

## Living After Auschwitz:

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**Living After Auschwitz: Memory, Culture and Biopolitics in the Work of  
Bernard Stiegler and Giorgio Agamben**

**Ross Abbinnett**

To write about Auschwitz <sup>1</sup> is to expose oneself to certain risks that gather around the remembrance of the Jewish deportees and other 'deficient' strands of humanity who were killed in the Nazi genocide. These risks are of an incomparably different kind from the ones to which Jewish populations of Europe were exposed during the Second World War: they concern only credibility and reputation, and not the economy 'of flame and of ashes' that came into being after the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 (Derrida, 1989: 1). And yet these risks are significant, for the historical reality of Auschwitz has become part of political and religious disputes that continue to replay the annihilationist fervour of National Socialism. The religious fundamentalisms, ultra-nationalisms, and neo-fascisms that have arisen since the turn of the millennium, have attained a destructive intensity that seems to be endemic in the global-bio-technological regime of capital. The risks that are taken in critical-philosophical interventions in debates about Auschwitz therefore are significant because they are concerned with the ways in which the industrialized killing of over six million Jews, Roma and 'politicals' should be remembered. To argue, as I will in this paper, that the 'fact of Auschwitz' does not have a strictly 'factual' reality, and that its ethical significance has to be conceived independently of narratives of fate, retribution, and the will of God, is to risk putting oneself in the position of the 'historical relativist' who would seek to undermine the truth of the Nazi genocide. I will argue however that it is only by tracing the event of Auschwitz to a pivotal moment in the evolution of the relationship between culture, technology and collective memory, that it is possible to understand what is at stake in the uniqueness of the suffering that took place in the Nazi death camps, and how that suffering

should be redeemed through an ethics of remembrance whose telos is the future existence of the human species.

In essence, my paper is concerned with the return of fascism, as a racial-biopolitical ideology, after the event of Auschwitz. Liberal and neoliberal theorists have tended to regard the revelation of the scale of the Nazi genocide as marking the end of fascism's mass appeal: public recognition of the consequences of its racial ideology (the Final Solution, the Second World War, and the destruction of the German state) is conceived as having brought about a transformation in the culture of humanity whose organization as ethics, memory and political authority prevents repetition of its biopolitical violence (Fukuyama, 1992: 16-17). And yet in the last twenty years there has been an unprecedented rise in the neo-fascisms, ultra-nationalisms, and religious fundamentalisms that calls into question the claim that fascist politics, as the mass policing of racial-biopolitical hierarchies, has been permanently consigned to the margins of the neoliberal consensus. My primary concerns therefore are to trace the biopolitical logic which underlies the revitalizations of nationalism, fascism, and religious fundamentalism that have taken place in our present, and to register the fate of Auschwitz, as a historical event, within the constellation of economic and geopolitical effects that have been produced by this process of biopolitical transformation.

The origin of this approach to the remembrance of historical events can be traced to Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', where it is the figure of Paul Klee's 'Angelus Novus' that configures the infinite yearning of humanity for a timeless order of love and recognition. The angel, whose back is turned to the future, can only make partial and distracted sense

of the wreckage of everything that humanity has tried to build, and it is in this sense that his experience is like that of human beings. For insofar as he can never 'awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed' (Benjamin, 1992: 249), he experiences the same tragic contamination of truth and violence that is the essence of human history. Every historical epoch is a 'state of emergency' that is born of its inheriting the absence of redemption that humanity is fated to endure. The question that emerges from this idea of the present as a perpetual state of crisis therefore concerns the relationship between the human experience of time, and the technological means of representation through which that experience is supplemented. Clearly there is a sense in which Benjamin regards the advent of kinaesthetic technology as giving rise to an alternative imaginary that exceeds the repetitive violence of authoritarian mythologies. And yet the epilogue to 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' reveals the underlying power of film to intensify those mythologies, that is, to reinvigorate the 'aura' of the race, the *Volk*, and the *Führer* (Benjamin 1992: 234-235). It is the evolution of this power of technological intensification, I will argue, that is key to understanding the return of fascism, as a biopolitical regime, to our own historical present.

The readings of Giorgio Agamben and Bernard Stiegler I will present are concerned with how the biopolitical violence which has continued after the after the event of Auschwitz, is related to a particular set of effects that have arisen from the technological processes of the globalization. The most significant of these are: the digital-technological evolution of mass society (i.e. the universal programming of human cognition and desire); the rise of a post-reflexive politics whose formal expression is the state of civil emergency; the

explicitly genocidal intent of the neo-fascisms, religious fundamentalisms, and ultra-nationalisms that have appeared since the turn of the millennium; and the emergence of an explicitly transhumanist orientation in the economic ideology of capital (i.e. the assumption of an infinite adaptability of the human species to increasingly autonomous technological networks). In Agamben's work the normalization of extra-legal violence that has taken place in Western democracies, is presented as an outcome of the biotechnological systems through which specific 'others' are designated as objective threats to the integrity of the state. The ethical demand of those who come seeking help with only their physical life to recommend them, in other words, is automatically superseded by their media-bio-political depiction as 'asylum seekers', 'fundamentalists' 'disease carriers', 'refugees', or 'economic migrants'. I will argue that this biopolitical appropriation of those that come as 'bare life', or *Homo sacer*, is precisely what is at stake in Stiegler's account of epiphylogenetic memory. For it is only insofar as he is able to show that the powers of technological representation through which the economies of law, capital, and politics are objectively coordinated, are also the means to new modalities of subjective praxis and cultural inheritance, that the event of Auschwitz can retain its ethical significance in the unfolding of human history.

In what follows I will argue that the event of Auschwitz is both revealed and dissimulated in the global-biopolitical economy of capital, and how the chance of its remembrance is recalled to the events of violence and exclusion this economy systematically produces. My argument is in three parts. The first is concerned with elaborating the concept of epiphylogenetic memory which Stiegler develops in *Technics and Time* volume one, or, more precisely, with

the economy of trauma and remembrance it configures and how this is related to the social, political and techno-economic dimensions of the crisis that developed in Weimar Germany. The second part develops a rereading of what have become known, somewhat pejoratively, as 'mass society' theories of fascism. These theories provide a crucial insight into the libidinal dynamics of Nazism: for without the connections that are drawn by Arendt, Horkheimer and Adorno between the 'objective' forces of capital and the social, political and psychical dynamics of the masses, there can be no adequate explanation of Hitler's seizure of power and the execution of the final solution. This German tradition of critical theory however tends to reify the instruments of cultural and aesthetic expression, and to present their development after Auschwitz as threatening a relentless degradation of humanity to its basest functions of work, reproduction and enjoyment. In section three therefore, I will set out the terms of an encounter between Agamben, as the inheritor of a German critique of mass society that goes back to Martin Heidegger, and Stiegler's account of the affective dynamics of technological-epiphylogenetic memory. I will conclude by arguing that what is at stake in this encounter is the future of Auschwitz as the sign, or 'tensor', of a collective trauma which inhabits the evolving structures of biotechnological life.

### **Stiegler: Epiphylogenetic Memory**

Stiegler's concept of epiphylogenetic memory designates a very specific relationship between the objective-technological conditions of human history, and the forms of intersubjective culture through which that necessity, which is always traumatic in its effects, is mediated. The term phylogenesis refers to the way in which animal species are differentiated into subgroups that retain

the same genetic characteristics but which exhibit significant variations in their adaptation to environmental conditions. The concept of epi-phylogenesis that Stiegler develops in *Technics and Time* presents the idea that human beings, as an originally technological mode of life, are fated to enact a history in which their 'ethnic' differentiation is accomplished through instruments that constantly rupture the process of phylogenetic reproduction (1998: 140). This means that the history of the human species is originally bound up with the technological reproduction of culture; for it is in the spheres of inscription and graphical representation that the world is 'invented' through heterogeneous modes of language, aesthetic technique and philosophical discourse. There is then a certain reflexive, or *noetic*, demand that, for Stiegler, haunts the economy of human culture. For the experience of work, satisfaction and desire that is sustained in the symbolic order of collective life, is what provokes generationally specific reflections on the normative and juridical tradition of the state, and its relationship to the transformative effects of technology (1998: 183-203). The messianic possibility that is sustained by the Humanities (art, literature, philosophy, theology) therefore comes from their capacity to enact of the trauma of this reflection: they express the implicit, countervailing tendency of culture within the regime of socio-technological reproduction. According to Stiegler, these two spheres 'compose' with one another in such a way that the history of human society unfolds, firstly, through the evolution of technologies that constantly rupture the process of moral and cultural individuation, and secondly, the channelling of a collective sense of disorientation into performative acts that seek to revitalize the symbolic economy of social life (2013a: 102-126). This possibility of



expressive performance is essentially related to the concept of spirit that runs throughout Stiegler's work and which is crucial to understanding the ethical significance of Auschwitz in the future unfolding of human history (Abbinnett, 2015: 76-79).

The concept of history that arises from Stiegler's originary technicity thesis involves a complex interweaving of the intentional faculties that are associated with the theological and philosophical discourse of spirit, and the technological and utilitarian necessities that are associated with the capitalist economy. The relationship between these two elements is non-dialectical in the sense that each composes with the other to produce moments of extreme crisis, none of which is capable of resolving the contradiction between spirit, technology and economy that forms the fate of the human species. In fact, for Stiegler, the hope that arises from this catastrophic history consists in preserving the *antagonism* between technological capitalization and the reflexive and aesthetic spontaneity this has provoked in the social and individual life of human beings (2014: 46-48). The originary technicity thesis therefore anticipates the advent of modernity as a profound and episodic crisis of spirit engendered by the development of technological systems (mass media, industrial reproducibility, biomedical technologies etc) that threaten the human capacity for cultural inheritance, moral recognition and aesthetic self-expression. The dynamics of this catastrophe is anticipated in Stiegler's rereading of the Promethean myth as the erasure of the sensory-aesthetic and reflexive-*noetic* elements of culture that is threatened by constant innovation in the regime of technoscientific reproduction (1998: 186). Hyperindustrial modernity, in other words, is a crisis point that has haunted

the logic of technical development since its inception: it is the possibility of a total destruction of reflexive and aesthetic culture that would leave human beings open to processes of biopolitical violence that, in the long run, they could not survive (2013b: 9-36; Agamben, 1999: 82-86).

The pivotal question that arises here concerns the place of Auschwitz in the history of the human species and the possibility of its being remembered as the defining moment in the relationship between human beings and their technological environment. As I have said, Stiegler's idea of epiphylogenesis leads to the conclusion that human history develops through a more and more intense experience of the technological damage that is done to the symbolic relations of social life. This is the outcome of the movement of machine technology towards a certain degree of performative autonomy: human individuals come under the control of cybernetic systems that regulate the temporality of their somatic and psychical life. Consequently, the evolution of 'technics' into the economy of 'technoscience' is conceived by Stiegler as expressing a *teleological* development, in which the necessity of historical events is shifted from the orthographic economy of inscription (objective spirit), to the constantly evolving powers of prosthetic programmes and environments (1998: 36-37) and (2011a: 187-190). Auschwitz therefore should be understood as a historical sign that haunts the media-technological programmes through which the biopolitical organization of capital has been accomplished. Mass society theories, as we will see, have tended to underplay the radical affects that are gathered in the event of Auschwitz. For insofar as they view the execution of the Nazi genocide as the outcome of an 'objective tendency' towards technocratic control, there is little hope for ethical

remembrance beyond the formal transformation of the law and public pedagogy. In the section that follows I will set out a Stieglerian reading of the biopolitical dimension of power that was developed in the Frankfurt School account of the Nazi apparatus. Before this however, I need make some brief remarks about the structure of aesthetic affect that is sustained in Stiegler's account of epiphylogenetic memory, and how this changes the relationship between the violence of human history and its absorption into the repetitive forms of the culture and programming industries.

In his work on the decadence of Western industrial democracies, Stiegler argues that the digital networks that support human memory and experience are now such that they can 'annul' the differential effects that are produced among the discrete individuals that make up the audience (if this is a term that can still be applied to the 'subjects' of immersive media technologies) (2014: 34-35). Digital media networks and virtual-aesthetic programmes are able automatically to incorporate the psychical trauma they provoke through their representations of historical events. Our experience of the living present is subject to processes of redaction through which the past, which has always been technically inscribed, is instantaneously dispersed among increasingly sophisticated simulacra (2009: 93-96). The outcome at which this process aims is the erasure of the psychical affect that has been put back into play by the structure of the image, or more specifically, the perfection of the processes of repetition through which the symbolic reality of the past, as the reference point of the living present, finally passes out of existence. Yet it is the intensity of this process of technological re-staging, and the fact that it seeks a permanent separation of the present from the history of

violence perpetrated in the political life of *Homo sapiens*, that reanimates the psychological trauma (the clash of *Eros* and *Thanatos*) that is the origin of artistic expression. According to Stiegler, art is responsible for bringing the memory of violence to the surface of self-consciousness, that is, for revealing both the iterative-repressive structure of the forms through which that memory is encoded (film, digital medial, virtual aesthetic programmes, haptic environments), *and* for intensifying the sensory affect that haunts the simulation of the past. As he put it in *Symbolic Misery*

The question at this stage is to understand how it is possible that what I have called an 'objective primary retention' [a sensory event] should suddenly become the *katharsis* as well as the *catylist* - of individuation, and in sense the *katastrophē* - of individuation which is to say, the trigger of a quantum leap that liberates the unexpected of a traumatype. Such a traumatype, for which a work of art may be a projection support, does not simply belong to a *noetic* soul: it belongs to the pre-individual ground of all *noetic* souls, and it is in this way that it penetrates the defensive barrier of the stereotypes (2015: 152).

The work of art, in other words, is a work of 'spirit' in the sense that it belongs to the organological constitution *Dasein*: its *poiesis* gives expression to the violence that comes with the originary process of technological supplementation, and gives rise to cathartic affects that haunt the economies of freedom and necessity, memory and inheritance, produced by the culture and programming industries.

The experience of messianicity that is sustained in Stiegler's account of epiphylogenetic memory is essentially related to art as a mode of spiritual performance that can be executed within the virtual networks of technological societies. The question of the fate of art in the time of technological reproducibility, of course, has a long history and was the source of the tension between Adorno and Benjamin over the possibility of a mass revolutionary aesthetic (Adorno et al, 1994: 110-141). Stiegler's position is perhaps closer to Benjamin than to Adorno, in the sense that he conceives representational technologies as 'tertiary supports' whose supplementation of the faculties of imagination, affection and reflection constantly transform that relationship that we, as living beings in default of essence, have to our own historical past. Epiphylogenetic memory, in other words, is originally constituted as a zone in which the iterative potential of the image (as cultic inscription, analogue chromatic differentiation, digital pixilation etc) is haunted by spectres of who and what is not represented in the technological encoding of life. However, there is a certain reserve in Stiegler's relationship to the political aesthetic that comes into being with cinematic time, which comes from the conviction that programming industries are on the verge of perfecting the regime of technoscientific simulation. This returns us to the Adornian question of which, if any, aesthetic form/genre is appropriate to represent the event of Auschwitz, as each of them (film, painting, literature, poetry, music) tends to reduce the inhuman suffering of the victims to palatable stories about love, heroism and personal redemption. I will argue that the idea of the genre, as reductive technique, cannot be applied to the practice of technological art. Its interventions are provoked by the dynamic that takes place between the

unlived past (collective memory), the force of the law, and the biopolitical organization of life, and so it has emerged as a potentially non-generic field that is in a constant state of flux and transformation. In the final section of the paper I will develop the idea that Auschwitz is a 'tensor' <sup>2</sup> within this economy of remembrance, and that its affective demand is the source of an ethico-aesthetics of biopolitical life. For the moment however it is necessary to set out the relationship between aesthetics and biopower that, from the perspective of epiphylogenesis, can be traced in mass society theories of politics.

### **Nazism: Death and Mass Society**

In his book *Remnants of Auschwitz* Giorgio Agamben passed the following judgement on Holocaust theologies that seek to explain the Nazi genocide in terms of God's kenotic separation from the world: 'Behind the powerlessness of God peeps the powerlessness of men, who continue to cry "may that never happen again" when "that" is everywhere' (1999: 20). Thus, the question of *how* human beings are to redeem the violence of the world they have made, and of the ethical significance of Auschwitz in this redemption, in other words, must be referred to the biopolitical systems that have become the condition of human life and experience. The original analysis of this regime as the standardization of production, consumption and desire is presented in the Frankfurt School account of mass society, and further elaborated in Hannah Arendt's work on violence and political authority. This section will examine the relationship between Ardent, Adorno and Horkheimer's respective theories of an emergent biopolitics, and the new phenomenologies of memory that are traced by Stiegler and Agamben in the networks of the global economy.

As we have seen, the economy of epiphylogenetic transmission that Stiegler presents in the first volume of *Technics and Time* is the core of what he calls the 'technological tendency' of human civilization (1998: 36-46). He maintains that in order to understand the relationship between the objective elements of the social system (what he calls subsistence, economy, or *negotium*) and the reflective faculties of human individuals (what he calls *noesis*, or *otium*), it is necessary to theorize how each 'composes' with the other within the totality of social life. So, on the one hand, the orthographic and aesthetic regimes that have developed through human history are the means through which cultural forms of reflection and sensory cathexis are disseminated, while on the other, these regimes are always subject to the effects of innovation in the utilitarian networks of human society (1998: 49-60). What Stiegler conceives as the therapeutic function of culture has always been threatened by technological changes in the realm of work and economy, and by the representational techniques through which culture is transmitted. This however does not take the form of a thoroughgoing technological determinism. Rather, Stiegler's contention is that the unfolding of human history is simultaneously catastrophic and redemptive: the objective, self-coordinating element of technological evolution is such that it produces effects of moral, cultural and economic dislocation whose intensities cannot be foreseen, and also provides new forms of affective, intuitive and reflexive apprehension through which the fate of technological Dasein can be re-imagined (1998: 61-67). The *de facto* individuation of the human species through technological programmes therefore always solicits reinventions of the cultural milieu in which it reproduces its spiritual-symbolic value. For in

the absence of this kind of performativity, which is itself technological, the biopolitical reproduction of human beings as 'bare life' tends to fill the void of political culture (2013a: 17-19) and (Agamben, 1998: 126-135)

The Frankfurt School analysis of the effects of rationalization and technocratic control is the foundation of Agamben's work on the biopolitical trajectory of Western politics after Auschwitz. In order to understand this continuity, we need to extend the theory of mass society developed by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno to include Hannah Arendt's work on the banality of evil and its relationship to the technological organization of life. The essential characteristic of mass society theories of fascism is the association that is made between the loss of mimetic activity in social life and the sense of death that haunts the process of rationalization (Adorno, 1999: 58-60) and (Arendt, 1977: 273). The primary factor in the rise of Nazism is presented as its appeal to a 'natural order' of race whose differentiation of life into *zoë* and *bios*, Jew and Aryan, is being destroyed by the uncontrolled expansion of capitalism and its technological apparatus (Arendt, 1979), (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1986) and (Horkheimer, 2004). And so the fact that the masses became obsessed with the cult of the *Führer*, and with the mission to restore the 'sacred life' of the *Volk*, should be understood in terms of the feeling of proximity to anonymous death that had become part of everyday life in Weimar. The biopolitical designation of 'the Jew' as parasite therefore, arose within an ideological discourse that interpreted the economic and technological apparatus of capitalism as the instruments of a process through which Aryan culture was being liquidated by an inferior form of humanity. This articulation of the biopolitical economy of Nazism, as I have said, is essential



to understanding the transformation of moral and political agency that brought about the electoral success of the NSDAP and the establishment of the Hitler dictatorship. However, the way this is formulated by Arendt, Horkheimer and Adorno and, later on, by Agamben, tends to conceive 'the masses' as the *object* of a technological history whose unfolding after Auschwitz threatens to erase all traces of subjective spirit from human society.

It is in the light of this trajectory that Adorno presents the aesthetic and pedagogical forms of remembrance that, for him, are necessary after Auschwitz, and Arendt describes the outlines of a cosmopolitan law that would be able to respond to the technological attrition of humanity. In Adorno's case we have seen that the scope of moral education after Auschwitz is limited to a utilitarian reconstruction of self-interest which has little connection with the esoteric expressions of damage and obscenity that are the purpose of his negative aesthetics (2005: 102). The focus of Arendt's account of the Eichmann trial, on the other hand, is on the progress that the legal proceedings made towards framing a formal definition of crimes against humanity (1977: 274). She regarded the Eichmann trial as having made some progress over the precedents established at Nuremburg (which insisted on treating 'crimes against humanity' as special instances of the overzealous brutality that made up the sphere of 'war crimes'), but maintained that in the end it failed to make significant progress in framing a new sphere of cosmopolitan justice. The fundamental concern that underlies Arendt's account of the Eichmann trial is that the evolution of technological systems will be such that the organization of human beings through the biopolitical imperatives of capital, will give rise to a system of anomic destruction that is

normalized through the ordinary representations of technoscientific culture. Thus, it is the objective conditions of the world after Auschwitz - the population explosion, the development of machines that constantly diminish the need for human labour, and the potential use of nuclear technology in the disposal of 'surplus populations' - that establish the absolute necessity of an International Court of Justice (1977: 270). Arendt understood as early as the mid-1950s that the context of international right is the biopolitical disposal of human beings through the evolving powers of technological systems (this point is reiterated six years later in her essay *On Violence*) (1970: 81-83). And so it is in her work that we find the source of Agamben's juridical reflection on the technological enframing of Being and the fate of political sovereignty after Auschwitz.

The theories of mass society that are presented by Horkheimer, Adorno and Arendt are the first to reveal the entanglement of the law with the biopolitical organization of life and the technological means of representation. Their respective accounts of Nazism present two sides of a non-dialectical relationship in which the more efficient the networks of industrialized society become, the less chance there is of preserving the legal, ethical, political and aesthetic spheres which constitute the spirit of civil society. This problematic brings us to the two post-Auschwitz trajectories that are staked out by Stiegler and Agamben. In Agamben's work the unfolding of the relationship between capitalism and technology is seen as having followed a strictly biopolitical path: the state has been reduced to its barest executive functions and has become the instrument of an endemic violence that is practiced against those who are seen as threatening the integrity of its borders and/or the biological

vigour of its population. This is made clear in the essay 'What is an Apparatus?' where he proposes a 'general and massive partitioning of beings into two large classes: living beings . . . and the apparatuses in which living beings are incessantly captured' (2009: 13). Stiegler's work, on the other hand, demands a re-evaluation of Agamben's inheritance of the biopolitical assumptions of mass society theory. In the following section I will argue that Agamben's account of the death camps as the *telos* of biopolitical forms of sovereignty, remains caught in the logic of technocratic domination that is implicit in Adorno and Arendt's work on the remembrance of Auschwitz. Agamben's inheritance of their work is complex and raises important questions about the law and the ethics of representation in the time of biopolitical capitalism. In the end however his refusal to acknowledge the dualistic, or *pharmacological*, structure of subjective affect that is put into play by the digitization of experience, is key to understanding the reversion to a Heideggerian account of messianicity<sup>3</sup> in his work on the redemption of Auschwitz.

The political orientation of Horkheimer's work is subtly different from that of Adorno, in the sense that although he accepts the tendency of the techno-economic complex of capital to reduce human beings to fungible units, he also entertains the possibility that 'industrial discipline, technological progress, and scientific enlightenment . . . promise to usher in a new era in which individuality may re-emerge as an element in a more humane form of existence' (2004: 108). Horkheimer, in other words, had a sense that the technoscientific transformation of collective life that took place in late modernity, and which was undoubtedly implicated in the formation of Nazi

ideology as the 'revolt of nature', also opens the possibility of new forms of political and aesthetic community that could express free individual existence (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2011: 48) and (Horkheimer, 2004: 81). The exact nature of this possibility is, in a strong sense, impossible to grasp if the event of Auschwitz is understood in strictly Adornian terms, that is, as confirming an eternal circularity in the relationship between biopolitical violence, capitalization and technological innovation. If however, we shift our perspective on 'technics' from that of a purely external danger to the moral and legal community of human beings (a position which continued to trouble Walter Benjamin's account of the technological image) to an organological understanding of its place in the evolution of *noetic* culture, then the event of Auschwitz emerges as a traumatological experience that haunts the biopolitical organization of life (1992: 211-244). There might, to paraphrase Stiegler's reading of Arendt, be a chance of redeeming the law as an expression of the self-creativity of technological Dasein or, more precisely, as the form in which the human capacity for reimagining and reinventing itself is protected (Arendt, 1979: 474-479) and (Stiegler, 2011b: 19-121).

### **Auschwitz: Trauma and Remembrance**

In the part three of *Minima Moralia* Adorno argued that, in the time of the rational-technological capitalism that emerged after Auschwitz, 'dying merely confirms the absolute irrelevance of the natural organism in the face of the social absolute' (1999: 232). This claim is essentially biopolitical, for the means of controlling 'the people', as the dangerous residue of bare life that haunts the legally constituted order of utility and inequality, are the paramilitary organizations, detention centres and camps that have been set

up during the recurrent crises of the global economy. The political activity of the state is concentrated in its ability to divide the population into racially, culturally and ethnically privileged 'citizens' and those who can be killed, tortured or segregated without risk of prosecution. Typically, this process takes the form of an escalatory relationship between an external threat that has been putatively identified by the state as real, and the withdrawal of democratic rights from those citizens who are seen as having a racial, cultural, religious or ethnic allegiance to the perpetrators of that threat. By intensifying their ideological and mythological inventions of the other, Western states constantly reopen the chance that the civic virtue of the police will fail and those who have been designated as bare life, or *Homo sacer*, will be interned or murdered. This, according to Agamben, is the 'objective' trajectory of liberal democracies. For insofar as the reversion to emergency powers has become the normal condition of politics, the world is poised between the tendency of Western states to become machines that pursue unconditionally the protection of their 'legitimate' citizens, and the destructive potential of those who have been damaged by the drift towards endemic biopolitical violence (1998: 176). Thus, the pivotal question that arises from this trajectory is concerned, firstly, with remembrance of the Nazi death camps as 'the most absolute *conditio inhumana* that has ever existed on earth' (1998: 166), and secondly, with the chance of a politics that could challenge the iteration of biopolitical sovereignty in which the event of Auschwitz has been caught up (2005: 61-63).

In his account of the structure of epiphylogenetic memory Stiegler maintains that 'we always understand the history of philosophy *qua* the most

radical form of the *knowledge of the de-fault as a history of mistakes, awkwardnesses, distortions, and sinister failings that had to be, or that will have had to be*' (1998: 210, authors italics). This suggests that the history of humanity, as the species whose evolution is originally technological, has a catastrophic tendency that cannot be overcome (as the means to this overcoming are always already technological), but which can be moderated by critical attention to the spiritual-*noetic* life that is essential to human society as such. The possibility of this moderation, which for Stiegler has always been at stake in Western philosophy, comes from the fact of humanity's *de-fault* of being, that is, from its reliance on technological programmes whose effects it cannot completely anticipate or control. Practical philosophical reflection, or *otium*, takes place *between* the demand for duration, stability and composition that has informed the history of Western metaphysics, and the disruptive effects of technology on the institutional forms in which those categories have been temporally organized (2011b: 116-119). Remembrance of the wars, genocides and exterminations which technological instruments have made possible therefore, opens the possibility of choosing to curtail the aesthetic, economic and technocratic compulsions that have come to dominate the process of cultural individuation in hyperindustrial societies. And so Stiegler's contention that the history of philosophy is the history of the spiritual-*noetic* capacity of human beings to reflect on the fate of their collective existence, brings together two apparently contradictory elements: the Nietzschean idea of *amor fati*, or love of fate, and the concept of a sacred responsibility to redeem the past and thereby ameliorate the future suffering of humanity.

In one of his last books, *Ecce Homo: How to Become What You Are*, Nietzsche remarked that

My formula for human greatness is *amor fati*: not wanting anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just enduring what is necessary, still less concealing it - all idealism is hypocrisy in the face of what is necessary - but loving it (2007: 35).

This seems to entail that the idea of *amor fati*, of loving fate, belongs to a philosophy of individual will that is entirely incompatible with an *ethical* remembrance of Auschwitz. Nietzsche's contention would seem to lend itself to those conservative theorists, such as Carl Schmitt, who see the fate of humanity as eternally dependent on the maintenance of friend-enemy distinctions in which all parties fulfil their obligation to be effective and respectable adversaries (1996: 27-37). This, of course, is not the import of Stiegler's remark on the necessity of regarding the 'sinister failures' of human history as events that '*will have had to be*'. Rather, his position is that the love of fate which is the horizon of the philosophical impulse in human beings arises from their originary technicity; it is constantly re-formed through the damages that are done through the very instruments that have produced their social, cultural and economic elevation. From the perspective of epiphylogenetic memory the necessity of remembering Auschwitz does not arise as a radical affirmation of the power of human beings to overcome the process of technological self-attrition by revitalizing the ethics of conflict. Ultimately, the responsibility of the *noetic* freedom which Stiegler identifies as the essence of philosophy, is to redeem a catastrophic fate that has not been

collectively willed, but which is the condition of a messianic demand that care should be taken of the human species as an organological totality (2010: 185-189). Thus, ethical recollection of Auschwitz has constantly to move between the Nietzschean determination to embrace the violent inevitabilities of human existence, which for Stiegler arise from its originary technicity, and the demand to consider the evil of the final solution exactly as it was enacted in the death camps - in all its psychological, technological and juridical perversity.

From the perspective of epiphylogenetic memory ethical remembrance of Auschwitz is essential to the future humanity of the human species. For insofar as it is the point at which the destruction of 'pathological' strains human life was condensed into a singular rational-bio-technological regimen, Auschwitz is an event that haunts every state of biopolitical exception that is declared after its occurrence. In Agamben's work, which, I have argued, proceeds from Arendt's account of the external relationship between law, technology and the organic being of the human species, the death camp is characterized by its complete suspension of the rights of the internees (*Halflinge*) and their subjection to death by the arbitrary decree of the SS officers (1998: 169-171). This, Agamben argues, this is the paradigm case of the biopolitical turn of sovereignty in Western politics. Ever since the Nazi genocide the state of exception, which is now the standard response of democratic states to the perceived threats of the globalized world, has become normalized, and this has led to a limitless proliferation of those who are designated as 'bare life' without rights or citizenship.

Thus, the ethico-political demand of Agamben's work on sovereignty is implicit in his account of the need to transform the biopolitical state into the



site of a '*bios* that is only its own *zoē*' (1998: 188). The question of the inclusive-exclusive integration of bare life (*zoē*) into the biopolitical organization of sovereignty, in other words, ought to become the defining political question of global-capitalist modernity. And yet, despite the analytical power with which this proposition is formulated in the concluding sections of *Homo Sacer*, its force seems to dissipate in the play between legal formalism and Heideggerian messianicity that is presented there. This is not to say that Agamben's work says nothing about the global-biopolitical regime that has taken shape since the Second World War. However, it seems clear that if there is to be a general economy of political sovereignty in which the autonomous existence of the individual as *bios* includes care for life as *zoē*, then this can only come into being if the fate of the species (the biopolitical attrition of the law that Agamben describes) includes the possibility of transforming the conditions through which humanity reproduces both itself as spirit and as organic life (Abbinnett, 2017: 64-89).

It is this possibility that, for Stiegler, is configured in the idea of originary technicity: the chance of redemption that is sustained by the techno-prosthetic experience of time which is unique to *Dasein*, and which is haunted by the fatal, Epimethean contingency of human life (Stiegler, 2015: 106-110). Without this originary provocation, the hope of transforming the state into a place of reflective desire and cosmopolitical hospitality would remain incorrigibly abstract and never penetrate the everyday economy of psychical and collective individuation (1998: 185-203). The spectres of Auschwitz that haunt the networks of biopolitical production therefore configure the radical evil of its occurrence within the economy of epiphylogenetic memory. For it is

the fact that these spectres are produced by the passage of the event into evolving systems of technological representation that, on the one hand, means we can never 'have done' with Auschwitz and, on the other, sustains the attachment of human culture to life (*zoë*) within the networks of technoscientific society.

This does not entail an obsession with trying to capture the literal event of Auschwitz, that is, computer modelling of the camps, more and more 'realistic' simulations of the process of extermination, and 4G programmes that allow virtual access to all the sites of the Final Solution. Rather, the ethico-political imperative of Stiegler's account of memory demands that we, as an ethnically differentiated species, move from the pure particularity of Auschwitz (as the 'final solution to the Jewish question') towards affective-aesthetic figurations of the event that are provoked by the perpetual vulnerability of life to biopolitical extermination. Clearly this is no easy task, as the ethical significance of Auschwitz is a fiercely disputed question that is entwined with the global simulation of memory. As a traumatological figure it has been constantly invoked in the discourses and mythologies of sovereignty and security that have followed the Second World War - from the original conflict with Palestine that arose from the creation of the State of Israel, to the radicalization of Christian, Islamic and Zionist movements that has happened since 9/11<sup>4</sup>. And yet it may be the case that the new forms of aesthetic and philosophical reflection that are made possible by the development of the technoscientific paradigm (the pharmacological eddies in the human experience of time that it perpetually creates) give rise to unanticipated forms

of recognition that remobilize the memory of the camps in ways that, partially and inadequately, redeem their existence.

Should we therefore 'love' Auschwitz as the revelation of our collective fate as human beings? Should we as a species be glad of the suffering that took place at Auschwitz and the network of death camps that stretched across Eastern Europe? The answer, of course, is no: a no that is beyond all consideration of the technological and economic evolution of Western modernity, and beyond every 'explanation' of the social, economic and psychical conditions that gave rise to the Nazi genocide. Derrida's account of the unconditional nature of hospitality is instructive here. He argues that the 'categorical imperative' of welcome to the stranger is simultaneously dependent on and independent of the violence that founds its necessity. This means that although the law is inseparable from historical conditions it cannot control, it retains an effectiveness that is distinct from who or what comes to threaten its existence (1997: 75-77). Both Agamben and Stiegler conceive this unconditional demand for hospitality/ethics as inseparable from the evolution of the human species as technological Dasein. For what has followed the event of Auschwitz is the merging of two unprecedented effects. The first is the tendency to biopolitical violence that has become the defining characteristic of international politics (Agamben, 2005: 3-4), and the second is the increasingly close relationship between the process of capitalization and the development of technoscientific programmes that have transformed the temporal economy of somatic, aesthetic and *noetic* life (Stiegler, 2011a: 187-190).

Agamben's work on the modern state, as we have seen, presents the normalization of exceptional measures as the paradigm of modern politics. With the expansion of the global economy, the primary function of the state has shifted from its constitutive role in the preservation of political culture, to that of protecting its population from the putative threat posed by refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, guest workers, disease carriers and terrorists. The nature of this shift is essentially biopolitical. For insofar as these constituencies are defined in terms of the threat they pose to the integrity of the biological and genetic stock of the nation, their existence as 'bare life' is subject firstly, to the mythologizing practices of culture industries and political interest groups, and secondly, to strategic actions through which the state withdraws, either partially or completely, the rights of those who come with nothing but their status as human beings. According to Agamben, this recourse to the state of exception, or *iustitium*, reveals the fact that 'citizenship' is no more than a fictive exemption from the trauma of life without juridical rights, and that this exemption can be withdrawn at any time on the basis of a presumed complicity with a particular external and/or internal threat (2005: 48-51) and (1998: 134). Thus, the stakes of this biopolitical turn are what Arendt conceived as the political legitimacy of power. For insofar as the state has all but given up its role in forming the moral life of its citizens in favour of protecting their economic rights and biopolitical utility, a distinct kind of political indifference has emerged that constantly increases the susceptibility of human beings to arbitrary violence (Arendt, 1969: 87) and (1998: 147-148).

The counterpart of this tendency, which is analysed in Stiegler's *Disbelief and Discredit*, is the transhumanist trajectory that is implicit in the relationship between neoliberal economics and the strategic capitalization of biomedical, mediatic and computational technologies. Stiegler claims that, increasingly, human subjects are incapable of the kind of *noetic* reflection through which the social, economic and political crises of technological modernity can be collectively mediated. This condition is related to the emergence of a transhumanist ideology that presents the prosthetic technologies through which life is supplemented, as instruments by which the somatic and intellectual capacities of human beings can be intensified without limit (2011a: 211-218) and (2011b: 7-10). It is this assumption that has become the guiding thread of the neoliberal imagination. For insofar as the adaptability of human beings to *any* prosthetic environment is simply assumed (as well as the potential for technological solutions to *all* technologically generated risks), the deployment of new systems has taken on a functional necessity that has exceeded the old 'sacrificial' forms of ethical life. If we are to survive as a species, the argument goes, we must adapt ourselves as quickly as possible to the new forms of prosthetic life that are challenging the culture of human mortality. It is through the imposition of this neoliberal mode of transhumanism that the spectre of Auschwitz returns. As the originary traumatype that was formed within the epiphylogenetic memory of the West, it is recalled to the questions of life, as *bios politicos*, that arise from, firstly, the virtual systems that aim at the total desublimation of desire, secondly, biomedical cosmesis that seeks the absolute perfection of physical existence, and thirdly, genetic technologies that attempt to extend indefinitely the

duration of human life. For it is in the radical ambiguity of these 'perfections', and in their transformation of the experience of care, religiosity and community that constitutes the being of technological Dasein, that Auschwitz haunts the biopolitical economy that has emerged in our own historical epoch.

### **Conclusion: Ethics and Testimony**

Human beings, as both Adorno and Arendt realized after the scale of the Final Solution was revealed, must resist the temptation to discharge the event of Auschwitz into the narrative and aesthetic forms of popular mythology (Adorno, 2005: 99) and (Arendt, 1994: 13-14). This is not, as Adorno maintained, primarily because of a responsibility to pre-empt the conditions of its repetition in Western liberal democracies, even though the Nazi genocide continues to haunt the impending breakup of the European Union and the right-wing populism this has provoked. Rather, as Arendt made clear in her commentary on the Eichmann trial and in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, it is the global diversification of the conditions under which life can be destroyed with banal indifference, that constitutes the demand for ethical remembrance (1977: 273) and (1979: 460-479). This returns us to Stiegler and Agamben's respective accounts of the relationship between law, testimony and inheritance, and to the specific question of how Auschwitz is to be remembered in the time of global-techno-scientific capitalism.

In *Remnants of Auschwitz* Agamben addresses the question of the witness, and the acts of *poiesis* through which he or she presents the fate of the victim who did not return from the camps. He quotes Primo Levi who, in *The Drowned and the Saved*, described the relationship between the survivor

and the victims who were liquidated, in the following way: 'I must repeat: we the survivors, are not the true witnesses . . . we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the Muslims [*Muselmänner*], the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have general significance.' (Levi quoted in Agamben, 1999: 33). For Agamben, this 'paradox of testimony' entails that the poet-witness occupies a particular position in the unfolding of language as a body of signs: his or her enunciation is what exceeds the corpus of conventional meanings which constitute the living present, and thereby opens the possibility of an ethical inheritance of the past (1999: 159-162). Testimony and *poiesis* therefore exist in an intimate relationship whose structure is revealed, firstly, through movements into language that are provoked by the encounter with inhuman modes of life, and secondly, the impossibility of representing these individual forms of existence (the *Muselmänner*) as elements of a progressive, dialectical history. The *poiesis* of testimony is related to an irreducible origin of language that cannot be presented within its system of linguistic signs (*langue*), and which founds the intimacy of the human and the inhuman that is the core of the subject-ego. As Agamben puts it, 'the speech [*parole*] of the witness bears witness to a time in which human beings did not yet speak; and so the testimony of human beings attests to a time in which they were not yet human.' (1999: 162). The event of Auschwitz therefore occurs as the sign of this originary structure of testimony, that is, as the impossibility of erasing the traumatological relationship of witness and victim, *Muselmänn* and survivor, from the

biopolitical organization of life that has come after the Nazi genocide (1999: 164-165).

From the perspective of epiphylogenetic memory this structure of testimony constitutes something like a pre-technological origin: the opposition between the human and the inhuman that founds language and subjectivity comes before the technological constitution of care that, according to Stiegler, is the origin of self-consciousness. For Agamben, the economy of 'subjectification-desubjectification' through which each living individual anticipates its impending loss of humanity, arises within a distribution of Being that 'gives' consciousness to the world as the place of testamentary responsibility (1999: 134-135). This concept of a demand that is constituted through the presence of trauma is close to Stiegler's account of the *poiesis* of artistic expression, as it is through the emergence of new modes of ethico-aesthetic performativity that exceed the schema of mass culture, that the biopolitical trajectory of human life sustains the possibility of its own subversion. The question of what these aesthetic forms might be, of course, requires careful analysis - for it is in the detail of their execution that the future of Auschwitz is configured. However, one of the primary reasons why Auschwitz should be regarded as a general schema of epiphylogenetic memory is the impossibility of its formal subsumption: its representation through haptic, or virtual, or prosthetic technologies always leaves a residue which those systems cannot absorb, and through which human mortality returns as an ethico-aesthetic demand. As such, its re-presentation is originally related to the fate of bare life (*zoë*) within the systems of biopolitical reproduction <sup>5</sup>. The importance of Stiegler's concept of epiphylogenesis



therefore, lies in the idea that the question of ethical remembrance cannot be separated from the virtual and biopolitical programmes that have become the universal condition of being and memory after Auschwitz (2009: 71-72).

Agamben's account of the purity of the structure through which the living individual is related to 'the inhuman' is, in the end, a Heideggerian construction that awaits the arrival of a redemptive *poiesis* from within the degraded culture of the nation state. For despite his claim in *The State of Exception* that 'the very possibility of distinguishing life and law, anomie and *nomos*, coincides with their articulation through the biopolitical machine', he ends up soliciting the creation of a political space 'which severs the nexus between violence and the law' (Agamben, 2005: 86-87). The voice of testimony, in other words, is the foundation of a pure law of remembrance, or 'profanation', that transforms the catastrophic potential of biopolitics after Auschwitz (2009: 17-19). For Stiegler, on the other hand, the possibility of ethical remembrance arises from the originary relationship between organic life and its technological supplements, as it is in this proximity that the *noetic* culture of human beings is enacted. As I said in the introduction, the evolution of the technoscientific mode of production in the industrial democracies of the West, has given rise to a specific set of effects (the computational analytics of the programming and culture industries, the biopolitical ideology of globalization, the genocidal mythologies of religious fundamentalisms and ultra-nationalisms, and the transhumanist imaginary of neoliberal economics) whose aggregation has formed a new economy of fascistic politics. This economy is dispersed and heterogeneous in its effects, and has evolved through the tension that exists between the autonomous trajectory of

technoscientific programmes and the religious and nationalistic essentialisms that are their antithesis. From the perspective of epiphylogenetic memory the event of Auschwitz is sustained as a 'tensor' within this technoscientific economy: it is the figure that speaks through the clash of religious and technological immortalities that traverse the geopolitical organization of life; it is the traumatic memory that haunts the ultra-nationalisms that have warped the sovereignty of liberal-democratic states; and it is the presence of 'flame and ashes' in the fundamentalisms and sectarianisms that demand the annihilation of the infidel, idolater, and the unbeliever. Thus, to remember Auschwitz, in Stiegler's sense of *noetic* inheritance, is to experience and express the future of humanity that inhabits the unfolding of media-bio-technological prostheses; it is to encounter an event whose affective power returns constantly to the heterogeneous scenes of its exorcism, and which points towards the necessity of a sacrificial love that is sustained in its terrible facticity.

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In the paper I will follow Giorgio Agamben's use of the term 'Auschwitz' to refer to the Nazi genocide, rather than 'the Holocaust'. In his book *Remnants of Auschwitz* he argues, firstly, that Elie Wiesel's much regretted appropriation of the term holocaust from the scriptural economy of Judaism implies 'an unacceptable equation between altars and crematoria', and secondly, that in Europe the theological sense of the term had, long before the genocide, passed into a vernacular associated with violence against indigenous Jews. To use the term 'Holocaust', or even 'Shoah', therefore, is 'to continue a semantic heredity that is from its inception anti-Semitic' (1999: 31).

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<sup>2</sup> Lyotard's account of the tensor in *Libidinal Economy* sets out the impossibility of representing the 'impossible' traits and effects that are gathered in the living individual, through the totalizing power of the proper name. He presents the schizophrenic personality of Daniel Schreber as the extreme point of the legal, moral, erotic and aesthetic conflicts through which the self exists in space and time, and by which s/he constantly exceeds static economy of the name/sign (1993: 54-55). The fact of Auschwitz, and this is something Lyotard takes up later on in *The Differend*, is a historical tensor (1988: 86-91). For insofar as its evil was constituted through a singular-infinite economy of racial myth, biotechnological science, bureaucratic procedure, ideological zeal, scatological enjoyment and psychological inertia, it exists as a demand for ethical remembrance that is always projected into the future of biotechnological life (1993: 60).

<sup>3</sup> One of the difficult and overdetermined questions addressed by Derrida in *Of Spirit* is that of Heidegger's relationship to the cultural and philosophical origins of Nazism. Was his use of the category of spirit (*Geist*) after *Being and Time* a reflection of the resurgence of German nationalism, was it a cryptic declaration of his support for the 'inner greatness' of the NSDAP, or was it deployed as a continuation of his critique of ontology? Derrida's answer is that it is all three, but that the central motif of "spirit" (which appears under erasure or in quotation marks throughout Heidegger's work in the 1930s) reveals the fundamental tendency of his philosophy, which is to guide, to inspire and to compel the activity of Dasein in relation to its vocation: the revelation of Being. Derrida argues that the epoché used by Heidegger in relation to the power of spirit in the formation of man's historical destiny, ends up as an avowal of the primacy of German culture and language that is all the more powerful for its circumlocutions (1989: 99-102). The question (*Fragen*), which emerged in *Being and Time* as the occasion of Dasein's radical self-individuation, is shifted into a form whose tropes of fire, destiny, leadership and inspiration secretly reflected and intensified the cult of popular messianism that was mobilized by the NSDAP in its Aryan mythology. The pivotal issue here concerns what might be left of the ethical imperative that Heidegger sought to open within the fundamental ontology of Dasein *after* this reversion to the economy of spirit. For Derrida and Stiegler, what remains is the radical contingency that haunts the totality of the subject and its techno-symbolic attachments. For Agamben it is the originary relationship of witness, victim and testimony that is the essence of self-conscious life (1999: 164-165).

<sup>4</sup> Jacqueline Rose makes exactly this point in *The Question of Zion*. She contends that collective memory of the Holocaust as an event in Jewish history 'has had the most profound effect on the birth and subsequent evolution of the fledgling [Israeli] nation-state'. Shame at the lack of resistance of European Jews to the Nazi genocide, in other words, has been mobilized as an absolute determination to overcome the constraints of conscience in dealing with any and all who threaten the existence of the Israeli homeland (2005: 140-141).

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<sup>5</sup> This point is made in Dorota Golańska's article 'Bodily Collisions: Towards a New Materialist Theory of Art' (2005: 17). She argues that, from the perspective of a materialist version of memory studies, public art that successfully provokes a reflexive, cross-generational inheritance of the Nazi genocide, does so by bringing together both the narrative/symbolic and the traumatic/incommunicable dimensions that comprise the facticity of Auschwitz. Thus, Peter Eisenman's *The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* and Daniel Libeskind's *The Garden of Exile* attempt to configure the interruption of progressive historical time that occurred in the death camps, and to express their always-impeding return to the integration of life, capital, and being that is the implicit telos of our historical present.