

Technology and Formation: Stiegler on Event and Self-Care

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Abstract: This essay critically examines how Bernard Stiegler addresses the question of present-day technological developments and how they affect our understanding of education and self-formation. The first section is devoted to an account of the basics of Stiegler's understanding of the relationship between technology and humanity as well as of his characterization of the specific problems that characterize technology today. The main part of the essay analyzes how the questions of self-care, self-formation and education are addressed in relation to these specific problems. Stiegler addresses these problems in terms of the Derridean vocabulary of the *pharmakon*, and accounts for the present-day technological inventions in terms of pharmacological *events*. It is shown that Stiegler's account of education is difficult to combine with his attention to the *pharmakon* as well as to the event. In the concluding section, it is suggested that the question of self-formation in relation to pharmacological events should be reinterpreted in terms of the concept of experience.

Keywords: Bernard Stiegler, technology, care of the self, formation, pharmacology.

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The question of self-care has been reintroduced in philosophy by the works Pierre Hadot (1995) and (the later) Michel Foucault (e.g., 2005) who analyze self-care in ancient philosophy. More specifically, Foucault is interested in the ancient philosophical practices of self-formation, which he describes as *technologies* that

permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to *transform* themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (1997, 225; my italics).

The idea of self-formation or *-transformation* as a technology has captured the attention of Bernard Stiegler in his recent works (e.g., 2010 & 2013). He connects this theme to his more encompassing concerns the importance

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and impact of technology on humankind and society in general and on the contemporary world in particular. For him, self-formation may offer a way of dealing with the particular problematic dimensions of technology for society today. In this essay, I will examine first Stiegler's understanding of the relation of technology and humankind as well as of the specific problems inherent in technology today. Subsequently, I will analyze and criticize his conception of self-care, self-formation and education as a response to these problems. In particular, I will critically assess his account of education in relation to his interpretation of technics in terms of the *pharmakon* and of present-day technological inventions in terms of pharmacological *events*. In my conclusion I will offer some other, more fruitful directions for the inquiry of self-formation in relation to the event.

1. Technology and the Birth of Humankind

Stiegler (1998, 183-203) uses Plato's myth on the genesis of humankind as narrated in the *Protagoras* (320d-322d; Cooper, 1997, 756-758) to characterize his account of the relation of technology and humankind. In the contemporary setting, the question of the human is often taken up in terms of the question of the end of the human as well as of humanism, and these ends are often thought in terms of consequences and the future of technology, such as in the ideas of trans-humanism or post-humanism. In the context of these questions, Stiegler argues that before addressing the end of humankind, one should first understand how technics and technology are intrinsic to the human and even precede its birth (1998, 135). In Plato's myth, humankind is understood as a supplementary or prosthetic being, as Stiegler notes (1998, 193).¹ According to the story, the gods, having shaped all mortal beings, assign a task to the two titans Prometheus and Epimetheus, namely the task to hand out to each species the proper capacity (*dunamis*) it needs for its survival. Epimetheus adopts this task and hands out capacities to all species except one. Turning to humankind, he finds he has no capacities left, leaving the human utterly vulnerable: "the human race was naked, unshod, unbedded, and unarmed" (321c; Cooper, 1997, 757). In the urgency of the moment, Prometheus decides to steal the art of fire from Hephaistos and the other arts (*technai*) from Athena in order to compensate for this lack of human capacities so

¹ Clearly, Stiegler does not only offer a mythical account, but substantiates the meaning of this mythical account for the genesis of humankind by many arguments and authors. Yet, for sake of clarity and readability, I limit myself here, as Protagoras who tells this story in the dialogue, to the story.

that humankind has a chance to survive. In Stiegler's reading, this story discloses a number of fundamental insights concerning the relation between humankind and technology.

(1) *The non-proper, non-natural human*. First, humankind does not have properly human capacities or powers; rather, the powers it has at its disposal do not naturally belong to its species (according to the myth, they belong to the gods). The human only has powers and skills thanks to the gift of the *technai*. In particular, this applies to the *logos* by which the human is usually defined as *zoon logon echon*: humans have *logos* in distinction to other mortal beings that are called the *aloga* (Cooper, 1997, 757), but this capacity is made possible by the *technai* which are a supplement and a prosthesis for the human.

(2) *Supplement and pharmakon*. Secondly, this account of technics and technology as supplement should be understood in line with the work of Derrida, who was Stiegler's main teacher. The birth of humankind is marked by the instauration of an original *différance* between the human's incompleteness at birth and the *technai* that supplement this incompleteness: since the *technai* are not properly human, they compensate for the original human lack (*défaut*) without completing it. More precisely, in line with Derrida's account, the supplement should be understood as both the condition of both possibility and impossibility: human existence is made possible by the technical supplement since this supplement grants the capacities for survival. Yet, the same supplement threatens this existence. First, because it is not properly or naturally human and thus changes what it is to be human – and the history of humankind is a history in which technology changes who humans are. Second, concretely, the very gifts making human existence possible may also destroy it. Prometheus' gift of fire is exemplary in this sense, as Stiegler notes: fire is not only the condition of possibility of human civilization, but also what may destroy this civilization by setting it on fire (2013, 24).²

This latter example of the gift of fire inspires Stiegler in his later works (e.g., 2013) to adopt an other important figure from Derrida's work, namely the figure of the *pharmakon* that Derrida develops to characterize writing as both remedy and poison (1981, 61-172): like writing, which is also a *techne*, the *technai* are a remedy for human incompleteness, but they may turn out to be the poison that will be the end of human existence.

² This is an explicit theme in Plato's myth and the reason why Zeus, after the theft of Prometheus, assigns Hermes with the task to offer the divine *techne politike* to the humans. This is also an important theme for Stiegler (1998, 183-203), but I will not discuss this here.

This ambiguity of technics for humankind marks the human relation to technology, and we will see in which sense Stiegler will claim that it is the poisonous side that seems to take over in present-day technological developments and thus indeed making us face the question of the end of the human. Yet, before turning to this element of his analysis, we first need to discuss one more insight drawn from the myth.

(3) *Appropriation and deferral*. Third, because technics is an indispensable supplement that does not come natural to humans, humans are confronted with the necessity to appropriate these technics: the human capacities are not given by birth, but need to be taught to children. The child does not speak when it is born, and the child has no natural entrance to the culture in which it is born; the child only enters language and culture with a delay, with a temporal deferral. Stiegler's significant elaboration of this temporal deferral (see, e.g., 1998, 246ff; 2009, 226) should once more be seen in line with Derrida's work and more specifically with his account of *différance* as deferral (see, e.g., 1982, 3-27). For Stiegler, this deferral means that the non-identity of the human with its (linguistic, cultural, and so on) capacities implies a delay, which is the time need for the human to acquire these capacities.

In the next section, I will elaborate this aspect of deferral in relation to Stiegler's understanding of tradition and education. Yet, to get a sense for the scope of problems and questions to which this account of appropriation and deferral leads, let me first discuss an example in a way that remains close to Stiegler's account, but also indicates the problems that surpass Stiegler's framework. The example concerns language.

The human child is an infant, i.e., one whom cannot speak (*in-fans*). The child is thus marked by the lack of the capacity to speak if by that we mean the capacity of someone who can already speak a particular language. Yet, at the same time, the infant has an almost excessive capacity to speak.³ "Infants," as Heller-Roazen suggests following Jakobson, "as far as articulation is concerned ... are capable of everything. Without the slightest effort they can produce any – and all – sounds contained in human language" (2005, 9-10). Yet, the actualization of this capacity – "they *can* produce" – takes on a particular form: children are not born into *all* human languages, but are rather educated into one or more of them. Hence, the child's potentiality to speak all languages is actualized only in the speaking of one or several of them.

³ Already Aristotle distinguishes these two forms of *dunamis* in his *De Anima* (417a22-417b1; Barnes, 1984, 664). See also Agamben's account of potentiality (1999, 179).

The child's *lack* of actually speaking a language is thus not a pure nothingness. In this sense, "lack" is not the appropriate term. As Stiegler notes, the *défaul* of the human should be understood as a desire, as a propensity (to speak, in this case). However, the Heller-Roazen's comment also marks something that is not fully present in the register of Stiegler's thought: for him, the *défaul*, the particular desire of the human, is generated by or in the encounter with the *techne*, i.e., the language in which the child is to be educated. In a certain sense this is true: the child only starts to speak when spoken to. Yet, the potentiality of the infant to speak also exceeds the actual languages to which it is exposed and into which it is educated. The lack of the child corresponds to this generic potentiality as well as to the need of education.

The need of education to get into a language (as well as into culture) has important implications. Lyotard, e.g., describes this in the following striking way: "That children have to be educated is a circumstance which only proceeds from the fact that they are not completely led by nature, not programmed. The institutions which constitute culture supplement this native lack" (1991, 3). As Stiegler, Lyotard notes that the original human incompleteness (*défaul*) is indeed a "native lack" in the sense that infant is not yet equipped with the results of technics and the arts that constitute the culture and its accompanying institutions into which the infant is educated. Yet, one should immediately add that this description of the human *défaul* as lack of culture is at the same time the human *surplus* that consists in the human's non-coinciding with its "nature". In a certain sense, as Lyotard maintains, this means that the human does not only exist thanks to the arts that are never fully one's own, but also depends on this original surplus with which the child is actually born: the potentiality to be educated in each and every language and culture, is the child's in-fancy. This potentiality, which Stiegler somehow touches on but which he never discusses as such, does not only support the desire to be educated but also necessarily exceeds every historically constituted culture or language – and in particular the culture(s) or language(s) that the infant will be taught.

The human's entrance into language is thus marked by a *double* deferral: on the one hand, the deferral between birth and education and, on the other hand, the deferral between the constituted language that is handed down from generation to generation, e.g. in the form of writing, and the appropriated language by which the individual can speak. It is the second deferral, the difference between the sedimentation of tradition

by which culture is made possible, to which Stiegler pays attention and which we will investigate in the next section; I discuss the implications of leaving out the first deferral elsewhere.⁴

2. Technology as Tradition and Event

Stiegler discusses the relation between technology and education in terms of two different problems. The first problem (2.1.) can be captured in terms of Derrida's concept of writing and its implications for the notion of tradition, whereas the second problem (2.2.) concerns the ever-increasing speed of technology in the contemporary era that constitute what Stiegler calls the pharmacological event. Let me discuss both problems.

2.1. Tradition and Technology

As Stiegler notes, his work on technology in its temporal constitution departs from the insight that a fundamental difference exists between Husserl's emphasis on the lived experience as the basis of phenomenology – and thus the privileging of the present – and Heidegger's emphasis on Dasein's hermeneutic relation to the past which needs to be given a future:

The issue is no longer that of lived experience but of the future of the non-lived past: a "past of *Dasein*" is *already-there* before one, but it is only *one's* past to the degree to which this *Dasein* has *had to be*, only to the degree to which it is possible that this past, which is not yet one's own, can or could become one's own. (2009, 4-5)

This quote offers an exact formulation of the problem Stiegler aims to deal with: the past mentioned here is not Dasein's past lived experience and is therefore not simply Dasein's own past; yet, "without this past, Dasein is nothing," because the past – e.g., the past of the language and the culture in which Dasein finds itself – offers Dasein the orientation that it does not have. Therefore everything depends on the question of whether Dasein can *appropriate* this past so that Dasein inherits it as its proper inheritance. It is within the Heideggerian, hermeneutic framework that Stiegler raises his questions concerning the exact status of the past: how is the past given to Dasein and in which senses can it (and can it not) be appropriated? In raising these questions, Stiegler brings Derrida's

⁴ See "Technology and Childhood" to be published in the *International Yearbook for Hermeneutics* (2016).

conception of writing to fruition and extends it to a conception of (mnemonic) technics in general. As Derrida (1989) has shown in his account of Husserl's text on the origin of geometry, a history of a science depends on the externalization of this science in writing and cannot be founded on the lived experience of the scientist alone.⁵ It is writing that allows a science to be extended beyond the limits of the consciousness of its inventor as well as the living language community in which it originated and thus to be handed over to other generations and other communities. Writing is an external memory by which we have access to what our predecessors thought, that is to say, we have access to this tradition if we appropriate the written text. According to Derrida – and it is Stiegler who elaborates this by pointing out that writing is a tertiary memory (1998, 246ff; 2009, 226), i.e., a memory that does not go back to the lived experience of the one who interprets it – this structure of writing is the condition of possibility for the problematic of the appropriation of the past by Dasein as introduced by Heidegger in *Being and Time*.⁶

If education or formation as the process of the appropriation of tradition is fundamental to human existence (since the world in which we live becomes meaningful and an inhabitable world thanks to education and formation), we see at once how this process of education is made both possible and impossible by the structure of writing that constitutes every tradition. Tradition is not only the collection of written sediments handed down to us but also sedimented texts but also a horizon of meaning that offers us the means to interpret and appropriate these texts. Yet, by its dependence on these sediments, tradition is constituted by a structure that precedes the level of meaning and that cannot be reduced to or identified with it: writing is a supplement to the lived experience in Husserl's sense as well as to the appropriation of the past in Heidegger's sense. Whereas meaning belongs to the phenomenological level of lived experience as well as to the hermeneutic level of appropriation and understanding, writing as the indispensable supplement of these two levels cannot be accounted for in terms of meaning alone. Rather, writing is what remains if we would suspend the horizon of meaning within which we receive the past and in which we are educated. Therefore, writing is the non-identity or *différance*

⁵ This text of Derrida is of fundamental importance to Stiegler, and he discusses it extensively (2009, 33-49).

⁶ Stiegler extends this problem to technology as a whole, which is our external memory that makes an inheritance, a tradition and a culture possible and without which human beings cannot exist. See, e.g., his account of Leroi-Gourhan who states that the appropriation of tradition "is biologically indispensable to the human species" (as quoted in Stiegler, 1998, 172).

of the past and the horizon of meaning in which the past is appropriated. This has two implications.

(a) First, a complete appropriation of the past is impossible. Phrased in this way, however, also phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches agree with this proposition. Yet, for these approaches this proposition means that no appropriation can exhaust the horizon of meaning in which the past is interpreted: meaning is always presupposed and every appropriation takes place in a horizon of meaning. The point of view of Derrida and Stiegler, however, is that it is not meaning but rather writing that is presupposed, i.e., the horizon of meaning is not all-embracing, but is itself confronted with a past that has the structure of writing, of what is not reducible to meaning, thanks to which it can be appropriated within *different* horizons of meaning. Consequently, every appropriation is at the same time an “exappropriation” (Stiegler, 1998, 159) since every appropriation leaves a remainder, something that resists interpretation. Thus, the past is never fully one’s own. Yet, in turn, it is this very remainder, writing, that allows for the handing down of the same inheritance to other generations; it is the condition of possibility for the process of interpretation to continue beyond any given horizon of meaning.

(b) The incompleteness of appropriation has a second implication: the *différance* of the past handed down as writing and the horizon of meaning in which it is appropriated, is not only traceable in the limits of every interpretation, but it is also the margin or the play that allows for something new to announce itself within this horizon of meaning, i.e., the margin that allows for an *innovation* of this horizon of meaning.⁷ For what follows, it is important to understand that such an innovation, as it is rooted in what is not (or *not yet*) of the order of meaning, implies a temporary suspension of this horizon of meaning since this innovation appears in the first place, as writing or technics, as what *cannot* be appropriated in the present horizon of meaning.⁸ As non-appropriable, the innovation asks for a renewal of this horizon of meaning so that appropriation becomes possible. Thus, on the level of tradition and its horizon of meaning, the same happens as what happens in relation to Dasein and its inheritance

⁷ An account of tradition as a play between sedimentation and innovation can also be found in the work of Ricoeur (1984, 68), yet in his oeuvre also the innovation is understood as the invention of new meaning as has basic examples, living metaphor and new narratives, clearly indicate.

⁸ These are basic insights also elaborated in contemporary forms of the hermeneutics of the event, see, e.g., Romano’s work (1999).

of the past: since the past is not always already appropriated, but needs to be appropriated and applied to Dasein's own existence, the appropriation of the past is marked by a temporal deferral from which a fundamental expropriation may take place (Stiegler, 2009, 184) which has a fundamental disorienting effect. According to Stiegler, this temporal deferral, its accompanying expropriation and disorientation are intensified in the present-day forms of technology that constitute proper innovations. This brings us to the second set of problems concerning the relation of technology and education.

2.2. Event, Education, and Technology

According to Stiegler (2009, 3), the speed of technological innovation has accelerated so much in our time, that the multiplication of temporal deferrals by which it is accompanied, interrupts the very process of appropriation: our society is no longer capable of reconstituting the horizon of meaning in which the past can be interpreted. Consequently, since our past offers orientation for our lives, actions and thoughts, "we are suffering from *disorientation as such*" (2009, 3).⁹ Thus, this intensification has a particular consequence: by its accelerated speed, technology manifests itself first and foremost by its poisonous side, destroying the horizon of meaning, interrupting education as well as the process of self-formation. Stiegler explains this impossibility of education in the following terms:

We have seen that, generally, a new pharmacological event produces a *primary suspension* that disorients psychosocial individuation by short-circuiting long-established organological programmes, which are thus suspended by this techno-logical *epokhe*. What *Being and Time* called "the understanding that [Dasein] has of its being" is thus challenged by the *pharmakon*. (2013, 119)

Stiegler refers here to the *event*, which is the concept used in contemporary philosophy to think a form of innovation that it interrupts and suspends the existing orders of understanding (Van der Heiden, 2014). Stiegler's explanation of this notion in the above quote shows that he adopts the

⁹ Stiegler continues the above quote as follows: "This leads above all to the speed of technical development since the Industrial Revolution, which has continued to accelerate, dramatically widening the distance between technical systems and social organizations as if, negotiation between them appearing to be impossible, their final divorce seems inevitable."

term in a similar sense, albeit in the framework of his own interest in technics and technology. The pharmacological event refers to the technological inventions that interrupt (“short-circuits”) the common, established understandings and the common practices in a society. They obstruct Dasein’s appropriation of the past.

It is in this context that Stiegler addresses the question of education. He does so by referring to and critically reading Foucault’s account of Kant’s famous text *What is Enlightenment?* in which Kant’s fundamental appeal to humans to become mature and have the courage to think for themselves is stressed (Foucault, 2010, 303-320). It is this critical capacity to think as a form of maturity that intrigues Stiegler since the transitional capacity of education – the formation or *Bildung* that leads humans from immaturity to maturity – is thought by Kant in terms of the technology of writing: Kant addresses the literate public, the audience that can read and write (Stiegler, 2010, 24-28). Transposed to our times, education means for Stiegler the process of becoming mature in the face of the expropriating and disorienting effects of the pharmacological event. Stressing the pharmacological dimension of technics, he notes that the only way to appropriate the disorienting technical innovations is by inventing other techniques of self-formation that render the subject mature in the face of these new technologies.¹⁰

Yet, Stiegler’s attempt to connect his reinterpretation of the *pharmakon* by the pharmacological event to a conception of formation or *Bildung* (which he mentions several times in 2010, 17-35) has important consequences that seem to go against the grain of his own line of argumentation. The easiest way to capture these consequences is by considering two distinctions or oppositions that determine the course of his account of education and event: maturity versus immaturity and the implicitly developed opposition of disorienting technologies versus reorienting techniques of self-formation. My discussion of these two oppositions is meant to show the intrinsic difficulty or even impossibility of connecting the Derridean idea of *pharmakon* with the Enlightenment idea of *Bildung*.

Let me start with tracing the second opposition. To this end one should inquire first into the exact status of the pharmacological event.

¹⁰ As Stiegler (2010, 23-24) points out we already see the pharmacology of writing at work in Kant’s *What is Enlightenment?*: Kant addresses the literate community, i.e., those who can read and who are formed by writing. In this sense, writing is the very condition of possibility of reaching maturity. Yet, the same writing can also be a threat to maturity and understanding; it “can just as likely suspend the reader in immaturity” and “replace understanding” (24), e.g., when what is written is treated as mere authority rather than as a training or a practice to reach a mature level of understanding.

An event is an event of innovation. Therefore, the pharmacological event is first and foremost poisonous since it makes the appropriation of the past and orientation in the new situation by means of the established modes of interpretation and the given horizon of meaning impossible. In a response to this poisonous side the question of education has to be raised again, according to Stiegler, and more specifically the question of the invention of techniques that allow us appropriate and reorient ourselves in the new situation. This distinction between the technology that causes the pharmacological event and the transitional techniques helping humans to become mature in relation to this event problematizes the very idea of *pharmakon*. Recall that for Derrida, when introducing the concept of *pharmakon* to reinterpret Plato's account of writing, his concern is not only the distinction between speech (and the living experience or presence accompanying it) and writing – the distinction that became famous – but rather the distinction Plato makes in the *Phaedrus* between good and bad writing, between fertile and sterile writing (1981, 149). The notion of *pharmakon* is brought into play to problematize the distinction between good and bad writing. Stiegler's distinction between the pharmacological event and the techniques of self-formation seems to reiterate, against the grain of Stiegler's argument that aims to embrace the concept of *pharmakon*, the distinction between good and bad technics, between the invention of a new technology that obstructs understanding and the invention of technologies that offer a transition to a new epoch of understanding. That this reiteration is an important motive in Stiegler's recent works, can be seen even more clearly in his univocal rejection of the programming industries and his concentration on techniques for education that are able to counteract the pure poisonous technologies of the programming industries (for Stiegler (2010) the advertising campaign of the French Channel Y is the very embodiment of evil). In a very precise sense, Stiegler thus becomes vulnerable to the critique he directs at Adorno and Horkheimer who, according to him, only see the poisonous side of technology (Stiegler, 2013, 18). His own account of the technology of the programming industries as making humans *only* stupid and immature indicates the very rejection of the ambiguity of the *pharmakon* with respect to this technology.¹¹

Note that this one-sided rejection of certain forms of technologies

¹¹ In a very precise sense, Stiegler thus becomes vulnerable for the same critique he directs at Adorno and Horkheimer who, according to him, only see the poisonous side of technology (2013, 18): the technology of the programming industries is making humans *only* stupid and immature. This "only" is the very rejection of the ambiguity of the *pharmakon*.

in the hands of the programming industries, goes hand in hand with a certain conception of education, namely as the formation of a mature self. Although Stiegler states that “we must organically reform the *Bildung*” (2010, 35), he continuously refers to the Enlightenment tradition as well as to the Platonic understanding of education to capture what the formation is. This has important implications for the possible friction between his understanding of formation and the situation to which he wants to apply it.

Formation and education are usually understood in terms of the relation between teacher and student in which the teacher initiates or introduces the student in the ways to arrive at understanding. In terms of the idea of formation or *Bildung* as developed in the Enlightenment, the fundamental requirement of coming to maturity is that teachers introduce students in the horizon of meaning that constitutes the culture in which they live: e.g., the students are introduced to the canonical texts of this culture, into the way in which they are read, in the practices that are needed for sound scholarship, and so on. Thus formation, in its common understanding, presupposes the idea of relatively stable tradition, culture, or horizon of meaning within which the young students are introduced to such an extent that they can develop their own critical attitude to it; and it presupposes the distinction between the mature teacher and the immature student.

It is quite clear that Stiegler remains indebted to this particular sense of formation, especially in his usage of the importance of maturity in thinking the formation of the self. Not only the example of the Enlightenment as developed in *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* emphasizes this, but also his reference to the work of Donald Winnicott and his use of the transitional object throughout *What Makes Life Worth Living* attests to this: the transitional object presupposes to the state of maturity represented by the mother who offers the child a transitional object to enter and appropriate the culture in which the child will be living.

However, whereas the Enlightenment situation offers a clear culture or horizon of meaning within which the practices of self-formation can be trained under the guidance of teachers who know these practices and their results, the present-day situation is marked by what is called an event – the pharmacological event – and this means that the question of education and formation departs from a specific “short-circuiting,” that is to say, the question of education can no longer be understood as the introduction of children or immature humans in a relatively stable culture by mature humans. Rather, if the pharmacological event truly short-

circuits our horizon of meaning, every education in its common sense is deactivated. Strictly speaking, *the event makes everyone immature*; the event turns everyone into a child in relation to the new technologies.¹² The short-circuiting of the pharmacological event thus deprives our culture of a population of mature teachers. Consequently, the demands that the pharmacological event imposes on the techniques of self-formation are clear: it is required to find a new orientation that cannot use the model of a mere transition from childhood to maturity since there is no maturity present that could guide it.

In this sense, the situation in which the pharmacological event places us might better be described in terms of Derrida's account of the aporia or the impasse. In fact, in the section entitled "philosophy as teaching" (2010, 107-112), Stiegler moves in this direction. As he notes, in reference to Plato, the experience of aporia or being perplexed arises in philosophy when one "has reached the *impasse*" (2010, 109), and he connects to the famous figure developed in the *Symposium* in which Socrates describes the philosophers as the one who loves wisdom "precisely to the degree that it escapes and transcends him" (109), and this leads him to the following summary concerning philosophical teaching:

The predicament – the aporia – of philosophical teaching is, then, to mark the difference between the teaching of what *would be* philosophy and the object that can *never* be the telos of a straightforward teaching ... but that must become an experiment, indeed a way of life: an asceticism, a care, an *epimēleia* of a specific type (of which all Foucault's techniques of the "self" are instances). (109).

Although this notion of experiment might indeed offer a counter model to the models of education that presuppose maturity, it remains to be seen whether it can be found in this dialogue. After all, in the *Symposium*, it is Diotima, the wise woman from Mantinea, who guides Socrates toward the truth. Hence, also Socrates' education presupposes

¹² One might even wonder whether, by identifying this becoming immature with the activities of the programming industries and by continuously invoking moral judgments (of especially the French Channel Y to which he continuously refers), Stiegler does not present an ontological problem too strongly in moral or ethical categories: after all, the becoming immature is the immediate consequence of the pharmacological event as he thinks it.

maturity.¹³ Nevertheless, despite this inadequacy of the Platonic model of philosophical teaching, the idea of experiment might be more beneficial: the techniques of self-formation can only be set up as an experiment that aims to traverse the experience of the pharmacological event, i.e., that aims to become experienced in a situation in which there are neither teachers nor maturities. This, one might say, is characteristic of the novelty introduced by the event: it goes hand in hand with a lack of experience, and if there is a task for the technologies of the self, it is to become experienced in what the event brought about.¹⁴

Therefore, the distinction between maturity and immaturity does not apply to this situation. Stiegler's judgment of the programming industries that they make us immature, ultimately depends on a sense of maturity that cannot be thought if one considers the consequences of the event. Stiegler's description (2010: 1-6) of the adult and the adult's responsibility as well as of the effacement of adulthood and childhood is symptomatic in this respect: it presupposes a sense of responsibility, adulthood, and maturity, and seems to forget that the technological disorientation places our society for the task to experiment and find forms of responsibility, adulthood and maturity. In such a situation, the objectives of the techniques of self-formation are similarly changed: they are important as techniques to transform oneself but as techniques that respond to an event, they have no clear goal or trajectory since all maturity is lacking.

Looking back on Stiegler's basic account of the relation between technology and humankind, his insistence on maturity is also problematic. The fundamental temporal deferral characterizing all technics implies that we are never *in* the event, experiencing the event as such, but we are always relating to it as always already happened, i.e., in its *après-coup* as Stiegler likes to call it, by a "return through the failure of experience" (1998, 186).¹⁵ Humans begin with a failure of experience and therefore need to become experienced. The way in which Stiegler stages the problems in his more recent works tends to bracket these original insights: when literateness and maturity are *presupposed* – and this is what Kant, Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment do: they address the literate public – and when technology is thought as the event that interrupts these dimensions of *Bildung*, it is as if

¹³ Stiegler's reference to Diotima here as the representative of non-philosophy does not take away this problem: Diotima is the wise woman who already knows and who therefore can guide Socrates in the first place; as Socrates says in the *Symposium*: "But that's why I came to you, Diotima, as I just said. I knew I needed a teacher" (207c; Cooper, 1997, 490).

¹⁴ See Romano (1999, 193-201) who elaborates this in terms of a hermeneutics of Dasein.

¹⁵ See also Romano (1999, 63-69).

humanity is not marked by an original disorientation. Yet, experience and orientation are not presupposed; they rather *depart from* the gift and the invention of technology.

3. Conclusion: Experience and Event

Let us briefly reconsider the course of the arguments developed above. Technics or technology, as Stiegler notes from the beginning of his work in the first volume of *Technics and Time*, is what grants human beings their capacities so that they can dwell in the world. From the outset of this human relation to technics, as Stiegler insists, these capacities cannot be had without their intrinsic danger: they may ultimately incapacitate the human being: technics is a *pharmakon* for humankind. Yet, the question of present-day technology, its accelerated speed and its radical disorientation seems to bring into play the incapacitating effect intrinsic to the *pharmakon* stronger than ever. The lack of adulthood, responsibility, maturity, critical thinking, and so on, are due to the pharmacological event that short-circuits the ways we have at our disposal to live with technology. Yet, as I have asked above, is the reference to the classical models of education, which underlie Stiegler's usage of notions such as adulthood, responsibility and maturity, not highly problematic in relation to his account of technics as *pharmakon*? These classical models presuppose what is *not* given according to the interpretation of technics in terms of supplement and *pharmakon*: namely a pre-given maturity of humankind. Without a doubt, Stiegler would agree with this latter point and would say that this is exactly his point, but he seems to forget that, though thinking tradition in terms of technics and tertiary retentions, the pharmacological event short-circuits tradition as the realm from which we derive the norms of adulthood, maturity and critical thought. By insisting on notions such as maturity to grasp education and self-formation, he reiterates distinctions such as maturity versus immaturity and good versus bad technology that the notion of *pharmakon* aims to dismantle.

Rather than this reference to maturity, one might perhaps consider another concept that does not refer back to (relatively) stable norms of adulthood, responsibility and maturity but that rather argues that maturity as well as formation should be thought in terms of experiments and becoming experienced. Romano, who rethinks phenomenology and hermeneutics in light of the concept of the event, explains experience as the traversal of dangers and risks (1999, 193-201). One gains experience

when one is confronted with what one does not know, with what one does not expect; one gains experience when one is exposed to something new with which one does not have any experience yet.¹⁶ The encounter with an event, with something utterly new, indeed implies that one is exposed to it. Such an encounter is both a test and an ordeal (*épreuve*). Experience understood as the human encounter with an event, as the traversal of its tests, ordeals and dangers, offers a more accurate account of how the event itself is at stake in the self-formation that takes place in experience. Rather than distinguishing the pharmacological event of technology from the techniques of self-formation that remedy the harms done by the event, one should opt for a conception of these techniques that remains much closer to their pharmacological nature. The techniques of self-formation responding to the pharmacological event are perhaps nothing other than the experiencing of this event in its aftermath. Experience itself, as the traversal of dangers and the passing of tests, has the character of a *pharmakon*: whereas it is the only possibility to become experienced, i.e., to become mature in relation to what is experienced and thus to gain capacities to deal with it, it is also the risk of being fully incapacitated: one may fail the test and the dangers may prove to be too much. One should not forget, in this context, that the techniques of self-formation developed in Stoicism and to which both Foucault and Stiegler return in their inquiry of the care of the self, were in the first place techniques by which the self was putting itself to the test. In its intrinsic relation to technology, humans are put to the test by the pharmacological event and, with no pre- or “long-established” forms of adulthood at their disposal that they might imitate, they are first confronted with the test and the task to become experienced in the perilous, new situation.

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¹⁶ As Gadamer writes: “Every experience worthy of the name thwarts an expectation” (2004, 350).

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