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Bernard Stiegler's postfoundational aesthetics and gestural apparatuses for a memory to come

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Abstract. This article explores Bernard Stiegler's philosophical approach to culture in dialogue with Oliver Marchart's postfoundational framework and conflictual aesthetics. Through the exposition of two different cases of gestural devices, it exposes Stiegler's potential postfoundational aesthetics as an attempt to establish the necessary conditions for re-thinking the grounded-ungrounded existing relationship between humans, technical objects, and the composition of potential realities to grasp from an autopoietic relationship. These artistic and cultural examples are considered critical concepts that enhance and interrupt the philosophical discourse. The article argues that Stiegler's aesthetics is committed to the capacity that art, as a technology of the spirit, can contribute as agency in shaping public power, even when these agents are not directly in conflict and develop lesser and fragile performative technics through which a memory becomes present again.

Keywords: Bernard Stiegler, postfoundational, aesthetics, arts, gestures, apparatuses, technics.

INTRODUCTION: THE GHOST DANCE

The technique is a support of memory. And that means that the technique is the condition of constitution of relation to the past¹.

The message Wovoka received from God itself during one of several visits and visions ignited the flame of a movement. The Ghost Dance was a collective, social, and cultural gestural apparatus spread throughout the United States. This event appeared in the recent history of the colonisation of America (Mooney [1896]; Stewart [1977]; Warren, [2015])².

¹ «La technique est un support de la mémoire. Et cela signifie que la technique est la condition de constitution du rapport au passé» (Barison, Ross, [2004]).

² James Mooney was an American ethnographer who did the first and most important research on the phenomenon of the Ghost Dance. As he himself describes in his monumental work on it, he spent more than two years visit-

The Ghost Dance was a spiritual movement initially rooted in the visions of an elder holy man named Wodziwob (Carroll et al. [2004]: 127), who foresaw the renewal of the Earth and how to help to the situation the Paiute tribe was experiencing:

The great underlying principle of the Ghost dance doctrine is that the time will come when the whole Indian race, living and dead, will be reunited upon a regenerated earth, to live a life of aboriginal happiness, forever free from death, disease, and misery. (Mooney [1965]: 20)

During this period, many people died in contact with European diseases, especially because of a typhoid epidemic in 1867. In his vision, Wodziwob saw a cataclysm that removed all the Europeans, leaving the land for the Indians. He died in 1872. On January 1, 1889, another holy man had visions that echoed those of Wodziwob. Wovoka, or Jack Wilson, was a Northern Paiute. He saw the European settlers leaving or disappearing, the buffalo returning, and the land finally restored to Indian peoples (Mooney [1896]: 777). In James Mooney's report, he asserts that Wovoka had a vision that lately was transmitted by different visitors. Originally, as Mooney states of his conversation with Wovoka, the vision was about peace between native Americans and the whites' settlers. It is later that in the progress of its communication that the vision changed slightly between tribes and developed an interpretation on the disappearance of the whites. Mooney comments this discrepancy in his report reporting that the «(He) earnestly repudiated any idea of hostility toward the whites, asserting that his religion was one of universal peace» (Mooney [1896]: 772).

ing, living with the American tribes, and even participating in the dance. In one of his several journeys, he took with him a Kodak camera and made some photographs of the dance and the trance. Mooney did this work under the auspices of the Bureau of American Ethnology, within the Smithsonian Institution (see Mooney [1896]: 654). For more images and sound records: <https://www.loc.gov/item/00694139/>; <https://archive.org/details/Collected-WorksOfJamesMooney>,

Wovoka was raised in a white family and was exposed to Christianity (Mooney [1896]: 765)³. This can explain why his messages included a series of references to Jesus Christ and the return of the Messiah (Charles River Editors [2022]: 16)⁴. Many leaders of Indian communities saw in Wovoka's visions a new possibility to free their lands and people, and they also found the technic that was needed to reach this purpose: a dance. Dance has been, together with songs and words, one of the main technics through which America's original inhabitants have searched to achieve their spiritual and material aims, such as healing wounded or stressed communities and bodies, influencing particular events, or connecting with spirits and forces beyond the human realm (Kurath [2022]; Bell [2007]; Silver, Wilson [1988]). The Ghost Dance was based already on a long tradition of round dances common to many Indian peoples. These round dances were always communal, social, and healing based. Participants generally danced, holding hands in circles, swaying rhythms between bodies, stomps, and songs.

What does the Ghost Dance have to do with an approach to Bernard Stiegler's aesthetics? I suggest that its example immediately exposes the hypothesis of gestural apparatuses for collective memories to come. It makes a case for Stiegler's understanding of the condition of art, understood as a technique of collective knowledge and memory holder. Before going any further, however, we must describe a second feature of the Ghost

³ Wovoka, as Mooney states, was the son of another prophet, Tāvībo. His tribe, the Paiutes, lived near the Walker River Reservation, in western Nevada. The Paiutes were allowed to work for the settlers. This situation allowed Wovoka to be 'attached to the family of a ranchman in Mason valley, named David Wilson, who took an interest in him and bestowed on him the name of Jack Wilson' (Mooney [1896]: 765). For further references on Wovoka's life see Mooney (1986): 770 and followings.

⁴ «Wovoka worked for several years on the ranch of David and Abigail Wilson in the Mason Valley. (...) The Wilsons were deeply religious Presbyterians, and the family provided Wovoka with ample opportunity to hear readings from the Bible, prayers and conversations about religion» (Charles River Editors [2022]: 16).



Figure 1. Photo by James Mooney, 1890. See Warren (2021).

Dance as an event, which should reinforce its relevance in the context of an introduction to Stiegler's philosophical thinking.

This second feature has to do with one of the forms through which the visions and the Ghost Dance as a practice to perform were distributed at that moment, in particular one of them: letters sent by post. The spiritual and political leaders of the Indian communities constantly sent letters to other leaders, asking them to join forces in producing, forming, and realizing the dance. It was vital for them to have as many people as possible involved in carrying the dance out. This methodology of dissemination was made clearly possible by a technical factor, proper to the industrialisation that had accompanied colonization, i.e., the functional nationwide mail system that crossed the territories claimed by the Government of the United States. We can see that the dance apparatus could reach more people thanks to the existence of an industrialised communication device. Precisely because of the living conditions of Indian people in reserves, the mail system provided them with a technology of transmission, exchange and distribution of ideas that would have been unthinkable before (Gage [2020]: 19)⁵. And in

⁵ Letters were not the only media or technology used by the communities. There were also a lot of travels by messengers, going and coming between territories, allowing

fact, it was the elevated number of letters sent during a short period that alerted the American State authorities on the phenomenon of the Ghost Dance. Its subsequent prohibition and the persecution and assassination of Indian leaders who promoted it reveals the impact the Ghost Dance had at that moment, as well as its central role in Indian peoples' struggle against the colonial force of the United States Government (Brown [1970]; Carroll et al. [2004]; Green [2014]).

The end of the movement happened through a massacre by US Army. On December 29, 1890, near Wounded Knee Creek, on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, the Miniconjou (Sioux) surrendered to Col. James W. Forsyth. During the process a man began to dance the Ghost Dance and the 7th Cavalry opened fire. Between 250 to 300 people were killed that day, almost half of whom were women and children. Wounded Knee Massacre was the last major armed conflict between the United States Army and the Plains Indians. After it, the remaining Indian tribes were subdued or forcibly assimilated

the ideas and news spread throughout the states and reservations. Nevertheless, these trips were also made easier by the rail network functioning at that moment in the States: «Native Americans made at least twelve hundred trips between western reservations, and probably many more, from 1880 to 1890» (Gage [2020]).

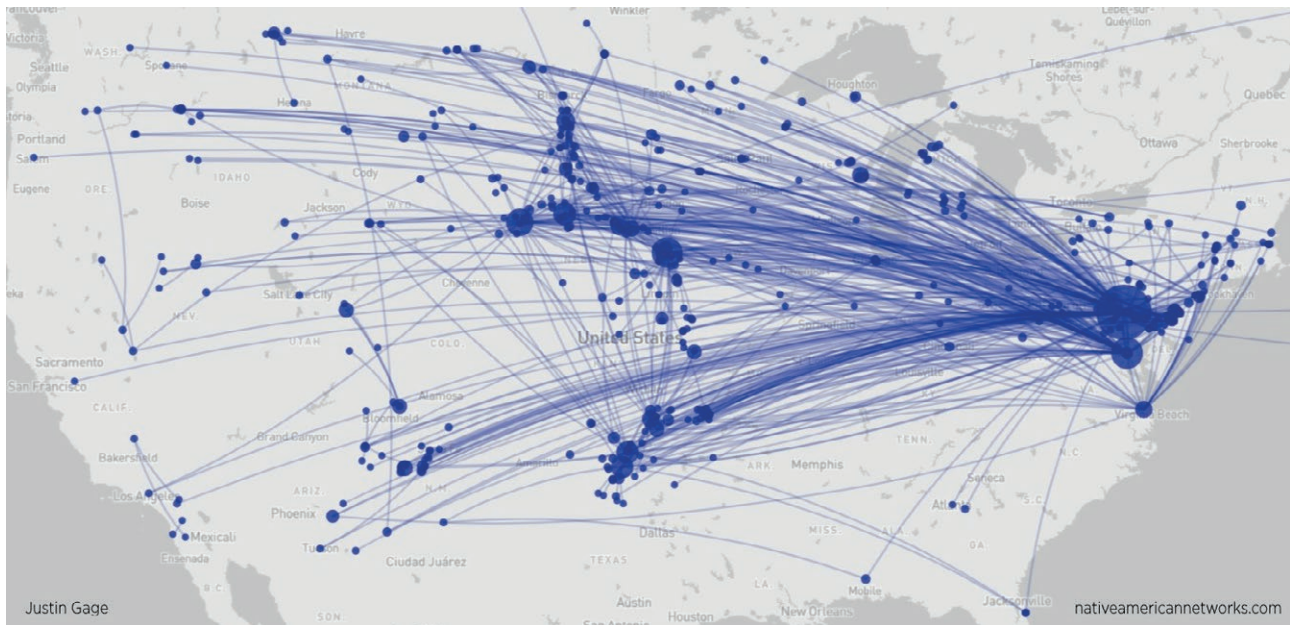


Figure 2. Map showing the letters sent by Native Americans between 1876-1896. See Gage (2020).

into white US society. It is also clear that after the massacre, Wovoka instructed other leaders in the native communities to stop the ghost dance. But the dance resisted until today, disguised through different rituals⁶.

POSTFOUNDATIONAL AESTHETICS

Today we need to understand the process of technical evolution, given that we are experiencing the deep opacity of technics. Stiegler (1998): 21

In his book *Post-Foundational Political Thought. Political difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*, the political theorist and philosopher Oliver Marchart explains that post-foundationalism implies a «constant interrogation of metaphysical foundations – such as totality, universality, essence, and ground» (Marchart [2007]: 2). It contrasts with what can be called foundationalist theories, which assume that societies, and

cultures, can be «grounded on principles that are (1) undeniable and immune to revision and (2) located outside society and politics» (Marchart [2007]: 11, quoting, Herzog [1985]: 20). According to Marchart, what distinguishes post-foundational thinkers such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Claude Lefort, Alain Badiou and Ernesto Laclau, is their interest in the processes of grounding and ungrounding of all social beings (Marchart [2007]: 9). Their philosophies are theorizing «the conditions of possibility for discursive structures and identities to appear, as well as the conditions of impossibility for them to ever become fully constituted and saturated» (Palonen, Sundell [2019]: 3). Marchart thus proposes a definition of a post-foundationalist constellation at the «realization of the groundlessness of the social as the entirety of the discursive» (Marchart [2007]: 33). This moment of groundlessness and contingency resides in the political, which, in post-foundational philosophies crucially differs from politics.

Marchart (2021) goes further in his postfoundational definition and explores its relationship with the sphere of the arts and politics in a second book titled *Conflictual Aesthetics: Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere*. In this book, Marchart criti-

⁶ For more on Wounded Knee, see Brown (1970) and Greene (2014).

cises what he calls the «spontaneous ideology of art», whose main champion and legitimiser is, in his view, the French philosopher Jacques Rancière as his main champion and legitimizer:

Although Ranciere's theory is widely read as a new approach to political aesthetics, it is actually antipolitical, as it provides the art field with ideological arguments against any explicit politicization. This appeal's to be the reason for the unrivalled success of his theory within the art field, as it allows antipolitical artists and curators to claim that what they produce or exhibit is political, even though it is entirely detached from any concrete project that would threaten art's autonomy. (Marchart [2021]: 13)

Marchart claims that the «spontaneous ideology of art» depoliticizes the capacity of the arts by assuming a pre-given political condition:

This ideology is structured around a paradoxical trope: not that art, according to its functionaries, is non-political. It is political, but it is political, we are told, precisely in being not political. Art's true politics resides in its complexity, obliqueness, and remoteness from every political practice in the strict sense. The less art is explicitly political, we are led to conclude from this, the more political it actually is. For this peculiar reason, we do not need explicitly political art. (Marchart [2021]: 12-13)

As an example of this ideology, he mentions Claire Bishop's (2012) approach, which is a reactualisation of Ranciere's claims on the political of all artistic practices. Marchart proposes instead a «conflictual aesthetics» that is based on an antagonism within the political field. Conflict aesthetics will be that of «propagating, agitating, and organizing as three interconnected ways of rehearsing antagonism» (Marchart [2021]: 30). It is the expression of the conflict, as well as its visualizations and enaction that allow the emergence of an indisposition within the rutinary practices of social institutions. I suggest that Stiegler's account on the cultural sphere is akin with Marchart's postfoundational thinking on aesthetics on this particular aspect. It is precisely in the cultural

sphere that the disruptive capacity of the neoliberal capitalist system erodes the political capacities of communities. When the techno-industrial project continues to expand in the fields of genetic and neuronal controlling, through technological devices that are meant to enhance our mental and physical capacities of experiences, it is certainly through a cultural sedimentation of disruptions, or that of psycho-social traumas that the performative practices of collective bodily devices still can contra-effect and affect. I will now focus on this issue and examine Stiegler's idea on the role artists should have within communities, beyond a Western institutional definition of the arts, and within the disrupting conditions of suppression and oppression we experience.

It is not possible here to unfold an entire critic to Marchart's proposal, but it is certainly necessary to note that there is a difference between what Marchart considers as political art, or activism, which conceptually works within a tradition of European models of modern democracy and political participatory struggle, and the practices portrayed in this article, which cannot be considered forms of *artivism* in the sense Marchart exposes. The examples in this article subtract themselves from a direct antagonism, and they do not participate in the same sense to the structural tradition Marchart assumes. His examples have as their main territory of discussion the recent history of Europe, or the Global North, which leaves outside the references to paradigmatic actions that occurred under different or marginal political and historical conditions. The practices described in the article sustain themselves in their own material occurrence without needing the recognition of their occurrence from the hegemonic discourses of power in place. In fact, they happen infrapolitically, referring here to James C. Scott's notion regarding the arts of not-being governed (Scott [2009]). They pertain to a dislocated territoriality that stays in relation to the European tradition but happens outside and marginally to that context.

A postfoundational aesthetics, then, should be an aesthetics that withdraws itself from given essences that have built it, or are still building it.

In the same way that postfoundational philosophy operates a differentiation between politics and the political, it would be necessary to distinguish aesthetics from the aesthetical. A postfoundational aesthetics can only be a deconstructive gesture, like in the cases of Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean Luc Nancy. A gesture of withdrawal or, in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's terms, «retreat», which constitutes a «retracing of the political, remarking it, by raising the question in a new way» (Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy [1997]: 112; Marchart [2007]: 64). In that sense, it certainly complicates the linearity of any origin that would have found a destiny to progress towards. Marchart understands that withdrawal gesture, constitutive of the postfoundational critic, as an active form of forcing the given conditions of relationality within a society. This gesture of retreat will enable a dislocation in the ordered diagram of singularities in a «specific social or communal location», retracing them from different angles, and potentially composing new paths of collectivity:

If they do not occupy a specific social or communal location, as they (singularities) only arise through and by the act of sharing, if they do not relate to the whole of community (to the communion as the One), but rather to the very withdrawal of community as a whole, then one is forced to approach the questions of relation from the angle of division, of connection from the angle of disconnection, of community from the angle of its retreat, and of communion from the angle of its disruption. (Marchart [2007]: 74)

Why should we situate Stiegler's philosophy within this set of thinkers or the postfoundational milieu, and why is it interesting? Stiegler shares the same *constant interrogation*, a deconstructive gesture. His work also considers an element that goes beyond the Heideggerian tradition of understanding technology as mere calculability. The general organology Stiegler proposes as a method already sizes this condition of a postfoundational critic. Because of the current «stage of organological development – that is of technological development which does, in general, modify both psy-

chosomatic and social organizations but today does so in an accelerated way» (Stiegler [2020]: 73), Stiegler's philosophy attempts to establish the necessary conditions for re-thinking the grounded-ungrounded existing relationship between humans, technical objects, and the composition of potential realities to grasp from that autopoietic relationship. Stiegler's questioning of the arts in his work considers this creative and relational complexity, a complexity based on the fact that the history of art, if there is one, belongs to a multi-localised and multi-layered terrain that does not coincide with a teleontological political destiny or project of European origins.

What does *epokhe* mean? It means interruption, suspension. And it is in this sense that Husserl's phenomenological method takes up this term. But it also means epoch, that is, collective individuation. Individuation: this is what occurs in a noetic milieu, inasmuch as it is noetic only to the extent that we can tear ourselves away from it only intermittently, and, in so doing, trans-form it. Individuation means constant trans-formation. (Stiegler [2020]: 161)

Before going further, we should say something about Stiegler's use of the term «technics», which confront us with the core of his philosophical project. Bernard Stiegler's major trilogy is titled of *La technique et les temps*⁷ (see Stiegler [1994]; Stiegler [1996]; Stiegler [2001]). He uses the notion of technics to refer to what he calls «inorganic organized beings» (Stiegler [1998]: 17). What Stiegler establishes early on in his work is the relational formation that exists between humans and technical objects. They belong in certain sense together, to their reciprocal constitution. The technical object becomes an element of exteriorisation that creates a new relation towards the human and the environment. The creation of tools, technics, creates the human (Stiegler [1998]), because it com-

⁷ In 2018 Fayard Éditions published the three volumes together in one book. I have mainly used this edition as a reference together with the English translations published by Stanford University Press in 1998, 2008 and 2010 respectively.

poses a new territory of perception and cognition of the lived experience, both individually and collectively. As Stiegler writes in the general introduction to *Technics and Time*: «As a “process of exteriorization”, technics is the pursuit of life by means other than life» (Stiegler [1998]: 17). The technical objects create a relational memory that traces towards the past, both in terms of genetic memory and memory of the central nervous system. According to Stiegler, there are three types of memory: «genetic memory, epigenetic memory, and epiphylogenetic memory» (Stiegler [1998]: 177; Roberts [2005]). Therefore, the technical objects cannot be understood as mere tools created or used by humans. The evolution of their forms, and the dynamics they formed between themselves and with the environments they inhabit, are breaking the existent boundaries of relational life. For Stiegler this change calls for a *new consideration of technicity*. Because technics «is woven into the development of humanity» (Abbinnett [2018]: 13).

Art is, for Stiegler, the unexpected opening source of a process of collective individuation (Stiegler [2020]: 74), through which we all have the «potential to receive and to disseminate the exclamatory gesture of the other» (Abbinnett [2018]: 140). As Professor Ross Abbinnett comments, at the end of the chapter *Crises of the aesthetics*, Stiegler is committed to the capacity that art, as a technology of the spirit, can contribute as agency in shaping public power. Stiegler recognises the sensory potential of art in the sense of being a *technology* that exosomatizes⁸ the «traumatological formation of the symbolic order of

society» beyond the given structures of exosomatization in place. Of course, Stiegler has in mind an art which, particularly in Western industrialised countries, has publicly and critically contributed to the necessary transformations produced by its hyper-industrialisation. Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol are the European and North American examples he uses when he comments on his interest in an art conscious of its participation and contribution to the life of the organised polis. It is here where it is possible to signal the inclusion of Stiegler in the postfoundational field and an agreement with Marchart's proposal of conflictual aesthetics. Certainly, there are important differences between Warhol and Beuys practices. Nevertheless, in their own ways, both reshaped the political spaces of art and the resonances of the arts in social and public debates.

In the same way Beuys and Warhol are seen by Stiegler as examples of an art that shapes the public sphere, the *Ghost Dance* can be seen as intrinsically contributing to the thinking and sustainability of a hidden public sphere of a community. An act, desperate enough, of care of a common body in front of a hyper destructive force that brought it to the fringes of extinction. At the same time, it certainly cannot be seen in the sense the Beuysian rituals politically confronted or critically engaged with European or globalised Western issues, such as democracy, economy or even ecology.

In his article *Relational Ecology and the Digital Pharmakon*, Stiegler comments that:

Education is the fruit of the accumulated experience of generations. It develops a patina over time like the pebbles rolling in the current along the riverbed that they themselves constitute. Education is the transindividuation of individual memories engendered by individual experiences, ones which, through being transmitted and developing a patina – that is, in being regulated, in forming a body of procedures, and sometimes in becoming formal regulations – have resulted in a collective memory constituted by the attentional forms of knowledge: knowhow, lifeskills, cognitive and theoretical knowledges. (Stiegler [2012]: 2)

⁸ The notion of exosomatization comes from Alfred J. Lotka, who understood the important and undeniable influence of human activity through engineering upon the world. This transformation occurs through inorganic organs: tools that produce, exchange, and consume energy. Lotka even uses the notion of exosomatic evolution (Lotka [1945]: 188), through which he assumes the relevant importance of «artificial aids» in the processes of adaptation of human life to new environmental conditions produced, in fact, through those relational exchanges between humans and nature.

Education is, for Stiegler, the main tool, or technique, of transindividuation, that a society or community has for making accessible, acknowledgeable, an accumulated past, that has not been experienced directly. A technique that has been engineered to be transmitted through a methodology, a body of procedures, through which accessing an embodiment in each individual of that common thread. This description is not considering just the defined knowledge, but the ways by which that knowledge is communicated. In that sense, the technique of education works in between the technical objects used in its transmission, the bodies involved, and the relational environment they built in their relational space.

Without the modelling of education that Stiegler mentions in general through repetition, in the form of habitus, the faculties of an individual remain just «latent, unexpressed and unknown» (Stiegler [2012]). This habitus can be only forged through attention. Attention is the capacity that is necessary to learn. If interfered or disrupted, then the process of individuation cannot take place. The type or model of attention conforms, in fact, the form of knowledge of a community. The material techniques condition the attentional model formed within that community, even spontaneously (Stiegler [2003]). And for Stiegler, in that sense, they are *mnemotechnics*:

Humans die but their histories remain – this is the big difference between mankind and other life forms. Among these traces most have in fact not been produced with a view to transmitting memories: a piece of pottery or a tool were not made to transmit any memory but they do so nevertheless, spontaneously. Which is why archaeologists are looking for them: they are often the only witnesses of the most ancient *episodes*. Other traces are specifically devoted to the transmission of memory: for example, writing, photography, phonography and cinematography. The latter even makes an industry out of producing and transmitting these traces we call retentions. (Stiegler [2003])

This means techniques that can *transport, express, exchange through time and space*. The pub-

lication of the Bible is a good example of it. But even more than that, the first publication of a bible in a lingua franca and not in Latin is a more specific example of that modelling of knowledge and the form of education, the vehicle or interface of education.

For Stiegler, culture is «the intergenerational transmission of attentional forms» through «psychosocial memory technologically exteriorized and supported». Stiegler highlights the importance of the modelling of education and cultures when the technical devices of accumulation of memory simultaneously disrupt that necessary attention. Which is basically what he expresses as a concern in contemporary times. Knowledge is thus becoming affected and infected by the disrupting effects of the industrial production of mnemotechnic devices: «As attention forming, education is the modality through which the social being that is always also a psychic individual *individuates itself at once psychically and collectively*» (Stiegler [2012]). Education is the modality, which means that the interface of that shaping of the attention depends on the educational model chosen by a specific society. Social beings individuate themselves through the interface of education. But what is the model of education that can create the attentiveness of that forming? The educational model has been at the base of the cultural building in Western societies. The souls of the citizens were at stake between philosophy and the arts since the Greeks. Philosophy was a model, and the arts were other. Here lies Plato's famous rejection of certain arts while others were useful in the modelling experience of souls, their individual processes. The performativity of the educational experience is fundamental in the form of a social being who apprehends the context within which she evolves. The comprehension of the context depends on the formal interface the social being has: the plasticity it considers from its pre-given experiences of attention. And it is here that the arts, as collective gestural apparatuses, compose a complex gesture of withdrawal of the given senses.

A TENSOR

Asumir un suceso de vida abierto (situaciones no resueltas, de incertidumbre) como investigación de arte. Parada (1980): 31⁹

I will now turn to other artistic example that stresses the conceptual notions in discussion. Hernán Parada is a Chilean artist (Talca, 1953) who lives in Toronto, Canada. He has developed a small and fragile mechanism of remembering known as *Obrabierta A*. During the decade of the eighties in Chile, when a new wave of public protests emerged against the Civic-Military Dictatorship (1973-1989), Parada decided to attend the marches and other public spaces with a paper mask: a mask made by photocopy. The mask portrayed Parada's older brother, Alejandro Parada, who was arrested in 1974, and disappeared by agents of the National Intelligence Bureau (DINA by the Spanish abbreviation of the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional)¹⁰.

Parada's brother was a student of veterinary at the University of Chile. After the coup d'état

⁹ See also Varas (2012): 99-102.

¹⁰ «Alejandro Arturo Parada González was born on 8 January 1952 in Talca. Married with one daughter, he studied at Liceo No. 8 in Santiago and later studied veterinary medicine at the University of Chile, where he began to join the Socialist Youth. After the coup d'état, he was involved in coordinating contacts and handing out materials to leaders of the Socialist Party. On 30 July 1974, at the age of 22, he was arrested at his home in the Cerrillos district in an operation carried out by the DINA and witnessed by the neighbours of the sector. In addition to his time at Londres 38, surviving witnesses claim to have seen him at Cuatro Alamos (concentration camp), where he remains missing to this day», <https://www.londres38.cl/1937/w3-article-97922.html> (accessed January 9, 2023). *Londres 38* was a centre of repression, torture and extermination during the civil-military dictatorship led by Augusto Pinochet. After years of denouncing actions, today, it is a space of memories recovered and open to the people, social organisations, and individuals. It is located in the centre of the city of Santiago, in the *Paris-Londres* heritage district, near the civic centre (for more information, <http://www.londres38.cl>).

in September 1973, he dropped out school due to the risks to his physical integrity posed by his militancy in the Socialist Party. The disappearance of Alejandro had a strong impact on Hernán Parada, who decided to incorporate this event into his artistic reflection. Parada developed a body of work that testifies to the scope of repression in Chile during the seventies and eighties. Like other artists of the same period, Parada experimented with new technological materials, such as videos, photocopies, and performances, allowing them to work with what was happening in Chile politically, culturally, and temporally¹¹.

Finally, I would define my work as a constant act of dating and measuring living or life-involving processes, with the ultimate goal of synthesizing and producing new information. Hernán Parada, September 22, 1983. (Sanfuentes [2001]: 78)¹²

Wearing the mask, Hernán Parada visited different places in Santiago of Chile. Parada inquired about his missing brother by asking the people he met about his whereabouts. The encounters generated by this experience were recorded on audiotape by the artist Luz Donoso, who used to accompany Parada in his actions.

The mask is the portrait of his brother. His artistic act's main triggering element is industrial, the photocopy, and State organised: the identification image. And, of course, it is composed of the embodying act of masking himself or allowing his body to become the territory for a memory to come: embodying the trace. There is an almost non-artistic

¹¹ Hernán Parada, as an artist, can be situated between two art collectives working in the same period in Chile: La Escena de Avanzada, and the CADA (Colectivo de Acciones de Arte). Parada did work within what was known as the TAV (Talleres de Artes Visuales), an organization formed by artists and teachers at the University of Chile. It is here that he found the environment and friendship of two main artist comrades: Luz Donoso and Victor Hugo Codocedo.

¹² My translation. Also, in Codocedo, Hernán Parada, *Arte & Textos. Contingencias*. <https://hernanparada.cl/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Catalogo-contingencia.pdf> (accessed December 12, 2022).



Figure 3. Hernán Parada, July 31, 1984. Image by Víctor Hugo Codocedo. See https://hernanparada.cl/portfolio_page/acciones-performaticas-2/ (accessed December 12, 2022).

will, except for organising those tools for an almost invisible methodology of holding a vanished memory. A memory of a lack, of an absence, a memory of someone who has disappeared, who has been made disappeared by the State. Parada's act is an act of *passing to action* in defiance of the conditions of repression at that moment. It supplements the reality and allows a collective trans-formation to happen. It is an act of fidelity¹³.

¹³ Fidelity is what names French philosopher Alain Badiou as the main force that the individual composes with an event. As the event is inexistent, without place, undomiciled from where it takes place, we cannot know about its existence. We only have access to its echoic presence that we rebuild afterwards through our activ-

Parada's act is a gesture sustained individually, both in his body and psychic life. Because of his experience, being the brother of a person who has been made disappeared by the State, his act retraces that personal memory, but it also localises a collective reverberance. His act, artistic in some sense, as a technique, sustained both elements at the same time: the social life of a community and the singularity it creates for the individual. In Stiegler's terms, Parada's act is a trans-individuation because it realises a sublimation for the collective.

Trans-individuation is the acting out and the socialisation of the pre-individual ground as a socialisation of the psychic: it is the realisation of sublimation. Through his work, the artist establishes an exemplary articulation along with an intensification of psychic and collective individuation. He represents an exemplary instance of the «and» in the expression «psychic and collective», and, to the extent that he intensifies this conjunction, he is a tensor. (Stiegler [2015]: 155)

Parada's act intensifies the situation through a gestural device that marks an operational lack. Through the embodiment of a loss, a different attentional device was formed. The echoic matter it carries recovers its potentiality in different times, keeping the memories for encounters to come. His act, now known through traces, will constantly disturb the tissue of essences and grounds that tend to solidify a community. In the same sense the Ghost Dance was made without knowing its results, Parada's act opened a path to retain the possibility of another time to come. A bifurcation within the limiting conditions of oppressing cultural devices.

In his book *Symbolic Misery*, Volume 2, *The Catastrophe*, in the paragraph titled 52. *What is an artist?* Stiegler goes on to say:

An artist is a vortex of a particular kind in the flow: she is charged with a preparatory task with respect

ity. Through that activism, embodied by us, the event is knowable in retrospective, and can extend its potentiality towards futures yet to come.

to the pre-individual ground of the *Is* and *wes* to come. And, at the same time, she is an operative of trans-individuation in the accessible pre-individual ground: she creates works, artifacts, the fruits of general organology arising from the stratum formed here by *tekhmé*, which open up the future (l'avenir) as the singularity of the indeterminate by accessing the repressed that incubates the potential of what Aristotle calls the noetic soul -as its intermittent possibility of acting out. (Stiegler [2015]: 155)

Parada's act was not seen within the marches; it was not even seen in any sense by any public audience. It certainly does not participate in an artistic sense. It happened without any institutional frame constituting it. In fact, it withdraws.

It is at this point that conflictual aesthetics must consider another path to the organised activism portrayed by Marchart. As in the case of the Ghost Dance, there exists a different implication of the action and its intentional aftermath. In Parada's case, there is a clear understanding of the agonist condition of his environment, the imposed limitations configured already and the slightly operational potential that the street protest acquired through his participation in it. Nevertheless, Parada's action occupied more than the street, exposing his body in other less favourable spots. Another example of this conflictual aesthetics without the propagandist intention is Carlos Altamirano's video art piece *Panorama*, 1981. There is a certain urgency in these actions that are not directly confronting the oppressive conditions, such as in the case of the *Pussy Riots* singing in the Red Square. This «indirect» confrontation also exposes the level of oppression these artists confronted. There certainly exists a differentiation of the artistic gesture and its conflictual condition due to the political situation. When, for example, another political collective around the same period during the Chilean dictatorship, *Movimiento Contra la Tortura Sebastián Acevedo* did its «litanies», they knew that their denunciation could also mean their imprisonment, torture and even disappearance. Artists protesting in «democratic» conditions are in a different situation. In Chile the recently successful collective, and even massive, performances made by *Las Tesis* cor-

roborate that difference. Interesting enough, it is also clear that none of them happen to be in the side of the organisational as it is defined by Marchart. The organised political struggle is an immediacy that Marchart assumes as a feature of the activist activity. Nevertheless, in some circumstances, that organisation happens to be small, undefined, undomiciled, weak, and its strength, if any, exists within that feature of vulnerability, repair, and dispersion.

Parada's actions occurred outside of any authorised cultural inscription. It was not art in the sense of any given system. Its artistic surface does not correspond to the construction of any cultural industry. I will even claim that it rests outside the institutionalisation even after it has been finally reconfigured as a recognisable and official part within the historical narrative of recent art history. The gesture of Parada is a gestural apparatus, a technology that sustains a memory to come. What I am referring as a gestural apparatus is Parada's action and not the aftermath of his action, which was after all exhibited in a space of art¹⁴. But even there, I propose, the artistic artifact tenses the condition of the art object. It certainly rejects that condition as a merchandise of the art system and stays forcing the conditions of sense in an environment of official oblivion.

Yuk Hui, in his article *For a Cosmotechanical Event in Honor of Idhe and Stiegler*, writes: «Technology in Stiegler's vocabulary is the tertiary memory, the necessary supplement (in the sense of Jacques Derrida) to the retentional finitude of Dasein» (Hui [2020]: 89). Hui uses the example of Strauss' *The Blue Danube* for letting us understand the difference between what Stiegler names primary and secondary retention and protention. Parada's acts certainly are supplements to an incomplete *perception of reality* that is being institutionalised, but what would be the differ-

¹⁴ Parada's *Obra Abierta* was recently exposed at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Santiago of Chile, under the curatorial direction of Alejandro de la Fuente: <https://mac.uchile.cl/exposiciones/obrabierta-el-tiempo-la-vida-la-informacion/> (accessed December 10, 2022).

ence between Strauss's and Parada's artistic actions in terms of that necessary supplement? Strauss's melody is an artwork that can be seen as a participant, recognised, and extending the constitution of an already foundational institutional aesthetic frame. In contrast, in the case of Parada's act, it gets lost in a retentional temporality parallel to the regular events. His act, made using artistic means, composes a gestural technology that re-established a new, then lost, relation to the recent past.

It is undoubtful that Parada recognised the existence of forms of art that have conflicted with the recent historicization of that Western cultural tool that art has become. Parada studied art at the University of Chile. In that sense, there is not a romantic critic to a returning act that will restore an origin, pure and supreme of art, before its institutionalisation. On the contrary, Parada works within forced circumstances, and the act, demanding enough, knows about the incapacity of the tool for changing the structural technopolitical circumstances. But despite those facts, it makes trace, as a weapon of the weak¹⁵. His act participates without knowing if the gesture will endure. Parada did not know if the photographs being taken would be exposed or collected in some institutions, as they are today. He did it without knowing about the intensification his act was producing. His act, and those of other artists in the same period, supplied and supplemented the institutional forced amnesia upon a social body through artistic means already intertwined with the technological conditions of the moment. And they have an intense educational capacity to unfold the hidden aspects of a community shocked by a Coup d'état.

CONCLUSION

What would be revealed in the gestures of Parada and the Ghost Dance? The locality of a memory which is in displacement. This trajectorial conditioning belongs to the art-act as a ges-

tural apparatus, which is to sustain a memory for a time, localising its echoic return. The Ghost Dance and Parada's *Obra Abierta* are interruptions to the disruption in Stiegler's terms. The revealed is not merely the personal situation of Parada's brother, neither Parada's sentiment before a horrific situation nor the history being written through the State violence upon an entire social body. Parada's act reveals all of that, but what the art-act is revealing is the ilocality of a memory to come. In the act, the being-there at that march, invisible among others, forcing and forming a supplement, what is retained and revealed is the local embodiment for a memory. These practices are embodying techniques that, without directly changing the circumstances where they appear, they convoke the potentiality of an echo, allowing a memory to be grasped suddenly as a collective trans-individuation:

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 the catalyst -of individuation, and in a sense the *katastrophe* -of individuation, which is to say, the trigger of a quantum leap that liberates the unexpected of 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. (Stiegler [2015]: 152)

The Ghost Dance and Parada's *Obra Abierta* are gestural apparatuses. They compose procedures of cognition through mechanisms of action. Stiegler's philosophy constantly interrogates the form of philosophy and performs a withdrawal of its discursive political consistency. It is in that sense that we can recognise his philosophical practice as postfoundational in the sense proposed by Marchart. I claim that Stiegler's approach towards the arts allow us to operate readings toward cultural and artistic practices that exceed the fixed definitions within the sphere of Westernised institution of art. Stiegler's approach allow us to understand artistic practices as tools and

¹⁵ The notion of *weapon of the weak* comes from American anarchist anthropologist James (1985).

mechanisms, performative and embodied technologies that work collectively and socially beyond the existent cultural rules in place. From Stiegler's perspective both examples interrupt the disruption, not by sublimating any loss, but through the cypher that inscribes a trace, where a finitude of the existent is assembled to an intensity that institutes a bifurcation.

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