times brilliant account of originary *technicity* is presented in tandem with a set of claims about *technics* and even *techno-science* as though all these claims happened at the same level. This mechanism makes of Stiegler’s book perhaps the most refined example to date of the confusion of the *quasi-transcendental* (originary technicity) and *transcendental contraband* (technics)”: (“Emergencies” 190)



ambit and terms of his own philosophy' ("Towards a Critical Culture of the Image" 116)—Richard Beardsworth formulates the following reading of this exchange between Stiegler and Derrida:

Derrida's comments are, to say the least, odd in response to Stiegler's concerns, both at a juncture of the interview when the two men are acquainted with each other's preoccupations and, more importantly, at a moment in cultural history when the terms of philosophical reflection upon the real are shifting. As we have seen, Stiegler's interest lies, precisely, in the historical differentiation of this "other" of reason and meaning together with the political implications of the articulation of this "other." To respond by reiterating a series of propositions that are well-known from within and around the thought of deconstruction and post-structuralism, but that do not engage as such with the explicit wish on Stiegler's part to genealogize, after the last twenty years thinking, what lies prior to the opposition between reason and unreason, meaning and unmeaning is intellectually and culturally dissatisfying. ("Towards a Critical Culture of the Image" 138)

But it is not surely not Derrida here who is failing to engage with Stiegler but *vice versa*: as we have seen above, Stiegler fails to respond to the basic problem being outlined here, however many ways Derrida formulates it, which one might formulate again and put as follows: 'How is theoretical and historical knowledge of "technics" possible, given that as you yourself argue, technics is first of all what makes theory and history possible?' Stiegler never really responds to this question, neither in *Echographies* nor in the two first volumes of *La technique et le temps*. In his General Introduction to the multi-volume work, he doesn't even offer the genealogical explanation that Richard Beardsworth provides for him in his reading of *Echographies*. Moreover this response, i.e. to assert the possibility of a genealogy of technics, couldn't be more problematic. One can provide a genealogy of a concept, showing how that concept is inherited through a determinate history. *But we are concerned here with the genealogy of that which makes conceptualisation possible*. Moreover—and here, in a sense, is the very strangest aspect of the deployment of the term "genealogy" here—as Stiegler has already shown us, technics as epiphylogenesis or tertiary memory is the condition of inheritance itself. A genealogy of technics would be *a genealogy of genealogy itself*, an exercise that would seem rendered impossible by the "topological" structure that Derrida has just mentioned in relation to intelligibility.

Following the "topological" logic that Derrida has just outlined, if technics is the condition of memory it can't possibly be made present, rendered intelligible, dissected, theorised, historicised and, in general, *remembered* or made present to consciousness. The tendency of Stiegler's account is to make it seem as if technics is not only the condition of knowledge, but is in itself knowable. However, as soon as the prosthesis or technicity in general is the condition of knowledge, of what is sayable or thinkable, what can be positively known or said about the prosthesis *qua* prosthesis is necessarily limited. At a later point in the interview Derrida reformulates this idea in the terms of *Specters of Marx* on the relationship to inheritance. Derrida comments on the necessary dissymmetry which inhabits this relation to the spectral quality of the technical object:

One has a tendency to treat what we've been talking about here under the names of image, teletechnology, television screen, archive, as if all these things were on display: a collection of objects, things we see, spectacles in front of us, devices we might use, much as we might use a "teleprompter" we had ourselves written or prescribed. But wherever there are these specters, we are being watched, we sense or think we are being watched. This dissymmetry complicates everything. The law, the injunction, the order, the performative wins out over the theoretical, the constative, knowledge, calculation and the programmable. (122)

For both Stiegler and Derrida the question of technics is closely linked to the question of inheritance: for Stiegler, as we have seen, it is because the technical object is the condition of my

access to the “past I have not lived” that technics is constitutive of temporality; for Derrida, “to be is to inherit”, that is, to be is to be inhabited by a certain spectral inheritance. However, for Derrida what is crucial about the structure of inheritance is what he calls in *Specters of Marx* the “visor effect”<sup>9</sup>—the reference here being to the suit of armour worn by Hamlet’s ghost—which means that we cannot see the specter, even as “we sense or think we are being watched”. As Derrida reaffirms in *Echographies*: “The specter is not simply the visible invisible that I can see, it is someone who watches or concerns me without any possible reciprocity, and who therefore makes the law when I am blind, blind by situation” (121). Thus even if “to be is to inherit”, there is a certain impossibility about knowing the terms of that inheritance. What this seems to mean in this context of Derrida’s discussion with Stiegler, and this is the sense of the passage we have just cited, is that if technicity is the condition of inheritance, such a technicity can’t in itself become the object of a theoretical knowledge. The dissymmetry which Derrida remarks here is clearly linked to the topological structure we have just seen him bring out in relation to intelligibility: that which bears the inheritance can’t in itself become visible within that inheritance. Thus whereas in *Technics and Time* Stiegler could be seen constructing a (highly cogent) *theory* of inheritance as epiphylogenesis, for Derrida the structure of inheritance exceeds and makes possible theoretical knowledge, without itself becoming the object of a theoretical knowledge. It is in this sense that “[t]he law, the injunction, the order, the performative wins out over the theoretical, the constative, knowledge, calculation and the programmable”.

It is in a sense the question of dissymmetry of this topological structure that would differentiate Stiegler’s theoretical account of technics from the thought of arche-writing in *Of Grammatology*. For *Technics and Time* never really explicitly poses the question of how the theory of technics or a history of the supplement is possible, or, put differently, how, given a general structure in which everyone has forgotten Epimetheus, it is possible for Stiegler to remember him. Stiegler’s work therefore inclines towards a much simpler and more traditional type of theoretical work in which one imagines that what can supersede philosophy in its repression of technics (or even Heideggerian thinking) is just a “better” theory,<sup>10</sup> one which in this case makes possible a new thinking about the political or what Stiegler calls a “politics of memory”, as he outlines towards the end of the first volume of *Technics and Time*:

The irreducible relation of the *who* to the *what* is nothing but the expression of retentional finitude (that of its *memory*. Today memory is the object of an industrial exploitation that is also a war of speed: from the computer to program industries in general, via the cognitive sciences, the technics of virtual reality and telepresence together with the biotechnologies ... There is therefore a pressing need for a politics of memory. This politics would be nothing but a thinking of technics ...) (*Technics and Time* 276)

It might well seem therefore that Stiegler’s desire in the first volume of *Technics and Time* to think technics on the basis of difference (and therefore to resist the various pitfalls which he finds in Leroi-Gourhan and Simondon) is at odds both with the specifics of Derrida’s own account of difference—this much is clear from the reading in *The Fault of Epimetheus*—but also with deconstruction in general to the extent that Stiegler in *Technics and Time* seems to be concerned with the construction of a new *theoretical* account of technics that is capable of simply displacing philosophical and, to a certain extent, traditional scientific accounts. At the stage of the “Fault of

9 “To feel ourselves seen by a look that it will always be impossible to cross, that is the *visor effect* on the basis of which we inherit from the law”: (*Specters of Marx* 7, his emphasis).

10 This is essentially the argument that Geoffrey Bennington makes in his reading of Stiegler: “‘Technics’ is a philosophical concept, and to that extent can never provide the means to *criticise* philosophy. Failing to register this point (which is now very familiar as the principle of all of Derrida’s analyses of the human sciences in *Writing and Difference* and *Margins*) condemns one to a certain positivism, itself grounded in the mechanism of transcendental contraband whereby the term supposed to do the critical work on philosophy (here *tekhnē*) is simply elevated into a transcendental explanatory position whence it is supposed to criticise philosophy, while all the time exploiting without knowing it a philosophical structure *par excellence*’ (“Emergencies” 184).

Epimetheus” it seems as if Stiegler is tending towards a theory of what one might call, using Richard Beardsworth’s terminology, ‘technics as time’.<sup>11</sup> This theory would draw on deconstruction in a rather straightforward way—in effect as a continuation of the arguments that Derrida opens up in the chapter entitled “Of Grammatology as a Positive Science’ in *Of Grammatology*—whilst correcting, for example, Derrida’s failure to understand the significance of the emergence of the human (which we addressed above).

In later work<sup>12</sup> Stiegler seems to want to advance a subtle distinction between his work and that of Derrida. This difference is articulated by arguing that whereas Derrida is primarily concerned (in *Of Grammatology*) with a ‘logic’ of the supplement he is concerned with the ‘history’ of the supplement. This distinction can be observed in the paper Stiegler, “Discrétiser le temps” where Stiegler argues for a history of the supplement “of which ...Derrida has unfortunately never really explored the conditions”<sup>13</sup>. Even if Stiegler believes, as he states in the introduction to volume two of *La technique et le temps* (“La désorientation”) that the logic of the supplement is “always already” the history of the supplement,<sup>14</sup> it is clear that he believes that Derrida has in some sense neglected this history of the supplement or failed to recognize its importance. One place in which this question is explicitly raised in *La technique et le temps* is in the discussion of phonetic writing in the chapter in volume 2 entitled “L’*époque orthographique*”:

The stakes here concern the *specificity* of *linear* writing in the history of arche-writing, ortho-graphic writing which is also *phono-logic*, always understood from the beginning as such, and of which Derrida often seems to blur, if not deny the specificity of in the history of the trace.<sup>15</sup>

Immediately we notice here Stiegler’s insistence on the term “orthographic” writing in preference to “phonetic” or “phonologic”. Stiegler argues, via a reading of Jean Bottero, that what is distinctively different about such writing is not that it is closer to the sounds of speech, but rather that it is capable of breaking with the context of its inscription in a way that “pictographic” signs are not:

“Proper writing” (l’écriture proprement dite) is what is readable as a result of us having at our disposal the recording “code”. It is orthothetic recording. Pictographic tables remain unreadable for us even when we have the code at our disposal: one must also have knowledge of the *context*. Without this, the signification escapes. In order to accede fully to the signification of a pictographic inscription, one must *have lived* the event of which it holds the record.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore for Stiegler the specificity of orthographic writing is not that it is closer to speech but that it represents a different type of ‘recording’ (*enregistrement*). Derrida’s own account of “phonologocentrism” seeks to show that (i) the philosophical account of language always prefers

---

11 I am drawing here on Richard Beardsworth’s account of Stiegler’s work: “*La technique et le temps* therefore thinks technics firstly *within* time (in terms of its own historical dynamic), secondly *with* time (in terms of the impossibility of the origin), and thirdly *as* time (as the impure, retrospective constitution of the apophantic ‘as such’, or consciousness)” (“From a Genealogy of Matter to a Politics of Memory” 96).

12 For example in Stiegler, “Derrida and technology”.

13 ‘Histoire [du supplément] dont je pense que Derrida n’a malheureusement jamais réellement exploré les conditions ...’: (“Discrétiser le temps” 117n6)

14 (*La technique et le temps II* 12)

15 L’enjeu porte sur la *spécificité* de l’écriture *linéaire* dans l’histoire de l’archi-écriture, écriture ortho-graphique qui est aussi *phono-logique*, toujours comprise d’abord comme telle, et dont Derrida paraît souvent étonner, sinon dénier, la spécificité dans l’histoire de la trace.”: (*La technique et le temps II* 41).

16 “L’écriture proprement dite est ce qui *nous* est lisible pourvu que nous disposions du code d’enregistrement. C’est l’enregistrement orthothétique. Les tablettes pictographiques nous restent illisibles même lorsque nous disposons du code: il faut avoir aussi connaissance du *contexte*. Sans lui, la signification échappe. Pour accéder pleinement à la signification d’une inscription pictographique, il faut *avoir vécu* l’événement dont elle tient registre.”: (*La technique et le temps II* 68–9).

speech to writing ; (ii) it therefore prefers phonetic writing to any other kind since, being closest to speech, it is something like the ‘least worse’ form of writing. The deconstruction of such phonologocentrism involves showing, on the one hand, how the characteristics that philosophy ascribes to writing are always already at work in language in general (including speech). To this extent Stiegler is quite happy to go along with Derrida’s account. He finds a problem when, on the other hand, Derrida argues that as soon as one removes the phonetic privilege, an axiomatic distinction between phonetic or orthographic writing and non-phonetic writing becomes impossible to sustain. Stiegler will therefore find it problematic that Derrida can on the one hand argue in the opening Exergue of *Of Grammatology* that the phoneticization of writing is ‘the historical origin and structural possibility of philosophy as of science’ and yet on the other hand talk in a later chapter, ‘Of Grammatology as a Positive Science’ that ‘phoneticization ... has always already begun’ and that ‘[the] cuneiform, for example, is at the same time ideogrammatic and phonetic’ (*Of Grammatology* 4,89). Stiegler comments:

Grammatology elaborates a *logic of the supplement* where the accidentality of the supplementary is originary. It is concerned with taking the *history* of the supplement as accidental history from which would result a becoming essential of the accident—but one must therefore *also* talk of a becoming accidental of the essence. By most often blurring the specificity of phonologic writing, by suggesting for the most part that *nearly* all that develops therein was already there before, by therefore not making this specificity a central question (and doesn’t all grammatology come in a certain manner necessarily to *relegate* such a question?) doesn’t one weaken in advance the grammatological project?<sup>17</sup>

One has to understand this move in the context of Stiegler’s overall project in *Technics and Time*. The deconstruction of speech and writing is crucial to Stiegler’s argument in the sense that it appears to show that the technical supplement (writing), far from being an exterior accident that befalls an originally full speech, is actually at the heart of language proper. It therefore deconstructs the opposition between the contingent, ‘accidental’ exteriority of the technical supplement and language as essence or necessity. But for Stiegler this move is, as it were, only a first step. What is required is that one goes beyond what he sees as a mere logic of the supplement—the deconstructive move that locates the contingent accidentality of the supplement within and not outside the essence of language—to what he wants to think of as the “history of the supplement”. The point is that Derrida’s deconstructive move here ought to lead him not only to the deconstruction of the relationship between the accidental and the essential but also to be more interested in the “accidental” in itself, in the history of the technical supplement, i.e. technics. It ought to lead him to thinking, as Stiegler puts it here, the “becoming accidental of the essence”, which involves rethinking the essence of the human as technical accidentality—essentially Stiegler’s project in *Technics and Time*. One ought to be less interested in the written supplement in general as an avenue for the deconstruction of then metaphysics of presence and more interested in the “specificity” of given written supplements.

## 2 Beardsworth’s Two ‘Derrideanisms’

In the conclusion to his influential 1996 book, *Derrida and the Political*, Richard Beardsworth

---

17 “La grammatologie élabore une *logique du supplément* où l’accidentalité supplémentaire est originaire. Il s’agit de prendre l’*histoire* du supplément en considération *comme* histoire accidentelle gauche dont résulterait un devenir-essentiel de l’accident — mais il faudrait alors parler *aussi* d’un devenir accidentelle de l’essence. En estompant le plus souvent la spécificité de l’écriture phonologique, en suggérant que la plupart du temps *presque* tout ce qui s’y développe était déjà là avant, en ne faisant donc pas de cette spécificité une question centrale (et toute la grammatologie n’en vient-elle pas d’une certaine manière nécessairement à *reléguer* une telle question?), n’affaiblit-on pas par avance le projet grammatologique?”: (*La technique et le temps II* 43)

develops the following ‘loose speculation’ which charts ‘two possible futures of Derrida’s philosophy’:

The first would be what one may call within classical concepts of the political a ‘left-wing’ ‘Derrideanism’. It would foreground Derrida’s analysis of originary technicity, ‘avoiding’ the risk of freezing quasi-transcendental logic by developing the trace in terms of the mediations between human and the technical (the very process of hominization). In order to think future ‘spectralization’ and establish a dialogue between philosophy, the human sciences, the arts and the technosciences, this future of Derrida’s philosophy would return to the earlier texts of Derrida which read metaphysical logic in terms of the disavowal of *technē*.

The second could be called, similarly, a ‘right-wing’ ‘Derrideanism’. It would pursue Derrida’s untying of the aporia of time from both logic and technics, maintaining that even if there is only access to time through technics, what must be thought, articulated and witnessed is the passage of time. To do so, this Derrideanism would mobilize religious discourse and prioritize, for example, the radically ‘passive’ nature of the arts, following up on more recent work of Derrida on the absolute originary of the promise and of his reorganization of religious discourse to think and describe it (*Derrida and the Political* 156).

Even if immediately after this passage Beardsworth makes clear that there is in fact ‘*no answer and no choice*’ between these opposed ‘futures’ of what he calls here ‘Derrideanism’,<sup>18</sup> it is clear from the rest of this concluding chapter to *Derrida and the Political* that the speculative choice he presents here is not merely a rhetorical device; it responds to or formulates what seems to be for Beardsworth a real duality in Derrida’s thought. Indeed even if Beardsworth retreats rather quickly from the reality of this choice, the terms in which he formulates it already seem to demand at least two questions, or sets of questions: firstly about the possibility of making a distinction between, on the one hand, a thinking of deconstruction in terms of technics (which Beardsworth associates here, as elsewhere, with the work of Stiegler) and, on the other, a sort of literary or ‘religious’ deconstruction; secondly, about the legitimacy of ascribing to these two, as it were, ‘schools’, a right- or a left-wing political orientation. Moreover while Beardsworth seems to retreat from the ‘choice’ at the end of *Derrida and the Political*, in his later article ‘Thinking Technicity’ he offers a rather similar analysis of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ deconstruction. In this essay the first (good) form of deconstruction is to be tied to Derrida’s early work and is again concerned with thinking, via the analysis of arche-writing, an originary technicity as the ‘radical exteriority of any interiority’

---

18 Bennington cites this passage from Beardsworth and then comments: ‘Beardsworth’s gesture in proposing this scenario only immediately to refuse it really might be described by the operator of disavowal’ (“Emergencies” 214n47). Bennington is alluding here to Beardsworth’s frequent usage of the term disavowal to describe gestures of philosophical exclusion. (To take a few examples from an extremely rich field: in Chapter 2 ‘[in] Hegelian logic, the very logic of contradiction ends up *also* disavowing time’ (*Derrida and the Political* 91); in Chapter 3, ‘Heidegger’s interpretation of Aristotle with respect to an opposition between vulgar and primordial time is ...itself a disavowal of time’ (109); in the conclusion Beardsworth wonders ‘...does Derrida’s thinking of the “there” in terms of the promise disavow in turn the originary relation between the human and the nonhuman?’ (152). In general in Beardsworth one either ‘articulates’ or ‘negotiates’, on the one hand, or ‘disavows’ on the other.) Bennington comments of this ‘operator of disavowal’ in Beardsworth’s book: ‘Beardsworth’s understanding is that Derrida takes “metaphysics” to be to do with a “disavowal” of time ...he uses the term within mild scare-quotes at first, but soon stops and never thinks through the difficult implications there may be in relying on a psychoanalytically determined concept to describe this situation’ (“Emergencies” 197). It should be pointed out, however, that Beardsworth does offer the following (albeit short) justification in a footnote to his introduction: ‘[I use] “Disavows” in the Freudian sense, that is in the sense of a refusal to perceive a fact which impinges from the outside. Freud’s example in his use of the term is the denial of a woman’s absence of penis ...The term is, however, appropriate for the way in which the tradition of philosophy has “denied” finitude. The concept will be used frequently in my argument’ (*Derrida and the Political* 158n2).

("Thinking technicity" 77). The second form of deconstruction is to be found, for Beardsworth, in Derrida's work around 'Levinasian ethics, negative theology and the Platonic conception of the *khôra* and is formulated here as thinking 'an "excess" that precedes and conditions all determinations' (*ibid.*). Beardsworth comments as follows:

For Derrida, arche-writing and this excess of determination are necessarily the same, even though each reveals a series of singular traits particular to the context from which they are thought. I would nevertheless argue at this juncture that, despite their sameness they necessarily have different effects. These effects reveal that there is a tension between them, one which concerns the kind of work that they bring about on metaphysical thinking, and its limits. The one (that of excess) has arrested within the culture of contemporary philosophy *further* articulation of what lies behind the institution of metaphysical thought, while the other, if situated beyond the immediate question of language and writing, can be considered to invite further differentiations. The one has given rise to the 'theological' turn to deconstruction in the 1980s (together with the sense of its apolitical nature) while the other, if articulated *through* its differentiations, allows us to continue thinking the past and future of metaphysics in terms of technical supplementarity, one that allows us to advance all the more interestingly the political dimension of contemporary thought ("Thinking technicity" 78).

The two forms of deconstruction that Beardsworth talks of here in 'Thinking Technicity' don't seem in principle very different from the 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' Derrideanisms that Beardsworth has talked of earlier and here the 'choice' between them is not immediately withdrawn but rather confidently affirmed. Indeed the opposition here between thinking technical supplementarity and thinking the 'excess' beyond all determination therefore refigures here the two forms of alterity that Beardsworth outlines in the conclusion of *Derrida and the Political*: the two forms of radical alterity:

There are ... 'two' instances of 'radical alterity' here which need articulation and whose relation demands to be developed: the radical alterity of the promise and the radical alterity of the other prior to the ego of which one modality (and increasingly so in the coming years) is the technical other. (*Derrida and the Political* 155)

Beardsworth goes on to argue that Derrida has indeed hitherto *failed* to 'articulate' these two forms of alterity; his failure to do so is explicitly tied here to his avoidance of the question of technicity in Derrida's reading of Heidegger in *Of Spirit*. Derrida's failure to articulate these two forms of alterity thus leads Beardsworth to imagine the two future forms of Derrideanism we have just mentioned.

At this point it seems to be worth explicating a little further these two forms of alterity. The first form of alterity—what I will call here 'technical alterity'—is formulated here by Beardsworth in terms of a relation to the 'nonhumanity' of matter. This alterity is tied by Beardsworth to Derrida's early thinking around arche-writing and the question of originary technicity. This technical alterity or originary technicity is then developed, as we have seen, by Stiegler into a theory of technics. Technics understands originary technicity as an 'Epimethean' prosthesis of the human, where the human is figured through the 'default of origin', constituted only in its prosthesis. It should be pointed out here that it is perhaps not entirely clear that Stiegler's thinking of technics as the prosthesis of the human is entirely consistent with a thought of technical alterity or originary technicity. Indeed although in both *Derrida and the Political* and 'From a Genealogy of Matter to a Politics of Memory' Beardsworth seems fairly clear that Stiegler's thinking of technics is consistent with the idea of articulating the relation to the 'nonhuman' of matter (or technical alterity), in his later article he seems to take some distance from Stiegler:

The risk Stiegler runs in differentiating the historical epochs of arche-writing, and in thinking them in terms of technical supplementarity, is precisely that of considering technicity in the *exclusively exteriorized terms of technics which befit the process of hominization*. In other words, the wish to differentiate further what lies behind metaphysics in terms of technics, if the model of technics remains that of the ‘technical object’, always runs the risk of re-anthropologizing the very thing that one wishes to dehumanise. The major theses in *Technics and Time* ... while brilliantly articulated by Stiegler in their own terms, end up having the following somewhat ironic consequence: biological life prior to, or in its difference from anthropogenesis is removed from the structure of originary technicity; as a result biology is naturalized and the differentiation of technicity *qua* technics is only considered in its exteriorized form in relation to the process of hominization. (“Thinking technicity” 81)

In a sense this argument underlines the problematic nature of Stiegler’s reading of Derrida. For Stiegler, as we have seen, it is only with the human that life is pursued by means other than life. Hence the human marks a break in the history of *différance* as the history of life. The origin of technics as organised inorganic matter therefore constitutes the aporetic non-origin of the human. But, as Beardsworth points out here, this leaves the relationship between organic life and inorganic life undisturbed and ends up, in a certain sense, reaffirming the singularity of the human (as that which is invented through the emergence of technics). Stiegler’s thinking of technics therefore risks undermining an originary technicity that is not tied to the specific emergence of the human, which in a sense is what Derrida seems to be thinking under the rubric of the trace and *différance* as the ‘history of life in general’.<sup>19</sup> Arguably Stiegler therefore, according to Beardsworth’s reading in this later essay, ends up losing the true alterity in ‘technical alterity’ of the nonhuman which we have seen espoused in *Derrida and the Political* (since Stiegler’s technics is always thought as the prosthesis of the human).

We should now consider here the second form of ‘radical alterity’ which Beardsworth outlines in *Derrida and the Political*, namely the ‘alterity of the promise’. In the opening of the conclusion to *Derrida and the Political* Beardsworth shows this Derridean thought of the promise at work in *Specters of Marx*. Beardsworth quotes the following passage:

Even beyond the regulative idea in its classic form,<sup>20</sup> the idea, if that is still what it is, of democracy to come, its ‘idea’ as event of pledged injunction that orders one to summon the very thing that will never present itself in the form of full presence, is the opening of this gap between an infinite promise ... and the determined, necessary, but also necessarily inadequate forms of what has to be measured against this promise. To this extent, the effectivity or actuality of the democratic promise, like that of the communist promise, will always keep within it, and it must do so, this absolutely undetermined messianic hope at its heart, this eschatological relation to the to-come [*l’à-venir*] of an

19 The argument that Beardsworth makes here is similar to the one made by Bennington in his earlier essay ‘Emergencies’, which may well have influenced Beardsworth’s thinking here. Bennington argues: ‘Stiegler wants to force the whole philosophical argumentation of Derrida through the ‘passage’ of the emergence of mankind: the fact that he *then* goes on to characterise that ‘passage’ in terms of an originary technicity which is very close to Derrida’s own thinking does not alter the fact that his first gesture commits him to a certain positivism *about* difference, and this leads to his confident identification of ‘technics’ as *the* name for a problem which he *also* recognises goes far beyond any traditional determination of that concept’ (“Emergencies” 190).

20 In a remarkable interview between Beardsworth and Derrida entitled ‘Nietzsche and the Machine’, Derrida provides the following extended analysis of why the ‘idea’ of ‘democracy to come’ is different from the Kantian Idea: ‘Where the Idea in the Kantian sense leaves me dissatisfied is precisely around its principle of infinity: firstly, it refers to an infinite in the very place what I call *différance* implies the here and now, implies urgency and imminence ... secondly, the Kantian Idea refers to an infinity which constitutes a horizon. The horizon is, as the Greek word says, a limit forming a backdrop against which one can know, against which one can see what’s coming. The Idea has already anticipated the future before it arrives. So the idea is both too futural, in the sense that it is unable to think the deferral of difference in terms of ‘now’, and it is not ‘futural’ enough, in the sense that it already knows what tomorrow should be’ (“Nietzsche and the Machine: Interview with Jacques Derrida” 49–50).

event *and* of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated. Awaiting without horizon of the wait, awaiting what one does not expect yet or any longer, hospitality without reserve, welcoming salutation accorded in advance to the absolute surprise of the *arrivant* from whom one will not ask anything in return ... *just* opening which renounces any right to property, any right in general, messianic opening to what is coming, that is, to the event that cannot be awaited *as such*, or recognized in advance ... (*Specters of Marx* 65)

As is made clear here, Derrida is situating the political, in the form of the democratic or communist promise in terms of a 'messianic' structure of the event which Beardsworth calls the 'absolute future that informs all political organizations' (*Derrida and the Political* 146). The thought of the political requires that one hold on to the idea of an indeterminate future, or an unanticipatable event. Without the 'promise' of such an unanticipatable event, no politics is possible: if the future were either in principle or practice entirely knowable then the political would become superfluous. The political must therefore welcome the event in its absolute alterity, awaiting it without horizon of anticipation (*attente sans attente*)—for to anticipate the event would already be in some sense to determine it, to know something about it, to anticipate the unanticipatable. This *messianic* structure around the event is to be distinguished by Derrida from any determinate *messianism* of a biblical kind:

Ascesis strips the messianic hope of all biblical forms, and even all determinable figures of the wait or expectation ... One may always take this the quasi-atheistic dryness of the messianic to be the condition of the religions of the Book, a desert that was not even theirs (but the earth is always borrowed, on loan from God, it is never possessed by the occupier, says precisely [*justement*] the Old Testament whose injunction one would also have to hear); one may always recognize there the arid soil in which grew, and passed away, the living figures of all the messiahs, whether they were announced, recognized or still awaited. (*Specters of Marx* 168)

However, this 'dry' messianic structure of the event is not simply a structure that would underpin any determinate messianism as it would underpin any determinate politics. Nor is it a limit that, as Derrida puts it in 'Force of Law', 'defines either an infinite progress or a waiting and awaiting' (*Acts of Religion* 255). Because the political relationship to the 'absolute future' also requires that one act, that one make political decisions. This is an argument that Derrida formulates in relation to justice in the essay 'Force of Law':

...justice, however unrepresentable it remains, does not wait. It is that which must not wait. To be direct, simple and brief, let us say this: a just decision is always required *immediately*, right away, as quickly as possible. It cannot provide itself with the infinite information and the unlimited knowledge of conditions, rules or hypothetical imperatives that could justify it. And even if it did have all that at its disposal, even if it did give itself the time, all the time and all the necessary knowledge about the matter, well then, the moment of *decision as such*, what must be just, *must* [*il faut*] always remain a finite moment of urgency and precipitation; it must [*doit*] not be the consequence or the effect of this theoretical or historical knowledge, of this reflection or this deliberation, since the decision always marks the interruption of the juridico-, ethico-, or politico-cognitive deliberation that precedes it, that must [*doit*] precede it. (*Acts of Religion* 255)

This messianic structure which Beardsworth associates with the promise and thinks of as Derrida's second form of alterity is therefore marked by what Derrida calls later in *Specters of Marx* an 'irreducible paradox' (*Specters of Marx* 168). For it is both a 'waiting without horizon of expectation' and also 'urgency, imminence' (*ibid.*). One can never therefore be entirely happy with



the division that Beardsworth makes at the end of *Derrida and the Political* when he associates this second form of alterity straightforwardly as ‘a reorganization of religious discourse’ (*Derrida and the Political* 156). It is never simply, for Derrida, the case that ‘what must be thought, articulated and witnessed is the passage of time’ (156). That is only one step, one side, or one hand and, as Beardsworth reminds us elsewhere, with Derrida ‘it is always a question of hands’ (“Deconstruction and Tradition” 287). For this reorganization of religious discourse is always also—via the thinking of urgency, imminence or the necessity of decision—a rethinking of political or juridical discourse. Nowhere could this point be clearer than in *Specters of Marx*, where Derrida very precisely associates the urgency or imminence of this messianic structure with Marxism. As Derrida puts it there: ‘No differance without alterity, no alterity without singularity, no singularity without here-now’ (*Specters of Marx* 31). The linking of differance to the singularity of the here-now is an indication that, in a sense, what is being thought around the political injunction is not completely new in terms of Derrida’s thinking. Indeed in an earlier interview about Marx, Derrida explicitly links the singularity of the political injunction to the theme of iterability in ‘Signature Event Context’ (“The Politics of Friendship: an interview with Jacques Derrida” 228). This argument around iterability will help us to show that Derrida in fact from his earliest writing thinks Beardsworth’s two forms of alterity together.

As Derrida reminds us in ‘Signature Event Context’:

My “written communication” must, if you will, remain legible despite the absolute disappearance of every determined addressee in general for it to function as writing, that is, for it to be legible. It must be repeatable—iterable—in the absolute absence of the addressee or the empirically determinable set of addresses. This iterability (iter, once again, comes from *itara*, *other* in Sanskrit, and everything that follows may be read as the exploitation of the logic which links repetition to alterity), structures the mark of writing itself, and does so moreover for no matter what type of writing (pictographic, hieroglyphic, ideographic, phonetic, alphabetic, to use the old categories). (*Margins of Philosophy* 315)

The crucial phrase we need to underline here is that the iterability of the written mark constitutes a ‘logic which links repetition to alterity’. In his book *On Being With Others* Simon Glendinning gives a particularly clear account of this moment in Derrida:

Paradoxical as it may seem, what has to be acknowledged here is that Derrida’s appeal here to the concept of iterability is made not only because of its connection with the idea of sameness and identity but also because of its (improbable, etymological) connection with alterity, otherness and difference. Roughly, what Derrida aims to show is that alterity and difference—i.e., what is traditionally conceived as bearing on features which are essentially ‘accidental’ or ‘external’ to ‘ideal identities’—are, in fact and in principle, a necessary and universal feature of all idealisation as such. Thus, Derrida will argue that the recognisability of the ‘same word’ is, in fact and in principle, possible only ‘in, through, and even in view of its alteration’. (Glendinning, *On Being With Others* 112; citing Derrida, *Limited Inc* 53)

In other words, what guarantees the sign in its identity, that is, its iterability, is already constituted through a relationship with alterity. Here this alterity is not simply that of original technicity, relation to exteriority, or the alterity of the ‘nonhuman’. It is always already *also* a relation to temporal alterity and alterity in general. Now this is clearly a very significant point in relation to Stiegler’s attempt to develop the thought of originary technicity in Derrida’s early work on arche-writing into a general theory of technics. For Stiegler’s argument is, as we have seen, that the technical object in general constitutes the relationship to time, the condition of access to the undetermined future (and the privileged example of this is what he calls orthographic writing, what Derrida calls ‘phonetic’ writing). Yet the argument around iterability makes it clear that for Derrida

the 'orthographic' mark is already *itself* constituted by a relation to alterity—the repeatable identity of the mark is only constituted through a relation to its temporal alteration and to alterity in general. There are in effect two sides to the argument around the trace. On the one hand, 'articulating the living on the non-living in general', the trace is a moment of exteriorisation, binding idealisation indissolubly to the mark (*Of Grammatology* 65). On the other hand ('it is always a question of hands...'), the mark is never simply material: it is only constituted as the mark that it is through a relation with alterity, through an iterability that constitutes it, as Glendinning puts it above, '*in, through, and even in view of its alteration*'. Iterability can never mean simply 'possibility of repetition' because in that case what guaranteed the identity of the mark would have to be constituted as a possibility prior to the actual repetitions it made possible—this structure of an ideal form and its real copies would then reconstitute a logocentric and idealist understanding of language. The trace therefore can never simply constitute the technical *possibility* of a relationship to alterity, which it is already constituted itself through a relationship with alterity. The technical organisation of time is always already the *temporal organisation of technics*.

The inextricable relationship between technicity and alterity in relation to the sign is in effect underlined in Derrida's later work around the commodity. For Derrida, the spectral quality that Marx locates in exchange-value—that is, that an exterior thing be the bearer of an idealised value—is already at work in *use-value*. For the use-value of the ordinary useful thing is never simply a material property, or constituted simply through an imminent relation of a human subject to the thing, but always, for Derrida through '[the] possibility of being used *by the other* or being used *another time*' (*Specters of Marx* 162). As Derrida goes on, 'In its originary iterability, a use-value is in advance promised, promised to exchange and beyond exchange.' (*Specters of Marx* 162). What this makes clear once again is that for Derrida iterability, the identity of the technical object, or what Stiegler wants to think of as the *organisation* of 'organised inorganic matter' can't simply be thought of as something that is constitutive of temporalisation because it is first of all constituted by and through a relation to an alterity that is both spatial and temporal (here figured precisely in terms of the promise that Beardsworth would like to oppose to it). On the one hand this problematises the whole project of *Technics and Time* in as much as it wants to relate the history of the supplement—thought of as the history of organized inorganic matter or technics—as the prosthesis which invents the human in its relationship to time. For the relationship to time cannot be simply derived from the technical object if, as Derrida's argument around iterability makes clear, the technical object is already constituted in part by that relationship with time. On the other hand it also renders extremely problematic the division Beardsworth is trying to demonstrate in his conclusion to *Derrida and the Political* between two forms of alterity. To recall the terms of Beardsworth's argument:

...in the context of the theme of originary technicity of man ...there is indeed a shift which Derrida has not expounded. In *Of Grammatology* the trace was said to 'connect with the same possibility ...the structure of relationship to the other, the movement of temporalization, and language as writing' ...In 'The violence of the letter: from Lévi-Strauss to Rousseau' Derrida maintained that 'arche-writing' was the origin of morality as of immorality. The non-ethical opening of ethics. A violent opening'. This opening is rewritten as the promise in *Specters of Marx*. And yet, if time is from the first technically organized, if access to the experience of time is only possible through technics, then the 'promise' must be *more originary* than 'originary technicity'. Even if they are inseparable—and what else is the law of contamination but this inextricability?—they are not on the same 'ontological' level. There are, consequently, 'two' instances of 'radical alterity' here which need articulation and whose relation demands to be developed: the radical alterity of the promise and the radical alterity of the other prior to the ego of which one modality (and increasingly so in the coming years) is the technical other. (*Derrida and the Political* 155)

In the context of what we have just discussed it becomes clear what the problem here is for

Beardsworth. For he wants to regard Derrida's early work as concerned with an originary technicity in the form of the trace that would be constitutive of both temporalization *and* the relationship to the other, and therefore constitute the 'nonethical opening of ethics'. The priority here would be not to think alterity but rather to think that which is constitutive of alterity, i.e., the 'technical other', exteriority and the relation to the nonhuman, in short 'technics'. But then with the thinking of the 'promise' in *Specters of Marx* it begins to seem as if the alterity that appeared to be constituted by technics in the early work is in fact more originary than technics. The relation to temporal alterity in the form of the event would have to be thought *prior* to the technical 'organization' of time. This leads Beardsworth to conclude that there must indeed be two forms of alterity at work in Derrida, 'which need articulation and whose relation demands to be developed'.

But the analysis we have just made makes it clear that in Derrida's analysis of writing the 'technicity' of the sign, i.e. iterability, is already constituted through a relation to the other. It is not a question of simply constituting or making possible a relation to temporal alterity. The problem here is Beardsworth's 'And yet, if time is from the first technically organized ...'. For that implies that technical organization is to be thought prior to the temporalisation that it gives access to. (Indeed this sounds much more like Stiegler than Derrida.) As Derrida puts it in *Of Grammatology*, i.e., the very text that Beardsworth is quoting from:

The "unmotivatedness" of the sign requires a synthesis in which the absolutely other is announced as such—without any simplicity, any identity, any resemblance or continuity—within what is not it ... The trace, *where the relationship with the other is marked*, articulates its possibility in the entire field of the entity [*étant*] ... (*Of Grammatology* 47, translation slightly modified).

The relation to the other is not constituted by some, technical, for example, 'synthesis' that precedes it: alterity is rather already inscribed within the synthesis that constitutes the trace. Originary technicity in the form of the trace is here quite clearly the opening to alterity, to the 'event', to the 'promise' which Beardsworth thinks must come along later and therefore constitute 'a shift which Derrida has not expounded'. But there is no shift in *Derrida* here that has not been expounded. If there is a shift to be 'expounded' it is between Derrida's understanding of originary technicity in the trace and Stiegler's thinking of technics as the technical organisation or determination of time.

## References