The Ghost in the Interview: Spectres of Mnemotechnics in "Our Automated Lives"

Nicholas Chare & Marcel Swiboda

The interview reproduced below between Bernard Stiegler and Denis Podalydès was conducted as part of the build up to the fifth annual *Les [rencontres] inattendues, musique et philosophie* [The Unexpected (Meetings), Music and Philosophy] festival, in Tournai in Belgium from 28th – 30th August 2015. This outing of the festival was the culmination of a series of events that commenced in 2014 around the theme of "the unexpected [*inattendu*]", including a series of improvised encounters involving philosophers, musicians, actors, writers and comedians and a summer school [*académie d'été*] scheduled as a prelude to the festival proper. Tasked with programming the 2015 festival, Bernard Stiegler opted to interpret the music-philosophy conjuncture in terms of his longstanding intellectual and practical engagements with the issue of technology's role in society. Rather than celebrate technology as a vehicle for unbridled innovation, however, Stiegler's ambition has been to mobilize digital tools as devices for engendering creative and critical rapports with technology to try to ameliorate our present social conditions. In the case of *Les [rencontres] inattendues*, this largely consisted in the use of networked devices to allow amateur spectators as well as professional participants to document and debate their experiences of the "unexpected".

Extracts of the interview, which form a "tertiary memory" of *Les [rencontres] inattendues*, are posted on the video sharing website YouTube.[1] The mise-en-

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[1] The concept of "tertiary memory" is adapted by Stiegler from the concepts of "primary" and "secondary retention" as elaborated by the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl to account for the relationship between present perceptions and subsequent recollections. Stiegler's philosophy mobilizes this third term alongside Husserl's concepts to demon-

scène is seemingly a product of happenstance. Stiegler sits on a bench, his head usually haloed by floral wallpaper, pink cyclamens or roses. Podalydès perches on a sofa positioned in front of a door of artfully distressed wood and some bookshelves. A standing lamp semi-illuminates his face. The actor enjoys more dramatic lighting. Background sounds, including a bell ringing, the clatter of cutlery and occasional crashes, acousmatically intervene in the conversation.[2] The ensemble of images and sounds here collectively constitute an audiovisual flux that crosshatches with the "fluxes of consciousness" of the spectators, by means of technologies usually mobilized in order to remotely "hypersynchronizing" consciousnsesses (2011b, 85).[3] To study, or analyze, these videos then would be to explore critically the imbrications of the audiovisual fluxes and fluxes of consciousness *diachronically* (52). [4] The interview is not being conducted behind closed doors. There is no "black box" to decipher here. Instead we are invited to read the interview as foregrounding the variability of interpretation itself (2017, 75-6).

   The point of view of the camera is always limited. Podalydès and Stiegler, for instance, are consistently filmed in medium shot. This permits the viewer to see some of the gestures, the chattering fingers, which accompany their words.[5] Hands sometimes appear and then drop out of frame. These comportments consist in so many corporeal and gestural habitual dispositions. As such they are comprised of so many "automatisms' which, when confronted with the vicissitudes of unforeseen contingency, become "disautomatized".[6] There is no use of

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strate how technology, or more precisely *technics* (diverse modes of making, doing, acting or thinking involving the use of instruments, tools or symbols), plays the role of rendering memories exterior to the organism in ways that outlive it. For an account of Husserl's concepts, see Husserl, 2012. For a reading of Stiegler's concept of tertiary memory in relation Husserl, see in particular Stiegler, 2009.

[2] The term "acousmatic" was developed by the theorist of sound Michel Chion out of the work of the composer and pioneer of *musique concrète*, Pierre Schaffer, who described the spatialization of sound in terms of "*acoustmêtre*"—literally "to place acoustically". Chion used the term acousmatic to describe sounds arising in a given space but whose source remains absent or unknown. As such it is often used as an audio correlate to mise-en-scène in film analysis.

[3] For a detailed account of the imbrications of the fluxes of images and those of consciousness, see Stiegler, 2009a. NB. The concept of "fluxes of consciousness" here is also adapted from Husserl, see Husserl, 2012.

[4] Regarding diachronization, see Stiegler, 2017. It is arguable that the division of the video into the separate clips with the marked contrasts in setting as highlighted here themselves invite a diachronic reading.

[5] Sigmund Freud refers to "chattering finger-tips", to gestures that betray inner thoughts, in his case study of Dora (Freud 1990 [1905], 114).

[6] In his recent work, Stiegler has started to explore the relationship between diverse instances of "automatism"—mechanical, biological, organic and machinic—and what he

zoom to signal particularly emotional or important moments. There are no close-ups to generate a feeling of intimacy with the viewer. The medium shot is the shot of choice for the interview. It is dispassionate, seemingly providing a looking without prejudice. By convention these kinds of shooting techniques are used to try to stage objectivity, but such a staging, of necessity, undoes the objectivity it seeks to embody. It can only ever grant the appearance of that which has taken place. What we are left with are apparitions.

The liminal relationship between appearance and reality and the troubling of the putative opposition separating these realms is a key theme in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, a play that is referenced more than once in the interview. One of the reasons Podalydès and Stiegler appreciate *Hamlet* is because a ghost is central to the tragedy. Jacques Derrida also made much of this dimension to the play as it intersects with what the drama reveals about temporality. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida describes a ghost as "neither substance, nor essence, nor existence," a thing that *"is never present as such,"* a thing that is no thing (Derrida 1994, xviii). In a "televised" discussion on the topic of ghosts in relation to time, Derrida and Stiegler debate the question of what part technology might play in mediating such spectres, leading the latter to state that mediating transmission consists in the "irreducible distension between the event and its recording" (Derrida and Stiegler 2002, 125).

The interview embodies this distension. As such it operates in a complex temporality. Firstly it is as if there is a double-clock at work. Once Stiegler wraps things up, thanking Podalydès for his time, the actor asks the time. Here one witnesses a disjuncture between clock-time and "real-time".[7] To complicate matters further a third kind of time is in play—an extemporary time which cleaves both the time of rational calculation and the "live" time of technological mediation (Stiegler and Derrida 2002, 125). The men are immersed in an interplay of their thoughts—in which it is the vicissitudinous objects of thought, or "*noemata*" that haunt the audiovisual proceedings.[8] Occasionally, these noetic encounters are interrupted. In one of the videos, the door behind Podalydès

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terms "disautomatization". Rather than simply oppose these terms to one another, Stiegler reads them as two elements of an imbricated process by means of which habits, gestures, or routines can, under certain conditions, engender unforeseen transformations. For an account of these relationships, see Stiegler, 2015 and Swiboda's article in this issue.

[7] For an exploration of this relationship in the work of Bernard Stiegler, see Stiegler, 2011a, in particular his reading of Alfred Hitchcock's television play *Four O'Clock* (NBC TV, 1957).

[8] "*Noemata*" is another conceptual term adapted by Stiegler from the philosophy of Husserl. In the latter's work, this term is used to describe "thought objects", such as (non-linguistic) ideas. For an account of Husserl's reading of this concept, see Husserl, 2014. For a reading of Stiegler's take-up of this concept, see Stiegler, 2013.

squeaks open as he talks of clichés. Less than a minute later, the door opens again as Podalydès describes improvisation exercises for young actors. These untimely occurrences supervene the proceedings in ways the interlocutors must extemporaneously accommodate, akin to how Hamlet must attend to the revenants that weigh heavily on his "noetic soul".[9]

In the same spirit of remembering what is forgotten and affirming haunting and happenstance, this translation of the interview potentially captures certain words and phrases that would be akin to wraiths, insubstantial, barely perceptible, in "real-time" viewing conditions. As such, the translation also seeks to channel the spirit of the events it textually inscribes—both the interview and the festival—in all of their vicissitudes, whether of image, sound, decor or milieu, engaging actively and critically with these with the aid of the digital networked technologies of recording that afford us access to these events—even if only as an *apres-coup*.[10] The act of transcription involves a labour of attention that the viewing of YouTube videos would likely not usually be subject to. Such efforts at mediation take inspiration from Stiegler's own endeavours to promulgate a "critical culture of the image" by mobilizing "*analusis*", "unravelling", or "decomposition".[11] For example, specific sections, quiet or excessively noisy, have been repeatedly played in an effort to find the right words for them.

Roland Barthes (2002 [1974]) famously explores aspects of the transformative process of transcription in "*De la parole à l'écriture*", an essay in which he also employs the notion of gains and losses to interrogate the nature of the procedure of transforming the spoken into written, the motional into the fixed. This act of fixing has been extensively analysed by Stiegler, a propos the work of the French historian and theorist of languages Sylvain Auroux, on "grammatization", which describes how prosthetic extension functions through the discretization of continuities, whether the continuities in question are those of language (e.g. alphabetization) or of images or non-verbal sounds.[12] The process of discretization is what Auroux and Stiegler term grammatization. For Barthes,

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[9] The concept of "noetic soul" is developed in the work of the ancient philosopher Aristotle. He distinguishes between three different yet related kinds of "soul [*psūchê*]": "vegetative", "sensible" and "noetic [*noētikós*]", the last of which is intellective. For Aristotle's definitions of "soul", see Aristotle, 2016. For Stiegler's interpretation of Aristotle's distinction, see Stiegler, 2011.

[10] For Derrida and Stiegler, the temporality of deferral consists in events only coming to be known after-the-fact. For Derrida on the "*après-coup*", see Derrida, 1976. For Stiegler on this term, see Stiegler, 2013.

[11] For an explanation of Stiegler's conception of the "critical culture of the image", see Stiegler, 2002. Working with the etymology of the word "analysis", Stiegler draws out the term's ancient associations with "unravelling" and "decomposition", as in breaking things down into their consituent parts. See Stiegler, 2013.

[12] See Sylvain Auroux, 1994; Stiegler, 2011.

speech is always staged for a public. He calls it *théâtrale* (Barthes 2002, 537). Transcription, however, is doubly scripted, depriving speech of its characteristic uncertainties. This raises a particular challenge for the one tasked with transcribing, in particular when the focus is improvisation: How does one keep the fluxes and flows in play, in public-facing ways, when the double-scripted character of transcription consists in the discretization of continuities?

With a mind to meeting this challenge, our version of the interview sifts through the verbal material while retaining the coarse elements. We sometimes use ellipses to signify moments of the trailing off of thoughts before dots are joined up again and discoursing resumes. We also retain repetitions, those false-starts as words are searched for and decided upon. Additionally we have chosen to include interjections of affirmation or agreement, those backchannel responses that signal little more than continued attentiveness. We have retained phatic expressions that function as continuers or assessments offering no additional information but serving to index attention, comprehension, or perhaps affirmation. Nonetheless we have still lost many of those instances of trailing off, of over-talking, of mmm's of assent, those phonetic ornaments that enrich spoken dialogue yet do not translate well to a written representation of it. We also lose instances such as Stiegler adjusting his microphone while he is discussing a death in Fanny and Alexander, the noise making his words hard to hear, causing a kind of chance acoustic death mirroring the death he seems to be describing. This haunting poetry is absent from our staging of this play of voices.

The videos of the interviews, however, already possess absences in addition to those we have previously mentioned such as the world beyond the video frame: a world heard but not seen. The videos also betray acts of censorship as there are numerous cuts. The cuts, the edits, betray a structuring and censoring of the spontaneous. We have indicated when such cuts occur by inserting "[Cut]" in our transcription. We therefore draw attention to what appears to be a tidying up of the encounter, a series of decisions indexed through missing chunks of time. These do not impede the flow of the interview but it is clear moments of it are missing. These lost moments are also rendered apparent by occasional references to topics previously discussed during the interview that are absent from the six segments available on You Tube, most notably a discussion about Phaedra. Video, like transcription, possesses malleability, permits degrees of intervention. What you will now read is therefore an index of a process of negotiation. It is also an example of a kind of improvisation as we have sought ways to provide a feel of the spoken version.

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