

Dare to Care: Between Stiegler's Mystagogy and Foucault's Aesthetics of Existence

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Philosophy is, for me, before anything else, to learn to repeat repetitions that are good. To learn ways that the *pharmakon*, which is always that which repeats, does not destroy me or render me indifferent by its repetitions, but rather takes care of me (*me soigne*). That is to say, individuates me, distinguishes me, differentiates me, . . . in order to permit me to discern in myself—to distinguish—alterity, difference [differance?], . . . the future. Philosophy is undertaken in order that these repetitions make a difference.

—Bernard Stiegler (2014a)

Philosophy takes care of me. It provides a therapeutic practice of the self, a repetition with a difference that opens me to the differance that happens as I defer toward a future that differs in and from me. But how does such taking care happen? That's where the mystery comes in.

For a number of years, in his courses, seminars, lectures, and

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books, Bernard Stiegler has alerted us to the consequences of a transformation that took place in Western thought when, in Book VII of *The Republic*, Plato's "doctrine of the truth" (to recall Heidegger's famous formula [1998]) decisively privileged exactitude as philosophy's *raison d'être*. In making philosophy doctrinaire, Plato refused the tragic horizon within which Socrates and the pre-Socratic thinkers lived, and thereby deprived philosophy of its mystery, a mystery that Socrates (who participated in the Eleusian Mysteries) certainly did not abjure. Challenging the long legacy of this Platonic refusal, Stiegler admonishes us to attend to the extraordinary within the ordinary, or, even better, to let it surprise us. Yet, to appreciate the mystery, to let the mystery surprise us, we have need of a *mystagogy*, whose initiations help lead us toward the mystery because our eyes are too often shut to it (as its Greek etymon *muein* [μύειν] might suggest).¹ Over the last several years, and especially since *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, Stiegler has tantalizingly (albeit elliptically) invoked what he refers to in the essays published in this special issue as "the necessary *mystagogy* that would underlie and support the life of the spirit in all its aspects," even while rigorously cautioning against the mystifications to which all such *mystagogy* so easily succumbs (Stiegler, "Proletarianization," 11).

Needless to say, *mystagogy* does not appear very often in the pantheon of contemporary theoretical concepts—nor for that matter does "the life of the spirit" that it underlies and supports. In order to approach the former, we might first consider the latter. The phrase "life of the spirit" signals Stiegler's admiration for the work of Paul Valéry. In a 1939 essay entitled "La Liberté et l'Esprit," (to which Stiegler regularly returns), Valéry offers a brief characterization of the entanglement of "human life" and "spirit":

Intellectual life's creation and organized existence find themselves in the most complex, but strictest and most certain, relation with life as such, with human life. No one has ever explained how we make sense (*à quoi nous rimions*), we humans, with our strangeness

1. The *OED* gives the following etymology: "Classical Latin *mystērīum* secret, (plural) secret rites, in post-classical Latin also mystical or religious truth (Vetus Latina), (plural) Christian rites (late 2nd cent. in Tertullian), the Eucharist, the elements used in the Eucharist (4th cent.) < ancient Greek *μυστήριον* mystery, secret, (plural) secret rites, implements used in such rites, in Hellenistic Greek also secret revealed by God, mystical truth, Christian rite, sacrament, in Byzantine Greek also the elements used in the Eucharist (4th cent.), probably (compare also *μύστης* *mystes* n.) < the base of *μύειν* to close (the lips or eyes), probably of imitative origin + *-τήριον*, suffix forming nouns" (*Oxford English Dictionary* online, s.v. "mystery").

(*bizarrierie*) which is spirit (*esprit*). This spirit is a power in us that has engaged us in an extraordinary adventure; our species has been estranged from (*s'est éloignée*) all its initial and normal conditions of life. We have invented a world for our spirit—and would like to live in this world. The spirit wants to live in its *oeuvre*. (Valéry 1945: 194)

The “extraordinary adventure” that constitutes human life—or “not-*inhuman*” life as Stiegler prefers²—arises out of and diverges from the “initial and normal conditions of life.” Our extraordinariness as spirit (which Valéry also calls our “*bizarrierie*”) estranges us from the ordinary life to which we must nevertheless maintain “the strictest and most certain relation.” To live a life of the spirit, then, is both to live and to put oneself at a distance from “life as such.” Combining the rhetorics of Gilbert Simondon and André Leroi-Gourhan (both of whom Stiegler embraces as precursors), we might translate Valéry’s text by saying: the life of the spirit emerges from a transductive relation between life/spirit (i.e., it emerges from a preceding complex not governed by the law of noncontradiction in which life and spirit do not yet oppose and therefore suppose each other) that only appears in the course of hominization, when exteriorization through technology opens the possibility for interiorizing an individuation that is at once psychic and collective. Indeed, as Stiegler underscores, “The ‘and’ of this expression (‘psychic and collective’) can then perhaps be understood as that which designates the spirit” (Stiegler 2014b).

If the life of the spirit evokes a transductive relation, life/spirit, which in turn provokes the transduction psychic/collective, then perhaps the mystery to which mystagogy conducts us bespeaks the inextricability of the very terms that such transduction makes appear. Perhaps it gestures toward that which, by exceeding it, allows this appearance to appear as such in the first place. Simondon suggests as much when he defines “spirituality” as

the meaning (*signification*) of the relation between the individuated being and the collective and thus, as a consequence, also the foundation of this relation, that is to say the fact that the individuated being is not entirely individuated but still contains a certain charge

2. In *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* (2010), Stiegler explains this formulation: “The noetic mind, the one capable of taking spiritual action ‘intermittently,’ and in this sense profanely, thus becoming diachronic and individuating, is less ‘human’ (and as a result too human) than *non-inhuman*. We, because we *are* pharmacological, are less human than *not-inhuman*, always a little *too* human in always being a little too close to taking ourselves for gods” (170).

of non-individuated reality, pre-individual, and preserves it, respects it, and lives with the consciousness of its existence, instead of being shut up in a substantial individuality, a false aseity. It is the respect for this relation of the individual and the pre-individual that is spirituality. (Simondon 1989: 105–6)

Spirituality, according to Simondon, values the entangled relation of individual/pre-individual and psychic/collective. This value has nothing to do with what we know—or can know—but concerns what we appreciate, what we respect, what we admire, and, for Stiegler, what we *desire*.³ In other words, the entanglement that gives rise to the life of the spirit as psychic and collective individuation, as not in-human life, has meaning even if we do not *know* what that meaning might be. Moreover, even if it exceeds our ability to know its significance as spirit, as spirituality, we can “live with the consciousness of its existence” (i.e., we can *sense* it and *make sense* of it). The excessiveness of spirit with respect to knowledge turns us toward mystery insofar as mystery reveals to us—even as it conceals from us—an otherness that persists within the sameness that we take to be our own. As Stiegler puts it, “[Mystery] reveals next to existence . . . *something other* than the plane of existence—if one believes in it” (Stiegler, “Proletarianization,” 9). Conversely, he declares, “The cognitive is never mysterious” (10).

The work of mystagogy entails creating contexts, milieus, practices, gestures, rituals, and technologies so that that which confounds our cognition does not stop our thinking. Mystagogy cultivates that which helps us to contain those surprises that exceed our understanding and thereby enables us to expand or even “raise” it.⁴ In other words, mystagogy encourages us to appreciate that which exceeds our comprehension: “suddenly [I] find myself in a state of levitation—and in a way that is *unexpected* and that I *cannot take in (in-compréhensible)*: I am *passing on to the other plane*—a plane where an *over-taking (sur-préhension)*, a being *over-taken*, overcomes or surpasses all *com-prehension (com-préhension)*” (14). Alas, surprise in and of itself does not elevate; it can just as easily induce a state of

3. Desire, for Stiegler, refers to the infinitization of the object of desire, and as such opens the plane of consistence. For a brief explanation, see Stiegler 2014b.

4. Stiegler frequently uses tropes of raising—and lowering—to designate the movement from the plane of subsistence, to the plane of existence, to the plane of consistence, or, following Aristotle, from the vegetative, to the sensitive, to the noetic. I have some hesitation about the ways that the verticality of the metaphor suggests moving between a “lower” and a “higher” plane, which seems to rub up against Stiegler’s notion that all these terms are immanent.

shock. Surprise can paralyze. In order for a surprise that exceeds our comprehension to stretch us beyond what we have heretofore accepted as our limits or our necessities, rather than stunning us into passivity or indifference, we need to take care of it and of ourselves *at the same time*. Through mystagogy, we must therefore discover how to take care of ourselves in the presence of mystery, and to care for the mystery that is in the life of the spirit, such that the mystery that exceeds our comprehension does not destroy our consistence, and instead helps us to create ourselves anew—psychically and collectively.

Since the way of caring for the life of the spirit that mystagogy introduces overcomes or surpasses comprehension, it cannot unfold by way of teaching. Insofar as teaching entails the communication of knowledge, the conveyance of skill, the “endowing [of] any subject whomsoever with a series of abilities defined in advance” (in Michel Foucault’s definition [2005: 407]), it requires a demonstrative practice, a step-wise instruction that, if not always apodictic, at least enables an inductive repetition, a learned iteration, of the teaching process by the student.⁵ Hence, teaching is “‘exoteric’ by nature” (Stiegler 2010: 108). Mystagogy, on the other hand, proceeds by way of initiation; it cannot be known, only experienced. The test or the proof of mystagogy is (in) its experience. It can be lived but not known. As its etymology suggests, mystagogy directs us toward the mystery: it leads, it drives, it conducts (from the Greek ἀγωγός). More than teaching us a determinate something, its iterations always leave room for difference. Even when mystagogy leads us toward mystery, it cannot make us think. Thus, the conduct that mystagogy proposes acts upon our actions to induce us to act carefully toward and with mystery.⁶ In caring for the life of the spirit, mystagogy addresses itself to the spirit in life as lived experience, as immanence, as “a life” (to recruit Deleuze’s [2001] notion).

In promoting a careful conduct, mystagogy partakes of the practices that Foucault describes as “government” (i.e., as “a set of actions upon

5. “Understanding must be teachable, or else it is not understanding. And teaching can only transmit understanding—even if it is often accompanied by an education and in that assumes the transmission of life knowledge. This is where understanding breaks with mystagogy: rational knowledge is no longer the fruits of an initiation but an instruction” (Stiegler 2010: 108).

6. Indeed, as the *OED* informs us, “classical Latin *āct-*, past participial stem of *agere* to drive, to come, go, to cause to move, to push, to set in motion, stir up, to emit, to make, construct, produce, to lead, bring,” shares “the same Indo-European base as ancient Greek ἀγείν to lead, bring, drive, Sanskrit *aj-* to drive” (*Oxford English Dictionary* online, s.v. “act”).

other actions” [Foucault 1982: 220]). Although Foucault does not mention mystagogy per se, he does consider its close cousin, “psychagogy,” or “the government of souls” (Foucault 2010: 306).⁷ Like mystagogy, psychagogy has a venerable lineage, following from Empedoclean if not Pythagorean contexts. Psychagogy, or the conduct of souls, concerns itself with the philosophical task of transforming the subject, with modulating what the subject *is*, not what it knows: “we can, I think call ‘psychagogical’ the transmission of a truth whose function is not to endow any subject whomsoever with abilities, etcetera, but whose function is to modify the mode of being of the subject to whom we address ourselves” (Foucault 2005: 407). Moreover, Foucault avers, psychagogy involves “the immediate, direct effect which is brought about not just on the soul of the person to whom the discourse is addressed, but also of the person giving the discourse” (Foucault 2010: 335). Psychagogy (in contrast to its confrere, pedagogy) constitutes a distinct mode of interaction that works on both the subject to whom a discourse addresses itself and on the subject giving the discourse itself. It provokes in the subject what Foucault elsewhere terms “the ‘rebound effect’ on himself of the truth he knows, and which passes through, permeates, and transfigures his being” (an effect which for Foucault characterizes “spirituality”) (Foucault 2005: 18).⁸ Psychagogy therefore does not convey knowledge or skill (*tekhnē*) but constitutes a transformational relation, a transitional practice. Translating this Foucauldian notion into the Simondonian rhetoric that Stiegler prefers, we might say: the “internal resonance” that reverberates within the psychagogical experience modulates, changes, and sometimes elevates the individuations and transindividuations that take place within it.⁹

Foucault focuses his consideration of psychagogy through an interpretation of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, not coincidentally foregrounding the same section of the dialogue that supports Jacques Derrida’s famous reading of the *pharmakon*, on which Stiegler’s work, in turn, leans (Derrida 1981). However, Foucault offers a competing insight into the Platonic diremption

7. Foucault first introduces psychagogy explicitly in the previous year’s lectures, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2005). On Foucault’s engagement with and as psychagogy, see Cohen 2014.

8. On the distinction between “philosophy” and “spirituality” and the modern privileging of the former over the latter in the wake of the “Cartesian moment,” see Foucault 2005 (14–18).

9. For examples of Simondon’s use of “internal resonance,” see Simondon 1989 (17, 67, 238).

of rhetoric and philosophy. Instead of underscoring the undecidability of the pharmakon as remedy and poison, as Derrida does in his reading of Plato's famous myth of Theuth, Foucault holds that the force of Plato's discourse directs our attention to the disjunction between good and bad forms of truth telling (*parrhesia*). For Foucault, the *Phaedrus* does not disclose the necessarily pharmacological character of writing—and hence the irreducible tension between *anamnesis* and *hypomnesis* that Stiegler assiduously foregrounds—but rather posits certain critical questions: “How can we tell good speech, written or oral, from bad? That is to say: What is the quality of speech itself? Is it written or spoken well or badly? How should a distinction be made? *The division is not therefore between written and oral.* How is the division made between good or bad speaking or writing?” (Foucault 2010: 330; emphasis added). Eschewing the Derridian opposition oral/written, Foucault suggests that Plato's concern lies with the discourse's relation to the truth: “Discourse, the *etumos* art, the genuine art of speaking, will only be a true art on the condition that truth is a permanent function of the discourse.” However, this concern immediately provokes another question: “How can this necessary and continuous relationship of discourse to the truth be assured so that, in this perpetual relation to the truth, the speaker will possess and put to work the *etumos tekhnē* (the genuine *tekhnē*)?” Here Foucault suggests that Plato's Socrates affirms that a good discourse (i.e., a non-Sophistic discourse) requires a psychagogy linked to the truth through the dialectic. In the Socratic lineage, Foucault argues, philosophy becomes philosophy through “the double requirement of a dialectic and a psychagogy, of a *tekhnē dialektikē* and a knowledge of psychagogy (*psychagōgia*)” (334). Thus, he concludes, “The *tekhnē* peculiar to true discourse is characterized by knowledge of the truth and practice of the soul, the fundamental, essential, inseparable connection of dialectic and psychagogy, and it is in being both a dialectician and a psychagogue that the philosopher will really be the parrhesiast” (336).

What mystagogy and psychagogy have in common, insofar as they both involve actions upon other actions, is practice. Mystagogy and psychagogy must both be exercised or experienced in order to transform. In this regard, they both involve *epimeleia*, a concept familiar to both Stiegler and Foucault. In *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, Stiegler explains, “What the Greeks called *epimeleia*, self-care, [are] all either individual or collective techniques for channeling, and frequently for capturing attention. Such techniques resulted not only in the Enlightenment thinkers; they are also, and perhaps most frequently, the basis of mystagogic (if not

of all obscurantist) practices and behaviors” (2010: 36). Moreover, such *epimeleia* lies at the heart of a conundrum that lives within philosophy—as the love of wisdom—precisely insofar as they serve as the counterpoint to philosophical dissemination through knowledge (*gnosis*): “The predicament—the aporia—of philosophical teaching is, then, to mark the difference between the teaching of what *would be* philosophy and the object that can *never* be the telos of straightforward teaching (the simple interiorization of retentional operations), but that must become an experiment, indeed a way of life: an asceticism, a care, an *epimeleia* of a specific type (of which all Foucault’s techniques of the ‘self’ are instances)” (109).

Alluding to what Foucault names the “paradox of Platonism,” or what Derrida terms “Western Metaphysics,” Stiegler locates a tension, an aporia, in the history of philosophy between the modes of propagation on which it depends. Stretched between apodictic demonstration, the “straightforward teaching (the simple interiorization of retentional operations),” and “experiment, indeed a way of life: an asceticism, a care, an *epimeleia*,” philosophy folds back upon itself.¹⁰ Its metaphysical destination is prefigured by the supposition that straightforward teaching can replace *epimeleia* and thus that knowledge can displace experience and care as philosophy’s proper domain.¹¹ The neglect of this philosophical *pharmakon*, its reduction to a knowledge practice *tout court*, follows from Plato’s rectification of philosophy as the exclusion of mystery. The only way through this impasse,

10. Stiegler continues: “But this *impasse*, which puts philosophy perpetually in default, at the instant it opposes itself to mystagogy, becomes excessively mysterious (opening it to all kinds of reproach by even the very best intentioned), as a predicament, is at its origin a *pharmakon*: pharmacological being is originally mystagogic in that the *pharmakon*, by its very nature, endlessly returns to what Greek tragedy calls *enigma*. Enigma was for the Greeks a profane figure of mystery in a society in which divinities had withdrawn, and in which all the most elevated objects of attention had been desacralized (this is my thesis) through grammatization. Mystagogy is at the very core of nonrational pharmacology, of which *magic* is only the most common form (common to all preliterate societies)” (2010: 109–10).

11. In *Hermeneutics*, Foucault describes the “paradox of Platonism” as the tension between “knowledge” and “spirituality” to similar ends: “Platonism was the constant climate in which a movement of knowledge (*connaissance*) developed, a movement of pure knowledge without any condition of spirituality, precisely because the distinctive feature of Platonism is to show how the work of the self on itself, the care one must have for oneself if one wants access to the truth, consists in knowing oneself, that is to say in knowing the truth. To that extent, knowledge of the self and knowledge of the truth (the activity of knowledge, the movement and method of knowledge in general), as it were, reabsorbs the requirements of spirituality” (2005: 77).

Stiegler implies, lies through the defiles of mystagogy, which require the kind of care for the life of the spirit that *epimeleia* provides.

While Stiegler's understanding of *epimeleia* and the work that it performs does not follow Foucault's entirely (indeed, *Taking Care* offers a strong critique of Foucault to which I return below), Stiegler's reliance on the concept no doubt owes much to Foucault. Throughout the last three years of his lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault reflects on how *epimeleia* functioned in classical Greek and Hellenistic culture as practices or exercises of care: "Caring for someone, looking after a flock, taking care of one's family, or, as is often found with regard to physicians caring for a patient, are all called '*epimeleisthai*,' positive practices of care" (Foucault 2011: 110). These careful practices first come to the fore in Foucault's *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* when he takes up the relation between two archaic Greek precepts: *epimeleia heatou* (care of the self) and *gnōthi seauton* (know yourself). Considering both of these within the penumbra of the *tekhnē tou biou* (literally, in the Greek, the art or the technique of life), Foucault seeks to understand how in the history of the West the notion of self-knowledge came to dominate the practices of self-care, or, as he tellingly puts it, how there occurred a "forced takeover by the *gnōthi seauton* in the space opened up by the care of the self" (Foucault 2005: 68). This takeover, Foucault suggests, reaches its modern apotheosis in the "Cartesian moment" when the *gnōthi seauton* "played a major part in discrediting the principle of care of the self and in excluding it from the field of modern philosophical thought" (14). Following Foucault, we might say that *epimeleia* falls into arrears as a residual formation whose occlusion conceals the (philosophical) limitations of knowledge practices.

Foucault defines *epimeleia heatou* as simultaneously an "attitude towards the self, others, and the world" and as a "certain form of attention, of looking . . . a number of actions exercised on the self by the self, actions by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself" (10–11). The concept derives from the sense of *epimeleia* as formative practices or exercises.¹² Furthermore, the practicality of *epimeleia* refers to

12. Foucault again: "This canonical and fundamental expression, '*epimeleisthai heatou*' (to take care of oneself, to be concerned about oneself, to care for the self) which . . . is found from Plato's *Alcibiades* up to Gregory of Nyssa, has a meaning that must be stressed: *epimeleisthai* does not designate a mental attitude, a certain form of attention, a way of not forgetting something. Its etymology refers to a series of words such as *meletan*, *meletē*, *meletai*, etc. *Meletan*, often coupled and employed with the verb *gumnazein*, means to practice and train. The *meletai* are exercises, gymnastics, and military

their constant repetition as a process of bodily patterning or (in)forming.¹³ Hence, the care manifest through *epimeleia heautou* concerns those self-forming activities that unremittingly modulate the regulation and regularization of not in-human lives. As a careful act, *epimeleia* requires attention to the plasticity of human existence, to the capacity for both psyche and soma to stretch (as the Latin root of attention, *tendĕre*, to stretch, indicates). Such movements of the self beyond the self while remaining self at the same time—which is after all what we do when we stretch—disclose the self’s capacity to exceed itself that constitutes the self as self. Indeed, this is what we must do in order to take care, since to “take care” also means to *receive* care—to take care into ourselves. In taking care of ourselves, we experience ourselves (and our “selves”) as both subjects and objects of care, as careful subjects and as cared-for objects. Self-care, in Foucault’s usage, proposes care as a way of attending that extends the self beyond itself. It does not recuperate or rectify what “the self” might have been heretofore; it opens the possibility for *living otherwise*, for incorporating what he will call in his last volume of lectures “an *other* life (*vie autre*)” (Foucault 2011: 184, 244).¹⁴ The *epimeleia heautou* incorporates practices of self-care and therefore denotes not just a therapeutics but moreover a transformation of the self, or even a transformation through which the self as such—as subject—forms itself anew (Foucault 2005: 447–48).

On the surface, Stiegler seems to share Foucault’s interest in *epi-*

exercises, military training. *Epimeleisthai* refers to a form of vigilant, continuous, applied, regular, etcetera, activity much more than mental activity. . . . The series of words, *meletan*, *meletē*, *epimelesthai*, *epimeleia*, etcetera, thus designates a series of practices” (2005: 84). Foucault briefly returns to the etymology of *epimeleia* in his last lectures, where he reports his conversation with Paul Veyne on the question. The conversation turns around the origin of the Indo-European root *mel-* (as in melody) that at first Veyne rejects as an etymon but then reconsiders. As a result of this exchange, Foucault concludes: “There would be something like a musical secret, a secret of the musical appeal in this notion of care” (2011: 119). Extrapolating from this conjecture, we might perhaps link the notion of care supposed in *epimeleia* with Simondon’s notion of “internal resonance” which Stiegler invokes (cf. Simondon 1989: 17, 67, 238).

13. Victor Goldschmidt made a similar point about Plato’s dialogues, saying that they were more forming than informing (1947: 3).

14. Foucault uses the phrase “*penser autrement*,” “thinking otherwise,” in the preface to *L’Usage des Plaisirs* (1984) in order to convey his own sense of why his work constitutes a “philosophical exercise”: “The stakes [*enjeu*] were to know to what degree the effort to think its own history could free thought from what it silently thinks and permit it to think otherwise [*penser autrement*]” (15).

meleia, invoking Foucault's use explicitly and repeatedly throughout *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*: "The anamnesis through which philosophy tests the need for a mind that understands how to transform itself through its understanding is thus a form of *epimeleia* and of attention revealed as taking care of what is not oneself, what will later be called an 'object.' As Foucault shows, philosophy (and what has become its academic system as a body of disciplines) has forgotten that understanding itself is also and above all a system of care, an *epimeleia*" (Stiegler 2010: 111).

Moreover, he frames his own project using *epimeleia* as a critical articulation:

My thesis is that it is a psychic, collective, technical, and scientific process of individuation forming a system of care through the materialization of various streams or flows, leading directly to today's surrender to machines and to a short-circuiting of psychosocial transindividuation—of the generations as well as the social classes and territory: this grammatization has produced, and even more important, transformed into a hyperpharmacological archive. . . . A conjunction such as this can only exist as a group, despite its many internal tensions, through a common *epimeleia*. (152)

Stiegler then goes on to express his strongest concurrence with Foucault's focus on *hypomnēmata* in general and correspondence in particular (for example, in Seneca's *Letters to Lucilius*) as *epimeleia*, where they form a material basis (which Stiegler describes as "tertiary retentions") for a practice and care of the self. Like Foucault, Stiegler regards these practices as conjoint formations of an "I" and a "we," demonstrating that the care for the self always implies a care for the other and thereby constitutes psychic and collective individuation. In light of this shared insight, Stiegler affirms and recasts Foucault's position in his own (Simondonian) idiom: "But what is most important is that this subjectivation, here strictly psychic, also presents itself as the individuation of a *we*, not just an *I*: through the *I*, as what *one* could understand and read, which was not *mine* and was thus preindividual, then being individuated and becoming transindividual, that is, *we*. In this process, the *ego* [*moi*] becomes a self that is always already supraegoic, 'spiritual'" (155).

Yet, despite this affinity with Foucault's position, Stiegler also finds fault with it: "In the end, Foucault does not ask the question of pharmacology—a question that is nonetheless essential to all therapeutics, all medicalization, and all questions of care and *epimeleia*: no medicine without

pharmacopeia, which is perhaps, in the final analysis the true question of power” (125).

Stiegler’s objection to Foucault seems to lie in the belief that Foucault fails to consider the pharmacological effects of collective *epimeleia* disseminated through *hypomnemata* and other technologies subtending what Stiegler terms “the literate mind” and more recently “the digital mind.” Since Stiegler takes great pains to foreground the generalization of writing in the Greek polis and of printing in early modern Europe, as well as of more recent analog and digital technologies, he not surprisingly believes Foucault fails to appreciate these technologies sufficiently. Thus, he suggests that Foucault’s interest in general grammar that appeared in the course of his meditations on life, labor, and language, in *The Order of Things*, does not encompass the more expansive sense of grammar, conveyed by Sylvain Auroux’s notion of “grammatization,” as making the (temporally) continuous discrete (Auroux 1993).¹⁵ As a result, Stiegler believes that Foucault tends to devalue the positive or therapeutic potential of the disciplinary practices that underlie and underwrite literacy, and education more generally. To make this claim, he returns to Foucault’s earlier texts, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*, and reads them as limited and limiting: “But what Foucault completely neglects here is the role of the master/teacher who, through a discipline that is not *subjugation* but *integration* into transindividuation, builds circuits *regulated by concepts, not normatives*, forming a rational, intergenerational *we*, as mature attention accessible to the majority of students—though mandatory public education” (Stiegler 2010: 117).

For Stiegler, Foucault’s emphasis on the effects of disciplinary practices as forms of subjectification fails to consider the ways that they also inculcate capabilities that (potentially) exceed such subjectification and thereby open new possibilities for individuation and transindividuation. Therefore, Stiegler claims that the “Foucauldian inattention” to “what, within the context of this standardization (and thanks to it), could be produced as *extraordinary*, as *excess*,” skews Foucault’s depictions toward disciplinary education that acts primarily in the service of normalization.¹⁶

15. For a quick explanation of grammatization, which is one of Stiegler’s key concepts and on which he relies extensively, see Stiegler 2014c.

16. A bit later Stiegler reiterates his critique: “But the fact that nowhere in Foucault does he question the possibility that what he describes, as he lays out the social consequences of grammatization, is a *tendency* of the pharmacological field opened up by technologies of power (and technologies of knowledge) in which the disciplinary fields, in Foucault’s

While not an unfair characterization of Foucault's project in *Discipline and Punish* (and similar to many other complaints that the book normalizes the subject's enmeshment by power), Stiegler's analysis nevertheless neglects Foucault's emphasis on the "productivity" of power relations in the monograph that immediately follows *Discipline and Punish*, the famous introductory volume of the *History of Sexuality*. Moreover, it does not seem entirely clear why Stiegler pursues his line of criticism by moving backward in Foucault's oeuvre to make his case, when Foucault's subsequent work, especially the lectures at the Collège de France, substantially complicates the picture.¹⁷

If, instead of pursuing Foucault's thought on what Stiegler denominates "the self and care in general" by returning to texts Foucault wrote in the late 1960s and early 1970s, we follow the development of Foucault's thought in the late 1970s and early 1980s, we discern a somewhat different trajectory. In particular, if we consider the last lectures Foucault gave at the Collège de France, *The Courage of Truth*, we find that far from neglecting the possibility that subjectification might entail a creative development of the self, Foucault proposed what he names "the aesthetics of existence" as this very possibility. Moving beyond his earlier readings of Plato's *Alcibiades* as the locus classicus for the collapse of the care of the self into knowledge of the self (on which Stiegler's interpretation of Foucault hinges), in these last lectures Foucault turns to the *Laches* as a counterpoint to the former concerning the question of education as care of the self. In the *Alcibiades*, as Foucault reads it, the dialogue addresses the form that the care of the self that a wealthy young man who aspires to a role of importance in the City should have. As Socrates enjoins Alcibiades to concern himself with his soul if he wishes to govern himself in order to govern others, Plato adumbrates what Foucault frames as "the future site of a metaphysical discourse, which will have to speak to man of his being and what in the way of ethics and rules of conduct follows from this ontological foundation of his

sense (that is, as the control and subjection of individuals), would only be one pole faced with another pole: the field of disciplines structuring knowledge—and as its discursive relations based on techniques of the self—is not simply a bias but an *incoherence* within its own methodology and its results" (2010: 121).

17. In writing *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, Stiegler seems not to have consulted the lectures published as *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, *The Government of the Self and Others*, and *The Courage of Truth*. They do not appear in his bibliography, and his citations refer only to the earlier monographs and to the texts collected in *Dits et écrits* (Foucault 1994).

being” (Foucault 2011: 160).¹⁸ In the *Laches*, however, Foucault discerns a different undertaking. Rather than pursuing care of the self as care of the soul, the *Laches* directly addresses the question of teaching as care: “The theme is: we must take care of young people, teaching them to take care of themselves. . . . As the dialogue progresses, what is designated as the object one must take care of is not the soul, it is life (*bios*), that is to say the way of living. What constitutes the fundamental object of *epimeleia* is this modality, this practice of existence” (126–27). For Foucault, the *Laches* opens a second aspect of “philosophical activity, of philosophical practice in the West” beyond what the knowledge of the soul precipitates as an ontology of the self. It proposes “a philosophy as a test of life, of *bios*, which is the ethical material and object of an art of oneself” (127).

The art of oneself, Foucault argues, does not follow from “the chain of rationality, as in technical teaching, nor [from] the soul’s ontological mode of being, but [from] the style of life, the way of living, the very form that one gives to life” (144). This “aesthetics of existence”—which Foucault elsewhere describes as “this elaboration of one’s own life as a personal work of art” (Foucault 1996: 451)—returns us to Stiegler’s description of (or prescription for?) a mystagogy of art with a new, and possibly surprising, perspective:

The experience of art is the experience of a work that opens up onto such a plane [something other than the plane of existence], and that appears in this way to reveal this other plane. Every work of art has the structure of a revelation. . . . It makes appear *in the most ordinary way in the world* the *extra-ordinary next to this ordinary*—and as coming out of this ordinary, but also, and at the same time, as *something that can never be proven (prouvé): instead it can only be experienced (éprouvé)*. (Stiegler, “Proletarianization,” 9)

18. Foucault succinctly outlines his reading of the *Alcibiades* as follows: “[T]he *Alcibiades*, starting from the principle of the need to give an account of oneself, proceeds to the discovery and establishment of oneself as a reality ontologically distinct from the body. And this reality ontologically distinct from the body is explicitly designated as the soul (*psukhē*). . . . This establishment of the *psukhē*, as the reality ontologically distinct from the body that has to be looked after, was correlative with a mode of knowledge of the self which had the form of the soul’s contemplation of itself and its recognition of its mode of being. . . . Thus, the establishment of oneself as a reality ontologically distinct from the body, in the form of the *psukhē* which possesses the possibility and ethical duty of contemplating itself, gives rise to a mode of truth-telling, of veridiction, the role and end of which is to lead the soul back to its mode of being and its world” (2011: 159–60).

Stiegler's notion of the work of art as a technical externalization that begets an interiority that is at once psychic and collective depends on his reading of Leroi-Gourhan. However, in order to understand how the work of art makes the extraordinary appear in the ordinary, we must reflect on what makes the ordinary "ordinary" and that would seem to be the intermittently noetic, not-inhuman life in which it appears.¹⁹ Life circumscribes the horizon of ordinariness from which something like the extraordinary can leap forth and thereby reveal not-inhuman life. It incorporates (incarnates?) an experience that testifies to the revelation that the work of art exposes. Hence, Foucault's notion of a life as a work of art suggests another kind of mystagogical opportunity for self creation (i.e., another opportunity for surprise and revelation).²⁰ If we take *bios* "as an aesthetic object, as an object of aesthetic elaboration and perception: *bios* as a beautiful work" (Foucault 2011: 162), then we explicitly make psychic and collective individuation—the regard for which Simondon posited as spirituality—our locus of care and concern.²¹ For Foucault, the aesthetics of existence exposes within this life, this *bios*, the possibility for another life, "an *other* life."

Juxtaposing the "other life" to the "other world," which Platonism affirms as the domain of the true life, Foucault traces a displacement immanent to life that makes it possible to live truly. Socrates and Diogenes the Cynic after him exemplify this possibility insofar as their way of life makes a caesura appear within ordinary life so that another possible life—an extraordinary life (?)—can emerge: "It could be said that with Platonism, and through Platonism, Greek philosophy since Socrates basically posed the question of the other world (*l'autre monde*). But, starting with Socrates, or from the Socratic model to which Cynicism referred, it also posed another question. Not the question of the other world but that of an *other* life (*vie autre*)" (245).²² The other life lives within this life; it is the same life

19. As noted above (n4), Stiegler repeatedly invokes Aristotle's triad of vegetative, sensitive, and noetic souls and Aristotle's observation that only the Gods are entirely noetic, whereas humans are only intermittently noetic. For an explication, see the section "The Law of Regression: Being Only Intermittently," in Stiegler's *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies* (2011: 132–37).

20. Moreover, Foucault's extension of aesthetics to a "style of life" more directly addresses the problems of consumerist lifestyles and the globalization of the "American way of life" that so often worries Stiegler.

21. Foucault also sees this as a spiritual possibility, insofar as he takes spirituality to involve "the subject's attainment of a certain mode of being and the transformations that the subject must carry out on itself to attain this mode of being" (1996: 443).

22. Pierre Hadot makes a similar point about Socrates as the one who makes the other—

reiterated with a difference. The other life divulges the uncommon within the common by taking the common to its limit. At the limit of ordinary life lives the extraordinary life, the life of the spirit that we approach only by caring about it:

[T]he care of the self does not lead to the question of what this being I must care for is in its reality and truth, but to the question of what this care must be and what a life must be that claims to care about the self. And what this sets off is not a movement towards the other world, but the questioning of what, in relation to all other forms of life, precisely that form of life which takes care of itself must and can be in truth. (246)

The non-metaphysical question of care, then, reframes the way the self-difference of the self appears as such. Unfolding from an ordinary, immanent, and vital locus of concern, self-difference does not bifurcate into *psukhē/soma*, body/mind, life/death. Instead, self-difference, “that is to say, [what] individuates me, distinguishes me, differentiates me, . . . in order to permit me to discern in myself—to distinguish—alterity, difference [difference?], . . . the future” (as Stiegler affirms in the epigraph to this essay), appears as I take care of myself.²³ To take care of myself, I must appreciate within myself the possibility that I am different from myself and that from this difference a potential for an *other* life within this life arises.

Caring for the life of the spirit that is oneself, that is “the self,” means both attending to and desiring it. In *What Makes Life Worth Living*, Stiegler writes of the necessity for “inventing a way of life that constitutes a new way of taking care of the world, a new way of paying attention to it, through the invention of therapeutics” (2013: 88). While Stiegler’s project locates this careful practice at the level of “noopolitics,” or “industrial technologies of the spirit,” he does not, to my knowledge, refer to mystagogy at this level of generality. Perhaps this is because mystery is not subject to grammaticalization, to repetition by being made discrete, since mystery unveils the paradoxical entanglement of preindividual/individual or, to invoke Donald Winnicott’s text, which Stiegler places at the center of *What Makes Life Worth*

the extraordinary—appear within the ordinary life: “Thus, Socrates is simultaneously in the world and outside it. He transcends both people and things by his moral demands and the engagement they require; yet he is involved with people and with things because the only true philosophy lies in the everyday” (2002: 38).

23. I insert “difference,” since the audiorecording from which this is transcribed allows for both possibilities.

Living, of “continuous/contiguous.”²⁴ In order to think mystagogy as what, following Winnicott, we might consider as a “transformational practice,” we might need to expand Stiegler’s pharmacological ambit to foreground the life that lives a careful life a bit more clearly. While Stiegler professes a “general organology” that addresses the biological, technological, psychological, political, economic, and social simultaneously, his attention rarely focuses on lived experience as the context within which any organology necessarily transpires. Instead, he privileges the technological aspects of organology and often relegates vitality to subsistence as distinguished from the play between existence and consistence that for him define the “non in-human” per se. However, if we supplement Stiegler’s unnecessarily limited reading of Foucault with one that includes Foucault’s later works and embrace the “aesthetic of existence” as that which can make *bios* a work of art, an *oeuvre* in which the spirit lives (to paraphrase Valéry), then perhaps the vitality of art as a mystagogical initiation can reveal to us new ways of taking care. Not surprisingly, both Stiegler and Foucault ask us to rethink Kant’s motto for the Enlightenment, *Sapere Aude*, Dare to Know. Perhaps between mystagogy and the aesthetics of the existence we can find a new motto: *Curare Aude*, Dare to Care.

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24. In *What Makes Life Worth Living* (2013), Stiegler reads closely Winnicott’s *Playing and Reality* (1971) in order to consider technology in light of Winnicott’s notion of the “transitional object.”

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