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Time, Technology, and Teaching

I.

THE GENERAL PUBLIC'S IMPOTENCE IN THE FACE OF THE COLLAPSE OF TEACHING INSTITUTIONS, A COLLAPSE THAT FORMS THE ACADEMIC CONTEXT OF THE BATTLE FOR INTELLIGENCE, LARGELY EMERGES FROM THE *THEORETICAL DENIAL*, BY THE MAJORITY OF THE INTELLECTUAL WORLD, OF THE MNEMOTECHNICAL AND HYPOMNESIC NATURE OF ALL CURRENT FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE, EVEN WHILE THE PROGRAMMING INSTITUTIONS MOVES TOWARD ITS EMPIRICAL MASTERY OF THE CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF PSYCHOTECHNOLOGIES OF HYPOMNESIS.¹

By this time in our meetings we see that philosophy and education were born together in the quest for the good order of the psyche and the city (polis) measured by the Cosmic Logos and the problematics of appearance and reality. It is quite fitting then, and as we come to our last talks on education and the art of inceptive thinking,² that we revisit the site and 'compact symbol' of Plato's Cave. In his own words:

BEHOLD! HUMAN BEINGS LIVING IN AN UNDERGROUND DEN, WHICH HAS A MOUTH OPEN TOWARD THE LIGHT AND REACHING ALL ALONG THE DEN; HERE THEY HAVE BEEN SINCE THEIR CHILDHOOD, AND CAN ONLY SEE BEFORE THEM, BEING PREVENTED FROM TURNING AROUND THEIR HEADS. ABOVE AND BEHIND THEM A FIRE IS BLAZING AT A DISTANCE, AND BETWEEN THE FIRE AND THE PRISONERS THERE IS A RAISED WAY; AND YOU WILL SEE, IF YOU LOOK, A LOW WALL BUILT ALONG THE WAY, LIKE A SCREEN WHICH MARIONETTE PLAYERS HAVE IN FRONT OF THEM, OVER WHICH THEY SHOW THE PUPPETS.³

1

Martin Heidegger: *What Is Called Thinking* (Harper Torchbooks. NY, SF, London: 1968) pg. 6

2

Thinking inceptively refers to a going back to origins; but in no way should it be understood in the literal and reactionary sense of a simple redoing or repetition of an already worn out belief system (this would constitute an ideology); rather, it involves an act of interpretation (hermeneutic) which returns to a decisive historical 'event' which, although past, still constitutes the horizon of our present condition. One returns in order to recollect a certain crisis and the problematic situation which is still our own. We will discuss the word hermeneutics (interpretation) in the latter part of our talk.

3

Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato; The Republic Book VII* (University of Chicago Great Books, vol.7, 1952) p. 388.

Although Plato's Allegory of the Cave allows for different hermeneutical levels of analysis—ontological, epistemological, and political, and so forth—we will use it for a critique of technotelematics and teaching. To wit: what happens when both young and old are surrounded by a world of dancing shadows, images (*simulacra*), and the cacophony of sounds and opinions (*doxa*) bouncing off the back wall-screen of the cave? Today, of course, we have portable micro-screenomatic technology which enables one to carry in the palm of their hand a portal, or mouth, to another cave-like encompassing network—a portable black hole which glows around its event horizon before sucking in, consuming, and transforming information back into its preindividual ground. (In other essays I referred to the desire for cave life and the altered and manipulated light of simulation as the Logic of Las Vegas.)⁴

With the flight of the gods and the loss of the old Olympian order, the newly freed psyche of the Athenian demos found another kind of sheltering; no longer was the collective psyche shocked and in wonder (*thaumazein*) at the emergence of beings into light (*phusis*), but were, rather, amused by their own creations (*techne*), the satiation of their appetites and passions, and the expression of opinions with their newly found voice. And, in order to keep it that way—free from the imposition of any aristocratic or hierarchical order—they, like us, will construct shelters of distraction, amusement, and suspended time. They will invent the Dionysian festival and the theater where the tragedies of Sophocles and comedies of Aristophanes would play out the *hubris* of Kings and Queens and the pretensions of ordinary men and women.

But from what does one requires shelter? In the case of the body we, like all living things, seek cover from the elements of nature; but once the first caves were appropriated by archaic humans, the need for a different shelter—a meta-shelter—for another kind of threat became quickly apparent: ...the danger of chaos, disorder, disorientation, and the possible regression to 'bare life' will require the counterfactual and normative order of the 'ought'; and with the imposition of discipline, which comes with the ought, comes the emergence and agon of the individual psyche and the social-political-collective psyche. This latter dimension of existence—one proper to humans, qua humans—will require more than physical walls and roofs; it will be built within the opening of language which, being more than mere animal signals of reaction, provides for the eidetic constructs, or canopy of ideas, for order, identity, and cohesion of a people outside the cave and beyond. But the need for shelters of all sorts—from the womb to caves, and to the religious canopies of the sacred and the profane—brings us to the pedagogical problem at hand.⁵

With the advent of the need for acculturation (education)—for which cave walls and screens are a necessary part as the material conditions for capturing the attention of the young and facilitating the transmission of cultural memory through stories, songs, images, and symbols (mnemotechnologies)—comes the problem of addiction and rigid identification with what is a **second reality**!⁶ It is understandable, but hardly healthy for the psyche-soma complex in its real space relations with others, that one would begin to prefer, and stay in, the artificial

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See: D.J. Ciraulo, *Deflationary Essays*, "The Children of the Screen" (D. Monroe Press, San Jose, Ca, 2018).

5

Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres I, II and III* (Semiotext(e), Pasadena, CA, 2014); also see: Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Anchor Books, New York, 1969).

6

See: Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections* (Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, London 1989) p. 97.

light and ‘second reality’ of the cave-theater, that is, to stay in a dream state interrupted only by popcorn, popups, and hotdogs. (No doubt, Plato would, if he could, tell us that our junk food is correlative to, and consistent with, a life lived in the ‘second reality’ of simulacra!) Of course, what Plato has described with his allegory is the ideological (conceptual junk) state of consciousness where one’s head cannot turn, or see, in any other direction. The attention of the mind is, today, captured and totally immersed in the seductive mode of a digitally enhanced and amplified world of screenomatic iconics (analogously, the persuasive art of the Sophists relied on the seduction of language for the capture of the crowd’s attention). But what is being refused by the inhabitants of the cave and its ‘second reality’?

It was Nietzsche who with incisive humor diagnosed the pathology of desiring alternate worlds: this desire for a ‘second reality’ is, for Nietzsche, due to **resentment**! What comes with any encounter or converse with others in real space is the agon of asymmetrical relations of power: whether they are of a brute and physical nature, or in terms of learning a skill from an authoritative craftsman (*techne*, or art), or obeying the moral and ritual imperatives of a religious discipline, or with the imposition and intervention of a generational difference with its warnings, rules, and advice, Nietzsche reminds us (with his concept of the Last Man) that we have for most of our history suffered under the indignity of a Master-Slave relation. As a consequence ‘we slaves’ bare the scars of a distorted psyche which seeks to invert the old aristocratic scale of values: ...the weak and humble—and not the strong and noble—shall inherit the earth! ...and so on, and so forth. Hegel, being more optimistic than Nietzsche, understood the master-slave dialectic in a more ironic way. For Hegel, this relation is the motive force of history in its progressive project toward freedom: we slaves ‘make things’ for the master who goes to war and kills. And if one thinks about it, ‘we slaves’ have made the tools of war which essentially are devices and extensions for eliminating distance and spatial resistance: the sword brings the body of the other closer; stirrups, saddles, and horse shoes make for a faster passage through space-time and allow for a harder blow. From the wheel, chariot, ship, train, car, and airplane, ...to the telescope and electron microscope, one can see the urphenomenon (the essential form) of the elimination of spatial distance and resistance in our technology. And then, of course, the Cold War and the need for lighter payloads gave us the solid state computer chip and cellphones as extensions for instantaneous information (communication in the restricted sense of contact) and the near complete elimination of real space relations, ...or at least for their need or relevancy.⁷

We can now better understand Hegel’s notion of the ‘cunning reason’ of history which operates behind the back of actual affairs: with every extension ‘we slaves’ build for the master, the master becomes weaker and more dependent on what slaves produce and soon becomes historically irrelevant! Hegel would not go this far, but ‘we slaves’ are in the process of constructing a global second reality—life lived as nodal units

7

For the classic exposition of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, see: Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (Basic Books, Ithaca, London 1969) ch.2; for, hopefully, a more humorous take, see my essay on Moby Dick: “We Slaves, or the Problem of Ahab’s Whale-Bone-Leg” in *Deflationary Essays* (Available on Amazon).

safely ensconced in the interstices of a screenomatic cyberspace-cave! Without having to look over one's shoulders, as in real space, or hear the sound of distant horse hooves riding in from the horizon, 'we slaves' can finally experience the ersatz of security and the satisfaction of 'self-recognition' within the enclosed borders of screenomatic time-space and its Narcissistic feed-back loop. (This technotopology makes possible the new pseudo masters of late capitalism—the CEO and finance banker—who do not ride in from the real space horizon, but hide in the hardware and software...like Plato's puppeteer behind the wall at the mouth of the cave.)

As you know, Plato introduces into the enraptured state of the cave dwellers a disturbing event:

AND NOW LOOK AGAIN AND SEE WHAT WILL NATURALLY FOLLOW IF THE PRISONERS ARE RELEASED AND DISABUSED OF THEIR ERROR. AT FIRST, WHEN ANY OF THEM IS LIBERATED AND COMPELLED SUDDENLY TO STAND UP AND TURN HIS NECK ROUND AND WALK AND LOOK TOWARD THE LIGHT, HE WILL SUFFER SHARP PAINS.

Plato implies that this venture into the open will require the aid of a mediator-teacher for the adjustment and reorientation of the prisoners:

AND YOU MAY FURTHER IMAGINE THAT HIS INSTRUCTION IS POINTING TO THE OBJECTS AS THEY PASS AND REQUIRING HIM TO NAME THEM—WILL HE NOT BE PERPLEXED? WILL HE NOT FANCY THAT THE SHADOWS WHICH HE FORMERLY SAW ARE TRUER THAN THE OBJECTS WHICH ARE NOW SHOWN TO HIM?⁸

8

Ibid Plato.

Is it any wonder then that our technotelematic extensions take on a pharmacological use—a defense mechanism that with one click puts up a screen-wall of images and representations 'between' the released prisoners and their guide.⁹ The portable cell-cave allows for an immediate refusal of the asymmetrical relations of real space and a return and regression in real time to an earlier phase of psychic 'individuation'—back to a kind of Dream Time found in the sheltering and closed system of a mother's womb.¹⁰ This is a placental place of immediacy and resonant *jouissance* enjoyed before being 'thrown' out into the historical symbolic and often brutal world of the Father.¹¹

9

Much has been written on the term *pharmakon* which meant for the Greeks both a cure and a poison; see: Jacques Derrida's essay "Plato's Pharmacy" in *Dissemination* (Continuum, London, New York, 1981); also see: Bernard Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living*, on Pharmacology (Polity Press, MA, 2013). (Available on Amazon).

10

Ibid Sloterdijk.

When Nietzsche diagnosed what we talked about as the desire for alternate worlds and the inversion of values—first in religion then in philosophy and its various ideological offshoots, and now in the promethean desire and effort to reverse engineer creation and strip it down to its binary skeleton—he speaks, as we pointed out, of resentment. And if resentment is prolonged due to weakness or incapacity and left unabated, it turns into its active manifestation of revenge!

11

For the French philosopher and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan—under the influence of Freud (superego) and Heidegger (*das Man* = they self)—the child is born, or 'thrown' out of the pleasurable immediacy of the womb into the symbolic domain of family order, social norms, history, ... and so on. This is for Feminist theory the world of the phallic master-signifier (god, king, father, and so forth).

THE SPIRIT OF REVENGE, MY FRIENDS, HAS SO FAR BEEN THE SUBJECT OF MAN'S BEST REFLECTION.

But revenge against what?

THIS, YET, THIS ALONE IS REVENGE ITSELF; THE WILL'S REVULSION AGAINST TIME AND ITS IT WAS.¹²

12

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (Viking Press, New York, NY, 1970) p. 252.

How strange! But if we think about it, our existence is experienced in a flow of time; and if one were to object that human temporality is only an illusion or epiphenomenon produced by the brain (which from the third-person objective view is correct), this would, arguably, be scientifically satisfying; but it would be quite trivial as one rushes 'toward' one's own end and recounts foolish things of the past and wrings one's hands in regret over what 'has been'. The present for Dasein is pervaded by the measure, judgement, accomplishments, and atrocities of the past which grow more ponderous by the second. Perhaps then, and due to the accumulative dimension of internal time, it is not so strange that we take a stand against the 'it was'—to refuse the past and take refuge in the 'specious present' of cave-screens of some sort.¹³ When consciousness is absorbed and held captive by the redundant amusement of screenomatic simulacra, the 'now' is shorn of its temporal horizon and in a deficient mode of being present to the world. We 'Lotus Eaters' wait only for future 'innovations'—novelty and not natality, as Hannah Arendt would say—that are faster, smaller, and more spectacular modes and means of transmission. We Lotus Eaters stand in waiting for our coming transhuman condition, ...or being 'beamed up' and out of real space altogether!

13

The 'specious present' is a notion first used by William James, and later by Whitehead and Varela, to designate a deficient sense of time restricted to the now of distraction (focal instead of field awareness).

Moments of relief from stress and struggle are, of course, necessary to the human condition, but today, and as Bernard Stiegler has pointed out, teachers are in a 'battle for the attention' of the student psyche in order to help continue its ongoing process of individuation. Being overwhelmed, and inundated by the constant proliferation of new gadgets, apps, and 'innovations'—and caught up fatalistically in what appears to them as the inevitable wins of progress—the new Education-Administrator-CEO now understands the teacher to be a facilitator of information access and cyber-pilot of Smart Room technology. With this thoughtless response—thoughtless because philosophically ahistorical and without critique nor question—educators conform to what is happening in the world by throwing more of the same at the problem: ... more information exchange, and more captivating and intense images—more puppets, more current puppet dance routines; and above all else, replace the fire at the mouth of the cave with a laser projection for Hi Def images on the back-wall-screen of the cave (PowerPoint)! But the incipient moment of education given in Plato's Allegory of the Cave tells us of something else.

When Plato's prisoners return to the cave from the light of the sun, most will be glad to be back to their former environment and state of consciousness; but a few more courageous souls, or perhaps fool hardy, will try to tell the prisoners of their own captivity in view of the world of light outside. And now we approach the event horizon—the moment of truth—where Plato gives the clue to the essential calling of the teacher as one (Socrates?) who decides, at considerable risk, to step between the hidden puppeteer (purveyor of seductive simulacra) and the enthralled individual psyche. Teaching is a constant battle for the attention of the psyche and its redirection (*educere* = to lead) to the ideas proper to its health and growth.¹⁴ The teacher as guide tries to expand the horizon of the narrow ideologically addicted psyche from its **micro-psychotic** state—today living within the screenomatic frame of certain unthought and unquestioned assumptions and momentary sensations in the false 'now' of the 'specious present'—to what the Greeks called the *megalopsychos*, or the larger and magnanimous soul. Today, this battle is decisive! We can now see before our eyes that not only children and adolescents, but also parents and even teachers reach for their screenomatic-transporter-escape mechanism in the middle of a conversation, social situation, or even dinner! We can call this a **refusal to be in real space with others!** Bernard Stiegler calls this telematic-psycho-social behavior a form of **generational inversion**:

THROUGH THIS GENERATIONAL INVERSION, THE SEGMENT DESIGNATED 'MINORS' BECOMES PRESCRIPTIVE OF THE CONSUMPTION HABITS OF THE SEGMENT THAT IS OSTENSIBLY ADULT—BUT IS IN FACT INFANTILIZED: ADULTS BECOME DECREASINGLY RESPONSIBLY FOR THEIR CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR, AND FOR THEIR OWN. STRUCTURALLY SPEAKING, ADULTS THUS BECOME MINORS, THE RESULT BEING THAT ADULTHOOD, AS SUCH, JUDICIAL AS WELL AS DEMOCRATIC, APPEARS TO HAVE VANISHED.¹⁵

14

Usually when educators hear any criticism of technotelematics, they respond with: ...'But this is the reality!'—the 'given' situation of technological progress! In doing so, they betray the incipient moment of their own vocation—their call to take care of the self of those entrusted to them who are most vulnerable to the allurements of appearances and opinion (*philodoxy* Lec. I).

15

bid Stiegler p.3; also see: Katherine Hayles, "Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes." www.nlajournal.org

II.

What is happening around us, and more specifically in regard to technomnemonic learning, is an interruption of what Gilbert Simondon called the process of 'individuation'. The latter term—one that at the human level designates what we ordinarily call maturation—is used to describe, in a more in depth ontological and scientific way, the greater ground of our existence or how anything becomes individuated. When we say, ...person, human, subject, individual, animal, or atom, we assume a finished, stabilized, and self-identical entity. But Werner Heisenberg—one of the founders of quantum mechanics—warned his fellow physicists that it would no longer be correct to describe the atom as Democritus did, that is, as that which is uncuttable (*a-toma*), or as the smallest particle of an element—a micro cannonball crashing into other little particles in compliance with the classical-Newtonian laws of space and time. This latter picture is no longer supported by experimental facts which, for Heisenberg, rather support the Aristotelian ontology: if you remember from our previous talk on epistemology (Lec. VI) that, for Aristotle, the being

of a thing is a combination of **act** (what it is) and **potency** (what it can become), the particle is now understood as being always accompanied by ‘probability waves’. This means that a particle is an abstract moment in an overall process of becoming.¹⁶ Talking about the new physics, Heisenberg says:

IT WAS A QUALITATIVE VERSION OF THE OLD CONCEPT OF ‘POTENTIA’ IN ARISTOTELIAN PHILOSOPHY [...] A KIND OF PHYSICAL REALITY JUST IN THE MIDDLE BETWEEN POSSIBILITY AND REALITY.¹⁷

In like manner, but in regard to the nature of the self and the act of teaching and learning, departments of education still assume, and quite stubbornly so, the deposed—both by brain neurology and philosophical analysis—metaphysics of the self as a ‘substance’ or already complete individual entity possessed of an already formed opinion (*a priori*) held as though it was a piece of property—or better, as though it was an abdominal discomfort which merely requires expression for relief and a feeling of regained self-confidence.

Simondon, being in fidelity to the calling of philosophy as the essential moment and event of education, is concerned, as was Plato, with the order of the psyche in its process of **individuation** and its necessary relation to the collective psyche. And the good order of the psyche in its process of development can only take place if the psyche understands its ontogenesis and location within the larger ‘preindividual’ reality. All things for Simondon emerge from the metastable state of **preindividuality**—the ground and greater process of ontological becoming (individuation).¹⁸ No more than we can speak of an isolated and solid atom can we speak of an isolated, free-range, and complete individual psyche (social atomism). Today, and since the beginning of the Cold War, we go about the business of education and indulge in political talk without understanding our own assumptions, the historical genesis of our valued opinions and their underlying metaphysical commitments. This gives the conditions for what Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, called our **inauthentic** being-in-the-world: we engage in the superficial back and forth of **idle talk** and **curiosity**—going from one thing to another—in an effort to keep things in ‘the twilight of **ambiguity**’.¹⁹ It is obvious that these Heideggerian categories are meant to describe a ‘deficient mode’ of existence and flight from the awareness of our participation in the larger encompassing of Being. Much like one who skates on thin ice, or like Siliconers dreaming in the valley, this awareness would reveal the fragility and contingency of our being in the face of a greater Being—and, perhaps, a state of dizziness. But it is precisely this preindividual ground of beings which necessarily constitutes the deepest archaeological stratification of human existence and acts like a strange attractor on the psyche of the philosopher. In an effort to explain Simondon’s criticism of the abstract valorization of the individual (Classical Liberalism), Muriel Combs puts it this way:

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Suffice it to say for now that although Simondon is in disagreement with Aristotle on the primacy of form over matter, that is, that form, for Simondon, is also a product of an individuating process, he is, nevertheless, in agreement with Aristotle on the dynamic nature of matter as being always in a state of potency.

17

Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy* (Harper Torchbooks, NY, 1958) p. 41.

18

The ‘preindividual’ domain is in its being (ontology) always in the process of becoming and complexification (individuation). By itself the proton has an identity (+) and weight but is far from equilibrium and ready to combine with an electron (-); it finds a more stable condition in the hydrogen atom that in turn is in potency to becoming helium, ...and so on.

19

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Harper and Row, NY and Evanston, 1962) p. 210-217.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO STRESS THIS POINT ENOUGH, THAT IT IS NOT A RELATION TO SELF THAT COMES FIRST AND MAKES THE COLLECTIVE POSSIBLE, BUT A RELATION TO WHAT, IN THE SELF, SURPASSES THE INDIVIDUAL. [...] WHAT IS REAL IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IS TRANSINDIVIDUAL.²⁰

20

Muriel Combs, *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual* (MIT Press, London, Cambridge, 2009) p. 41.

It is anthropologically obvious and a universally cross-cultural practice that the initiation of the young takes place through rites of passage—rituals, intergenerational wisdom, stories, religion, and cosmogony—through, that is, the teaching of what is the transindividual element in the collective. But today our young—being confident that ‘the Old Man in the sky’ is no longer there (a superficial understanding of the Death of God)—are captivated by the simulation of transindividuation as ‘nodal units’ of exchange in the larger encompassing of the Internet.

The vocation (calling) of teaching—if in fidelity to its engendering moment in the problematics of philosophy—requires one to take a stand between the youthful psyche and the surrounding world of mediated and second-hand information (the common *doxa*), that is, to be engaged, as we said earlier, in a ‘battle for the attention’ of the student psyche (Stiegler) and its consequent redirection. The bombardment and sheer bulk of information is, for the most part, formidable and is aimed at the appetitive and passionate parts of the psyche (Lec. 1) against which our young have very little defense. Without some intervention and immunological counter measures, the attention of the young will stay distracted, subdued, and held captive by the seductive and addictive screenomatic loop of image-desire-consuming. (And can we really have a conversation about opioids or addiction in general, and hundreds of deaths a day, while in the historical, One-Dimensional and excremental, input-output, way of life?) The protection of the psyche first falls, of course, on the parents and family of the young whose authority has usually been grounded in what the Greeks called the *nomoi*, or laws and traditional norms. But the older means of cultural transmission—extensions for memory which Stiegler calls mnemotechnologies (oral stories, songs, print, books, and rituals, and so forth)—have today been interrupted and co-opted by commercial interests. The transversal intersection of digital programming, solid-state physics, and miniaturization has created a misleading and seductive toy-like appearance and simplified operational use of our extensions. As such, being ‘smart’ has, today, nothing to do with the physics and mathematics congealed below the flashy, fashionable, plastics encasements of mnemonic technology, but refers to knowing the code or sequence of clicks and digital maneuvers that allow for the power of instantaneous access to the constant flow of images and information.

In this way—the way of the magic wand, bauble (fool’s scepter), and the Star Trek transporter—children gain the power of making the far near, and what is near irrelevant; and with the wave of the hand, or movement of one finger, they make images appear and disappear. Technotelematics, with its nihilation of real space relations, create the *a priori* conditions for a **generational inversion** (Stiegler). Parents

themselves are caught up in the libidinal economy of capitalism—caught without historical-cultural reference (time) in a deterritorialized city (space)—and live, like their children, in the same constant ‘now’ of the ‘specious present’. They are the original **Children of the Screen**, and for some time have dreamed of being-beamed-up; and they also have been weaned on the toonomatic representations in the direct transfer of their attention from nipple to screen. Parents no longer have the will nor space-time conditions to step between little Narcissus and his/her image. And further, parents are the product of the Hollywood propaganda machine which presents the future as more of the same, ...but faster and further away! Real space relations have been abandoned and left only for autonomous vehicles, bots, war, and destruction. All of the above, and much more, has created a halt in the process of individuation, or in the collateral case of parents a regression and infantilization of the psyche.²¹

Excursus: By the time concrete cases of ‘generational inversion’ show up on SNL as comic sketches (Computer Guys), or make it on to our local Nightly News, the problem is well on its way to becoming an endemic cultural pathology: the particular story on the News (KPIX S.F. 5/11/18) concerning the case of a student hacker who evidently, and according to his own word, had ‘no problem’ breaking into his high school information system in order to apply “his own criterion” for grading. When asked what his measure (rubric) was, the student replied, ...“I raised the grades of people that I liked, and lowered the grades of people I didn’t like!...I felt I could do anything!” (I wonder if school psychologists, the police, and grief counselors are listening to the breathless candor of this ‘infantile grandiosity’?) And when another student was queried about the incident, he apologetically said, ...“I don’t want to say the teacher [whose computer was hacked] was not educated enough, ...but he clicked on one of those goofy little icons [fishing email]...this is beginner stuff;” “Yes,” said a fellow teacher, “the teacher was careless!” But the story doesn’t end here. It turned out that while the interrogation was going on, Rufus the sniff dog found the loaded thumb-drive hidden in a bag. If one is following the logic, Rufus would, therefore, be more educated than both hacker and teacher, ...and even the police!

But the ideology and metaphysical assumption concerning technology and the progressive movement of history (Hegel and Marx) is far more pervasive in its discursive effects and actions, that is, it cannot be contained within the classroom or home. ‘Generational inversion’ works, rather, like a contagion, or retro-virus, which shows up at all levels of social-political life when agitated or under stress. Once again, ...“I read the news today. Oh boy:” it seems that while we were sleeping, a number of people have been hit or run over by autonomous or semi-automated cars. When certain corporate representatives responded, they said it was the fault of the ‘old streets’ which should obviously be up-graded into ‘smart streets’ in keeping with the progressive ‘power-knowledge’ of technology. What we hear again is the reckless abandon of responsibility and sense of entitlement which accrues to ‘true believers’ in their indubitable faith in belonging to a higher history and transhuman condition. How else

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In the essay ‘Children of the Screen’ in *Deflationary Essays* I talk about the Star Wars Bar Effect: no matter how far back, or how futural, or how far away in time and space, there will still be a sword fight, class difference (Princess Leia), drag races in the desert, but off the ground, and with laser-guided violence; and there will always be a watering hole, or bar, with funky creatures, drinking weird pink and green concoctions, and still looking to screw you out of some money. Capitalism is infinite!

can one account for the acceptance of approximately 50,000 deaths and 250,000 mutilations a year by automobile then by a kind techno-religious potlatch and strange need to sacrifice this much flesh for the future of teleportation? In this regard, we have all become followers of Marshall Applewhite, the spiritual leader of the Heaven's Gate community, who had his followers and fellow programmers drink vodka spiked with phenobarbital—this, in order to be 'beamed up' to an alien spacecraft following the Hale-Bopp Comet which was supposedly carrying Jesus. They naturally assumed that their skill as computer programmers would be needed to pilot such a complex vehicle.

Recursus: The teacher must be able to present a counter-pull which operates on that part of the student psyche which is, even if unrecognized, opened out (nous, mind, reason) to its preindividual ground—the experience that Plato recognized as our participation in Being. But we know from Plato's allegory that teachers cannot intervene and redirect the attention of the psyche unless they can re-engage the existential experience that they have themselves undergone! The overwhelming experience (*thaumazein*) of standing in the sun of Being (the Good and the Beautiful—*Kaloagathon*)—even if for only a short time and limited sight—will produce in our future teachers the affective state (mood) of being shocked! And from that event forward, the psyche will take on the more enduring and sober condition of being-in-wonder about the larger encompassing of Being itself. No methodologies—no amount of information, simulation, amplification, recitation of facts, nor collaborative learning—will free the psyche from its screenomatic-cave captivity unless the facts and the content being taught are...**Wonder-laden!** To this end, teaching is in its essence hermeneutical.

III.

The term 'hermeneutic' is in its origin the Greek word for interpretation, or way of understanding a more oblique, overdetermined, metaphorical, or mystical use of language—usually historical texts of a divine, poetic, or legal nature. Because of the obscure heavenly discourse of the Olympians, direct communication was not deemed possible. For the Greeks, Hermes was, among other things, the mediating god and messenger from Zeus to the Oracle at Delphi, which, in turn, required the further translation and interpretation by the priests of the Temple. Although hermeneutics was later structurally differentiated as a method for Biblical exegesis in the Medieval schools (the four levels of the allegorical, literal, analogical, and moral), and later in the 19th century with the German theologian Schlegel, Heidegger gives the term new life and meaning in *Being and Time*: instead of studying only the historical-cultural background conditions of the text or artifact in question, that is, from the putatively objective, neutral gaze of the cogito (I think), the hermeneutical, for Heidegger, describes the existential structure of our very being...“Dasein dwells hermeneutically.” And this means that we always find ourselves in a larger historical and ontological encompassing. And what Heidegger means when he says that our understanding is

one of being in a ‘hermeneutic circle’ is that the observer-interpreter of a text or artifact of the past always finds him/herself in a pre-interpreted situation. Our being-there (Dasein) is never outside of a world of meaning, or without, a temporal-historical horizon. This inherited and finite condition is understood by Heidegger’s former student Hans Georg Gadamer as constituting an existential ‘prejudice’ or mode of comportment to the world which itself must first be put in question and problematized as a necessary condition of understanding.²² The ‘prejudice’ of one’s own historical horizon is not to be bracketed out, or be deconstructed, merely in order to find a neutral, a historical position, and more objective ‘I’—a more purified and disinterested gaze for the application of a more rigorous calculation, interrogation, and dissection of the object—but, rather, brought to light in order to allow the text, philosophical persona, or artifact to speak, and, perhaps, put a question to us and our own self-understanding.

At minimum, the act of teaching hermeneutically is a way of relating the part to the whole, that is, to present the material not in a reductive and decontextualized way, but in an additive and connective manner that shows the particular content being taught in the larger light of the historical and cosmological whole to which both observer and observed belong. When Hermes brought his message from Zeus, the Greeks were reminded by this medium of delivery that their problems and concerns were embedded in a larger Olympian household (*oikonomia*—*ecumene*). But with the departure of the gods and the rise of the demos with its collateral clamor of opinions in the polis, it fell to the philosophers to remind the Greeks of their relation to, and emergence out of (*phusis*), the overwhelming constellation of Being (what, with Simondon, we are calling the preindividual domain). Kant called that which confronts us as overwhelming and threatening...the sublime! Unlike the appearance of a thing of beauty, which is pleasing and seductive, the confrontation with the sublime—like a great mountain peak, tsunami wave, great whale, earthquake, black hole, or the possibility of a multiverse—throws us back on ourselves in the brute recognition of our finitude and the helplessness of our freedom.²³

From the Symposium we know that Plato’s reference to the sun as the Good and the Beautiful (the two words were often used together—*Kaloagathon*) does not, as we said, point to the beauty of a phenomenal and sensory kind but, and as Diotima teaches Socrates, rather points to Beauty in itself—that toward which all material things are moved in an effort to find their always elusive fulfillment. In an analogous way the hermeneutic mode of teaching attempts to present and frame the conceptual content to be taught within the more pervasive and affective field of the preindividual and **sublime** ground of Being to which both teacher and student belong. We can all acknowledge and ‘feel’ at a prereflective level that our consciousness is embedded in a historical sea of ideas and events, and that we still carry in our bodily composition the mass and energy of the **Beginning** (*arche*) event which moves in times to an unknown **Beyond** (*eschaton*). Ideally, the teacher as hermeneut stands between the sublime and the student in an effort to convey and transmit the experience of participation in the metaxic tension (being in the middle)

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Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (Crossroad Press, New York, 1989).

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Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (University of Chicago, Great Books, Chicago, 1952) vol. 42, p. 495.

which constitutes what is most essential and universal to human existence. The historical works of speculative philosophy concerning metaphysics and ontology are attempts to bring into language the whole to which we all belong, that is, what in our singularity is universal.

We should be careful, however, not to confuse—as we do with the on-going Neo Liberal economic ideology and process of globalization—what is **homogenous** and the ‘same for all’ with what is **universal** to the human condition. Global homogeneity is carried on through the capitalist mode of selling and consuming, and as such, is directed, through advertising, to the capture of our attention and desires—qualities which are necessary for sublimation and the creative process—in an effort to degrade and redirect them to our appetitive drives. Through the feed-back of immediate satisfaction, the creative urge, or Eros, is **desublimated!**²⁴ We can call this online libidinal economy—one which moves in a horizontal and ‘one-dimensional’ way from seduction to consuming, to satisfaction, pollution, and finally to the terrible lack felt in addiction—the homogeneity of The Excremental View of Life!

What is universal, on the other hand, is not constituted by the sameness of mediating technology (cellphones), nor equal access to information and the objects of desire and consumption, but the sameness of human dignity! And this latter designation means that we are all under a ‘demand’ (not just a social or psychological construction, but a demand intrinsic to our existential being as an ongoing process of individuation) to add to the factuality of current reality (what is) the obligation (ought) of making it better and more humane in the future (reality reveals itself to us as a process of becoming and not a static situation to be defended).²⁵ The teacher as hermeneut delivers the message (information, facts, and ideas) along with what is problematic and questionable about its meaning, use, level of importance, and tacit assumptions. This care is being born of the ‘excess’ and ‘accursed share’ (Bataille) that belongs only to humans! All existentialism tells us is that our being is ‘more’ than our factual-animal nature but endures in time as a **possible being**. The imperative ‘demand’ of the ought which hopes for things better for the human condition—and not merely for novelty or innovations and changing fashions—comes to us from the not-yet of our possible being and process of individuation.

A further complication in regard to the educational process occurred with the merger of commercial service industries (high tech media delivery: Google, Face Book, Twitter, Microsoft, Amazon, and so on) with Post-Cold War-Military-Digital-Screenomatic Technology (science has, for the most part, been folded into both business and technological war applications). The problem with the Business-Military Technology-Education triumvirate (STEM) is that the new telematic extensions, or *hypomnemata* (artificial memory supports), allow for the direct access of commercial interests to the student psyche as consumer; and with the message comes the direct and instantaneous entry of **private** capital—with all of its financial power and audio-visual techniques for seducing the libidinal energy of the young—into the public space of the classroom. With a screen and its simulacra—no longer a fixed screen on the back wall of a cave—standing between the student and the teacher, the teacher

24

Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1964) ch.3.

25

Giorgio Agamben, *What is Philosophy?* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2018) ch. 29.

must now ‘battle for the attention’ of the student psyche...before its libidinal desire for creativity (*Eros*) is desublimated (given what it desires without delay) and transformed into the drives of the appetites to consume (*Thanatos*—death instinct in English). Unless teachers are grounded in the ‘spirit of philosophy’—unless, that is, they have ventured out of the cave and into the overwhelming light of the Sun—whatever content they deliver will not be **wonder-laden**! And, as such, the message will lack intensity and thus appear banal and unable to break into the pit-bull-like grip of the Pavlovian feed-back loop of stimulus (signal) and response—to weak, that is, to capture and redirect the attention of the student in order to continue the process of individuation:

TO INDIVIDUATE ONESELF IS TO TRANSFORM ONESELF; AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF WAYS OF LIFE IS THE FORMAL LAW OF HUMAN LIFE—OF EXISTENCE. MAN CANNOT BUT SUB-SIST; HE EX-SISTS [PROJECTED INTO THE FUTURE], AND THAT MEANS HE TRANSFORMS HIMSELF.²⁶

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Ibid Stiegler p.30.

All the magical power of the screen will short-circuit the ‘trans’ in what Simondon calls the **transindividuation**, or the reaching out and going beyond our own psyche to what is universal in the collective psyche. (This is much like Rousseau’s difference between a ‘majority’ and the ‘general will’ of the people: a majority made up of putatively individual, self-interested singularities cannot, as Socrates pointed out, guarantee what is ‘just’ until each sees in him or herself what is good for all.) And ironically, Simondon, as a philosopher of technology, does not find the clue to our transindividuation in the force of technology alone, nor in conquering death and outer space (the Silicon Valley Syndrome), but in recognizing the sublime in our preindividual encompassing.

When we connect the process of teaching and learning to its deeper stratification, that is, when we relate the particular to its whole—and this is what philosophy does,—we can see that when something is learned, an older metastable condition of the brain has changed and moved its rhizomatic connections, not merely in a horizontal and linear way from one system of coordinates to another, but in the way of building (*Bildung*—culture): when we build we don’t get rid of or move off the foundation; the foundation is hopefully stable but ready to receive (metastable—potential) and support other formations (walls, and so forth); and this new stratification will also be in a metastable readiness and open to further configurations (individuation). For Simondon, what is meant by being, ground, or reality is actually, and at bottom, a metastable process of individuation or becoming: the hydrogen atom, like any element or particle, is in a metastable state; it has a structure formed from a previous state of individuation and is accompanied by a probability-wave-matrix that acts as the condition for a possible future combination with oxygen and the production of a more complex water molecule, ...and so on up the evolutionary scale; and when we analyze water, we do not forget about its prior ontogenesis nor its potential for combination with other molecules in the future. The notion of ‘complexity’ found in early process philosophers

(Morgan, Alexander, Bergson, Simondon, Chardin, and Whitehead) is understood, as we said, with the process of building or adding something new while retaining the older substrate.

But most important for the hermeneutical approach to teaching—which is, as such, in fidelity to the ‘spirit of philosophy’—is the ability of the teacher, no matter what subject is being taught, to reinstill a sense of wonder by referring students to the fact that they, like all other beings, emerge from a **preindividual** ground of being which is both behind and beyond our individuality. As you have already learned from our earlier talks on metaphysics, philosophers have, for the most part, and until the last century, searched, not only for the being of particular things, but for the Being of the whole. Whether with the pre-Socratic quest for the unifying principle—the **One** of the cosmos, or the attempt of Heraclitus to listen to the Logos, or with Pythagoras and his search for the geometry and music of the spheres, or the Socratic-Platonic examination of the individual psyche in terms of virtue (*arete*) and its relation to the collective psyche of the polis (*dikia*, justice), ...no matter what the particular investigation, philosophy is the quest for what constitutes good order! And the concept of good order implies a relation of parts to each other and to a common measure (*metron*) which transcends both.

Once again, and finally, the teacher, as hermeneut, does not return to the past—to the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, or Chinese, and so on—in order to reuse their principles and apply them to our current situation, but returns in order to understand the ‘incipient’ moment of an essential problem which still belongs to us as problematic: What is just? What is good? And what should be done?

Endnotes

I

The term ‘mnemotechnical’ refers to any device or extension (paper, book, or computer screen) that enhances our memory; ‘hypomnesis’ is used by Stiegler to characterize the quantitative changes (smaller, faster, more spectacular) which create a more seductive element and affect; see: Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2010) p.112.

2

Thinking inceptively refers to a going back to origins; but in no way should it be understood in the literal and reactionary sense of a simple redoing or repetition of an already worn out belief system (this would constitute an ideology); rather, it involves an act of interpretation (hermeneutic) which returns to a decisive historical ‘event’ which, although past, still constitutes the horizon of our present condition. One returns in order to recollect a certain crisis and the problematic situation which is still our own. We will discuss the word hermeneutics (interpretation) in the latter part of our talk.

3

Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*; The Republic Book VII (University of Chicago Great Books, vol.7, 1952) p. 388.

4

See: D.J. Ciraulo, *Deflationary Essays*, “The Children of the Screen” (D. Monroe Press, San Jose, Ca, 2018).

5

Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres I, II and III* (Semiotext(e), Pasadena, CA, 2014); also see: Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Anchor Books, New York, 1969).

6

See: Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections* (Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, London 1989) p. 97. □

7

For the classic exposition of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, see: Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (Basic Books, Ithaca, London 1969) ch.2; for, hopefully, a more humorous take, see my essay on Moby Dick: “We Slaves, or the Problem of Ahab’s Whale-Bone-Leg” in *Deflationary Essays* (Available on Amazon).

8

Ibid Plato.

9

Much has been written on the term pharmakon which meant for the Greeks both a cure and a poison; see: Jacques Derrida’s essay “Plato’s Pharmacy” in *Dissemination* (Continuum, London, New York, 1981); also see: Bernard Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living, on Pharmacology* (Polity Press, MA, 2013). (Available on Amazon).

10

Ibid Sloterdijk.

11

For the French philosopher and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan—under the influence of Freud (superego) and Heidegger (das Man = they self)—the child is born, or ‘thrown’ out of the pleasurable immediacy of the womb into the symbolic domain of family order, social norms, history, ... and so on. This is for Feminist theory the world of the phallic master-signifier (god, king, father, and so forth).

12

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (Viking Press, New York, NY, 1970) p. 252.

13

The ‘specious present’ is a notion first used by William James, and later by Whitehead and Varela, to designate a deficient sense of time restricted to the now of distraction (focal instead of field awareness).

14

Usually when educators hear any criticism of technotelematics, they respond with: ‘...’ But this is the reality!’—the ‘given’ situation of technological progress! In doing so, they betray the incipient moment of their own vocation—their call to take care of the self of those entrusted to them who are most vulnerable to the allurements of appearances and opinion (philodoxy Lec. I).

15

Ibid Stiegler p.3; also see: Katherine Hayles, “Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes.” www.nlajournal.org.

16

Suffice it to say for now that although Simondon is in disagreement with Aristotle on the primacy of form over matter, that is, that form, for Simondon, is also a product of an individuating process, he is, nevertheless, in agreement with Aristotle on the dynamic nature of matter as being always in a state of potency.

17

Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy* (Harper Torchbooks, NY, 1958) p. 41.

18

The ‘preindividual’ domain is in its being (ontology) always in the process of becoming and complexification (individuation). By itself the proton has an identity (+) and weight but is far from equilibrium and ready to combine with an electron (-); it finds a more stable condition in the hydrogen atom that in turn is in potency to becoming helium, ...and so on.

19

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Harper and Row, NY and Evanston, 1962) p. 210-217.

20

Muriel Combs, *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual* (MIT Press, London, Cambridge, 2009) p. 41.

21

In the essay 'Children of the Screen' in *Deflationary Essays* I talk about the Star Wars Bar Effect: no matter how far back, or how futural, or how far away in time and space, there will still be a sword fight, class difference (Princess Leia), drag races in the desert, but off the ground, and with laser-guided violence; and there will always be a watering hole, or bar, with funky creatures, drinking weird pink and green concoctions, and still looking to screw you out of some money. Capitalism is infinite!

22

Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (Crossroad Press, New York, 1989).

23

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (University of Chicago, Great Books, Chicago, 1952) vol. 42, p. 495.

24

Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1964) ch.3.

25

Giorgio Agamben, *What is Philosophy?* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2018) ch. 29.

26

Ibid Stiegler p.30.