TECHNOPHANY
A Journal for Philosophy and Technology

Technophany Vol.2 No.2

Short-Circuits at the Speed of Anaphylaxis: Politics, Law and the Fourth Kind of Memory

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Abstract

If, as Canguilhem argues, the emergence of exosomatic life involves the introduction of a new inconstancy into life's environment, then both juridical and scientific law can be understood as a response that aims at a new constancy or fidelity, but one that always requires interpretation. Today, however, there is a crisis of law, due to a speed differential between the speed of legal change and the speed of digital network technology. This crisis can be understood in relation to Stiegler's account of exosomatic life as involving three kinds of memory that struggle against the entropic tendency, but here we argue that there is also a fourth memory: the immune system. Taking this into account can further elucidate Stiegler's claim that the *pharmakon* has a third, psychosocial dimension: the *pharmakos*. By understanding immune function not just as discriminating proper and foreign elements, or friend and enemy, but rather as a retentional and interpretive system, we can understand phenomena such as the designation of a scapegoat as a fault of interpretation that can be compared with accounts of the onset of paranoia. This in turn makes it possible to understand the crisis of contemporary experience as an anaphylactic reaction resulting from a collapse of resonance that amounts to a loss of the knowledge and desire required to live in tension, where the latter is the only meaningful definition of peace.

Keywords

Canguilhem, Stiegler, entropy, law, immune system, paranoia

ISSN 2773-0875

1. The New Inconstancy of Exosomatic Life

Georges Canguilhem defined the health of the endosomatic organism as "a margin of tolerance for the inconstancies of the environment": even though the physical universe is "a system of mechanical, physical and chemical constants" that seem invariant, the living thing "does not live among laws but among creatures and events," which is to say, "in a world of possible accidents." The inconstancy of the environment, then, "is simply its becoming, its history"—*entropy*—and disease, conversely to health, is "a reduction in the margin of tolerance for the environment's inconstancies." Already for Canguilhem, the situation in which what Bernard Stiegler calls the *exosomatic* organism finds itself is more complicated: by enlarging its existence technically and prosthetically, new vistas of possibility arise, such that, for this organism, "good health" no longer means just to be adequately adapted to an environment, subsisting with a normal margin of tolerance. What Canguilhem calls the "normative" is an enlargement of the normal, such that good health means to be "capable of following new norms of life."[1]

What Stiegler adds to this thought consists in pointing out that this technical and prosthetic enlargement also brings with it the introduction of a new inconstancy, an inconstancy that has its own becoming, its own history, especially when it begins to coalesce into technical systems. More than that, it is *because* this form of life introduces this new inconstancy that it *must* remain capable of adopting new norms, new rules of life. This new inconstancy of the environment, this new instability introduced into the course of life, unfolds initially and for a long time at a very slow rate, undetectable to the organisms living through this process of gradual but ineluctable change brought by technics. But as this inconstancy unfolds, it becomes necessary to form new constancies around this process, new regularities that "metastabilize" this instability specific to a form of life that is no longer just organic, but "exorganological."

In other words, if, as a result of exosomatic evolution, we need to be constantly capable of following new norms of life, which means, capable of adopting new criteria for the selection of what to do and how to behave, then this need itself tends to form into systems, not just at the level of the individual (the simple exorganism: an individual together with its technical organs), but at the level of the group (the complex exorganism: a collection of individuals and their social organizations). Law is the very general name we give to this systematization of the metastabilization of social life in the face of this inconstancy of the environment. A bit less generally, it is the name we give to these systems after the invention of writing, which, once processes of education make it possible to form publics capable of reading and writing, makes possible new ways of metastabilizing these systems of law themselves.

1 Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological*, trans. Carolyn R. Fawcett, with Robert S. Cohen (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 197–200.

More than that, reading and writing made it possible to give law the character of exactitude, and this "literalization of laws"[2] meant that it also became possible to discuss law in precise ways, and therefore to interpret and reinterpret it, deliberate about it, and make decisions concerning the way that law itself should change, forming its own history of becoming. Politics would then be understood as the struggle to form agreements about how to metastabilize the systems of law, in a situation where a literate public composed of singular individuals tends to disagree about ways of doing so.

When law is written down, it makes it possible, as we just said, for it to be interpreted and reinterpreted. More than that, the very operation of law relies on interpretation, in the sense that the text that is written must be articulated with the circumstances of a case, such that it becomes possible to apply this law to those circumstances in the form of a judgment. A judgment is always a decision that by definition goes beyond any analysis: what occurs in judgment is a synthesis of law and fact, and such a synthesis is always an interpretation whose possibility arises from that conjunction. In short, the operation of law is never automatic, and the history of its judgments and the interpretations on which they are based forms a key component in the unfolding of law itself, one that runs parallel to politics as the process of forming legislative agreements.

In this way, the relationship of fact and law involved in collectively taking care of the inconstancies of the environment is just one particular form of the relationship between fact and law that *always* operates in our way of understanding the world around us and deciding what that understanding means for the ways we should live and want to live. Scientific disputation, too, which tries to collectively interpret the facts of the world with the aim of forming testable hypotheses in order to arrive at a metastable account of scientific laws on the basis of peer review, certified authority and so on, can then be seen as just another (no doubt very particular) case of the general relationship of fact and law that always involves the relationship between analysis and synthesis. But this relationship between analysis and synthesis must then be understood in terms of the history of exorganogenesis in general, and in terms of the history of mnemotechnics in particular, and even more particularly in terms of the history of writing that first made possible the conceptual discrimination of analysis and synthesis.

2. Law and Speed

Today, the juridical sense of law (but in fact this also applies to law of all kinds, including in the fields of science) finds itself in crisis. Fundamentally, there are two problems faced by law, which we must turn into questions, which is to say, which must become the object of a critique, as the means by which

2 Bernard Stiegler, *Nanjing Lectures 2016–2019*, ed. and trans. Daniel Ross (London: Open Humanities Press, 2020), 135.

we can hope to remedy a crisis. Both of these problems stem from a single fact: the introduction of a new inconstancy of the exosomatic environment as a result of the vast increases in speed made possible by the continuous development of digital and network technical systems, unfolding as a result of what becomes possible thanks, among other things, to that performative quasi-prophecy that is Moore's Law. But speed is always relative: this increase of speed must be understood first of all as a *relative* increase when compared to the metabolic rate of social activity made possible by writing and the deliberative techniques on which all legal systems continue to be based. It is a question of a speed *differential*.

The first of these problems is the fact that legal systems seem powerless to make any significant difference to the way in which large digital platforms seize hold of and exploit the data and consciousness (and the unconscious) of users. Whatever the idea—whether it is to compel platforms to obtain permission for the data they receive, to make them pay for this data, to break up the vast monopolies to which they amount (what are Google and Facebook if not monopolies? and the US does have strong anti-trust laws, after all, if it was ever prepared to use them, as Standard Oil learned in 1911), or a thousand other legal strategies compelling these corporations to do or not do this or that—nothing ever seems capable of making any real dent in the informational strategies they have for amassing unimaginable fortunes.

This bears some similarity to the difficulties governments have had in trying to deal with the tobacco industry: even after it became clear that cigarettes are in fact very harmful, no government moved simply to ban them, not just because, as cynics sometimes like to say, governments are themselves addicted to the tax revenues brought in by cigarette sales, but because it just did not seem possible to eliminate a product to which a significant proportion of the electorate was addicted. Consequently, all kinds of strategies designed to discourage and reduce sales have been pursued in this jurisdiction or that, justified on the grounds of long-term benefits, while of course still continuing to allow large profits to be made from a product known to often lead to fatal consequences for the consumer—a fundamental compromise with the protective function of government and law.

This in turn relates to the second reason that law, as a regulatory mechanism or metastabilizing process, finds itself challenged in a very fundamental way by very powerful computing technologies that take advantage of the constant two-way stream of data occurring on global networks. For these technologies function in a way that is akin to a drug such as nicotine, or for that matter, heroin: what a drug of that kind does, as Stiegler points out, is produce something that your body normally produces, but where the drug produces it *better* than your body produces it, with the consequence that the body "unlearns" how to produce it and delegates this production to the *pharmakon*, which the body therefore ends up needing as compensation for what it has forgotten how to do.[3] Likewise, the second fundamental challenge to

3 Bernard Stiegler, *The Neganthropocene*, ed. and trans. Daniel Ross (London: Open Humanities Press, 2018), 166–67.

law presented by "platforms" consists in the fact that the speed at which they send, receive and process data is in some important respects quicker than the functioning of the nervous and cerebral processes of the human body, and *this* speed differential, too, affects the possibility for law to function.[4]

Law is necessarily an analytical, deliberative and interpretive process that requires an exercise of judgment, where these same factors are necessary, not just for jurisprudence but for those political, democratic, or legislative processes by which laws are decided upon, but the extreme rapidity of these algorithmic, network and computational processes means that, in some way (but in some *limited* way), these high-powered calculative and analytical processes are *better* at producing and arranging the individual's relationship to its future than it is itself. As a consequence, the individual forgets how to produce the desire and knowledge by which it would otherwise ordinarily organize its relationship to the future, and through which the relationship between the scales of the individual and the collective, too, are organized. The resulting automatization of life is a kind of performative structuring in advance of existence that tends to close off possibilities for dis-automatization, where the latter is the condition of possibility of autonomy, that is, of deliberation, interpretation, decision and the *synthesis* of analyses on which all of these operations depend.[5]

In short, both juridico-political systems and consumer-capitalist systems fundamentally involve processes of adoption, that is, they depend upon the encouragement of the adoption of aims and desires that are always and from the outset artificial (law as the concretization of justice, in one case, consumer products as the concretization of new needs, in the other). To this extent, both law and capitalism may be described as *protentional systems*. What has occurred in the shift from producer capitalism to consumer capitalism, however, and even more in the shift to so-called platform capitalism, is the rise of a protentional system that constantly accelerates the pace of economic and technological change in a way that far outstrips legal processes, and that even outstrips the pace at which exosomatic life protentionalizes its experience, which is to say, its own relationship to an open future. To the extent this is the case, these systems might be described as being in principle protentional, but in practice *anti*-protentional—yet another species of difference of law and fact.

4 See Bernard Stiegler, *Automatic Society, Volume 1: The Future of Work*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 140.

5 See Bernard Stiegler, "Bernard Stiegler on Automatic Society: As Told to Anaïs Nony," *Third Rail Quarterly* 5 (2015): 16–17, available at: <http://thirdrailquarterly.org/wp-content/uploads/05_Stiegler_TTR5.pdf>.

3. From Three Kinds of Memory to Four

For Stiegler, all of these operations and processes of which exosomatic life is composed—and through which the organizations of exosomatic life persist against the tendency to decompose, and do so by keeping themselves open to future recompositions—are a matter of *memory*. What is memory? Above all, it is the possibility of an organized tendency that runs counter to the overall ("universal") tendency we call entropy, where the latter consists above all in the probabilistic tendency for the past to be erased over time.[6] For Stiegler, all of these operations and processes of exosomatic life ultimately consist in the way that *three kinds* of memory compose: *genetic memory* (contained in the proliferation of variations of the DNA molecule), *nervous memory* (contained in the synapses and neurons of the brain and central nervous system) and *technical memory* (contained in the organized inorganic artifacts that make this life, precisely, *exo*-somatic).

The first two of these organized ways of keeping the past in order to keep *open* a future, against the entropic tendency for that openness to close, make up *endosomatic* life. The first, genetic memory, does not learn lessons from the experience of the individual organism but very gradually evolves over multigenerational time. The second, nervous memory, may learn lessons but these lessons are as a rule lost to the species with the death of the individual. It is only with exosomatic life that a mechanism emerges that not only keeps those lessons learned by the individual, but makes possible their condensation, recapitulation and transmission in a cumulative way. This is precisely the mechanism that adds a new inconstancy to the exosomatic environment, which means that the struggle of this form of life is against not only the entropic tendency of the universe but the "anthropic" tendency introduced by this form of life itself, as it passes through an "outside" that becomes constitutive for it (without which it cannot live, and through which it forms its interiority), while at the same time being perpetually "destitutive" (undoing the ways of "neganthropic" life that have arisen to support and take care of life that is irreducibly exteriorized).[7]

All of Stiegler's work is premised on this idea of understanding exosomatic evolution in terms of the constant advance and delay of the processes by which these three memories are arranged. All of the three kinds of memory pointed out by Stiegler are "material": memory can only ever be a question of organized structures with the potential to, in one way or another, locally persist (within a locality that is both spatially and temporally local). But in *Psychopolitical Anaphylaxis* I began to argue that there is, in fact, a *fourth kind of memory*, a fourth material mechanism for improbably keeping the

6 Maël Montévil et al., "Anthropocene, Exosomatization and Negentropy," in Bernard Stiegler and the Internation Collective (eds), *Bifurcate: "There is No Alternative*," trans. Daniel Ross (London: Open Humanities Press, 2021), 47.

7 See Bernard Stiegler, in Bernard Stiegler, Judith Wambacq and Bart Buseyne, "'We Have to Become the Quasi-Cause of Nothing—of *Nihil*': An Interview with Bernard Stiegler," trans. Daniel Ross, *Theory, Culture & Society* 35, no.2 (2018): 141.

past in the present in order to maintain the consistency and viability of the organism as it encounters environmental inconstancy. That fourth kind of memory is the immune system.[8]

The immune system is indeed a retentional system: among its operations is the fact that "guardian cells" literally "cut out a part of the proteins" of which invaders are composed, so that the system will later be able to "display" this "portion of non-self […] inserted in a portion of self (the display),"[9] and, through that, identify the return of an identical or similar pathogenic element, in order to trigger the organism to prophylactically respond to that element. Of course, this function of the immune system that consists in identifying dangerous foreign invaders in order to eliminate them and thereby maintain the health of the organism is both why it is often used as a metaphor for certain phenomena occurring in the collective existence of exorganisms and why that metaphor is often viewed with suspicion, on the grounds that it legitimizes xenophobic reactions of all kinds.

Yet however justified that suspicion may be, the fact remains that the immune system itself is undeniably a kind of retentional system—a fourth kind of memory. Moreover, it operates "protentionally," not strictly in the sense of intentional consciousness, but in the sense that it is functionally devoted to the future viability of the organism. In what follows, we will try to reflect further on this retentional and protentional character of the endosomatic immune system, in order to see what significance it might have for conceiving exosomatic life, beyond its long history of being understood as a metaphor or paradigm for social and political processes of dealing with the distinction between friends and enemies.

4. Immunity and Speed

Beyond the simple statement that the biological immune system is concerned with "identifying enemy intruders"—and without concerning ourselves here with recent arguments that this is only one limited part of what is a much more general system characterizing the individual as a whole and possessed with a multiplicity of functions[10]—why do we have an immune system? Why did vertebrates evolve to possess this *new* retentional system dedicated to metastabilizing the life of the organism? The answer to this question has everything to do with speed, and with speed differentials: the benefit granted by the evolution of the immune system was to enable the organism to respond to pathogenic elements that affect the body more rapidly and/or mutate more rapidly than could be effectively responded to by previously existing systems and functions of the endosomatic organism. Rapidly acting and rapidly

8 Daniel Ross, *Psychopolitical Anaphylaxis: Steps Towards a Metacosmics* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2021), 227–38 and 344–55.
9 Jean-Claude Ameisen, *La sculpture du Vivant: Le Suicide cellulaire ou la Mort créatrice* (Paris: Seuil, 1999), 76, quoted in Francesco Vitale, *Biodeconstruction: Jacques Derrida and the Life Sciences*, trans. Mauro Senatore (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 179.
10 Thomas Pradeu, *Philosophy of Immunology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

mutating pathogenic elements have the potential to quickly cause a crisis for the older systems and functions of the endosomatic organism, and the evolution of the immune system amounts to an effect of selection pressures that eventually gave rise to a new mechanism for responding to such crises. One of the first and most obvious lessons of the colonization of the New World, after all, was that this immune system involves the acquisition and transmission of a history, and that, for those indigenous human populations without the protection of this immune memory, the vulnerability to European viruses was immense, and the consequences rapid and devastating.

Writing the metaphors of endosomatic life and immunity in our own terms, we might say that the structure of the DNA molecule is akin to the political constitution that sets the framework for the governing of a polity: this sacred or founding document, the genetic molecule, is itself either unchanging (for the organism) or very slow and difficult to change (for the species, and for good reason: if it changes other than slowly, the risk is great of producing monsters). The immune system is then ultimately legislated as a new function (a new "institution") within the organism that is always in the end governed according to the possibilities dictated by its founding document, where this new function consists in a retentional mechanism capable of responding to the crises arising from diseases brought by bacterial or viral elements that act quickly and mutate much more quickly than the ability of the genetic molecule itself to adapt. The immune system is "quicker" precisely because it is retentional and epigenetic: it learns the lessons of what happens to it within the life of the individual organism (or transmitted via mother's milk), rather than responding at the speed of the genetic drift of the species.

Whichever retentional system is in question, whether it be a political constitution or a DNA molecule, whether it be the set of laws legislated by a social organism such as a parliament or the expression of DNA in the organs and functions of an organism, the premise and condition of the successful functioning of that retentional system is that the inconstancies of the environment change *more slowly* than the ability of the retentional system of the organism itself to adjust to that change. *All* of these systems *do* change, and in fact *must* change, but they change at a rhythm that has to be quick enough to respond to those inconstancies and slow enough that harmful changes do not accumulate rapidly enough to have a strong likelihood of threatening the organism itself.

It is for this very reason, for example, that law changes at the speed of deliberation, where this deliberation is institutionally organized with an *in-built* slowness: the virtues of slow deliberation are, in general, in the institutions and bureaucracies of political life, *preferred* over too great an efficiency of very rapid changes, precisely because the undeniable risks brought by that slowness were long thought to be proportionate to the pace of change of the sociotechnical environment. The benefits of very rapid change can frequently turn out to be outweighed by the risks of perpetrating harmful error as a result

of ill-considered changes brought by sociopolitical mutations arising from insufficiently careful and cautious decision-making procedures.

A conservative, pre-industrial figure such as Edmund Burke, for example, argues that what has lasted in law and society for a long time should be trusted much more than what presents itself as novel and revolutionary improvement. Nevertheless, Burke recognizes that the "two principles of conservation and correction" are both necessary, for a "state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation." Even if it "is far from impossible to reconcile […] the use both of a fixed rule and an occasional deviation," it is obvious to Burke in 1790 that "change is to be confined to the peccant part only, to the part which produced the necessary deviation; and even then it is to be effected without a decomposition of the whole civil and political mass."[11] And even more than this restriction to the "peccant part," what ensures the virtuousness of any necessary deviation is the speed of the method of its institution:

> It is one of the excellences of a method in which time is amongst the assistants, that its operation is slow and in some cases almost imperceptible. If circumspection and caution are a part of wisdom when we work only upon inanimate matter, surely they become a part of duty, too, when the subject of our demolition and construction is not brick and timber but sentient beings, by the sudden alteration of whose state, condition, and habits multitudes may be rendered miserable.[12]

Over the long course of exosomatic evolution, from Oldowan tool use until today, the pace of sociotechnical change was indeed mostly very slow, and it was still *relatively* slow at the time of the Solonian constitution (6th century B.C.E.) or the Magna Carta (1215), or even at the time of the Constitution of the United States (1789) and the Declarations of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789). What all of these documents have in common is the fact that they *are* documents: texts engraved or inscribed in letters and words into stone, or on papyrus, parchment or paper, and held to be either unchangeable or changeable only via exacting processes instituted so as to ensure great care is taken. The retentional system at the basis of all of these approaches to the local metastabilization of exosomatic life is alphabetical writing, and the deliberative mechanisms they set into motion are designed to function at a pace capable of generating written law that responds *quickly* enough to handle the inconstancies of a slowly changing sociotechnical milieu, and *slowly* enough not to jeopardize the viability of those local exosomatic formations by promulgating laws whose interaction with sociotechnical realities has not been properly considered.

11 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 19.
12 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 143.

As everyone knows, however, from the time of the Industrial Revolution, the pace of technical change accelerated greatly. And if the two fundamental problems brought by digital networks, social media, algorithmic platforms and the like are both related to a speed differential between the technological processes and the processes of law and regulation, is this not fundamentally because the latter cannot be divorced from *written* constitutions, *written* laws, and *deliberations* about the meaning and consequences of new possible written laws? These new technological processes, however, even if they are *in a sense* a new kind of writing (engraved, so to speak, in silicon), are not bound by the temporal constraints and requirements associated with these kinds of documentary, constitutional, jurisprudential and deliberative retentional processes that have governed exosomatic life in many localities for many centuries.

Does it not seem practically *inevitable* that these *computational* processes, which amount to the *latest form* of the inconstancies of the exosomatic environment, will *always* unfold, change and mutate more rapidly than the pace of change that is allowable under regimes based on written political constitutions that legislate processes of political and legal deliberation and that arose at a time when such rapidly changing environments were unimaginable? Is this not why an ideology centred on "disruption" has arisen, and why it has gained a substantial sway over economic policies and entrepreneurial practices? But if we wish to say that such an ideology fails to meet the challenges we have just outlined, and only exacerbates the problems brought by these challenges, then what *could* be the solution to this problem of a speed differential that is highly detrimental to the functioning of all retentional systems founded on the writing of documents?

5. The Third Pharmacological Dimension

What I would like to focus on here, however, are the consequences of considering the immune system less directly in terms of its putative function of distinguishing friend and enemy, and more directly in terms of the fact that it is a retentional system, a fourth kind of memory. If it *is* a retentional system, and if it has the function of *discriminating* what it encounters, in the sense of initiating or not initiating an immune response, then we could say, using the term in a basic or primitive way, that the immune system is an *interpretive* system. By keeping remnants of the past in the present, counter-entropically holding onto them as a kind of memory store, the immune system is able to make comparisons between what it keeps and what it meets, where what it *does* is the result of this comparison—this interpretation.

It is this aspect of the immune system—its basic interpretive capacity—that means that the immune system is also capable of *mis*interpretations. For a start, as everyone knows (especially in the post-Covid era), the immune system suffers from retentional finitude, and from forgetfulness: what it

remembers, what it keeps in its archive, can be lost, just as libraries can burn down, ink can fade and books can be lost forever, and just as our own (cerebral) memories are finite and forgetful. But beyond forgetfulness, it is immune misinterpretations that result in those auto-immune disorders that seem to be ever-expanding (both in terms of our knowledge of them and their prevalence), and that were of such (metaphorical) interest to Derrida, in whose hands they were turned into a kind of pharmacology of immunity always containing and contaminated by auto-immunity.

Auto-immunity is not all, however: there is also anaphylaxis, a kind of extremity of auto-immunity—auto-immunity as extremism, even, involving a maximum of shock, up to (and including) the point of fatality. Nevertheless, according to Canguilhem, anaphylaxis is not in any way *opposable* to ordinary immune function, because both are a kind of reaction, and each of them are an expression of a single "normal" process:

> While immunity makes the organism insensible to an intrusion of microbes or toxins in the inner environment, anaphylaxis is an acquired *supersensitivity* […]. The presence of antibodies in blood serum is thus always normal, the organism having reacted by modifying its constant to a first aggression of the environment and being regulated by it, but in one case the normality is physiological, in the other, pathological.[13]

The "fault" of anaphylaxis is thus a matter of a degree of sensitivity, where the fault is not a *failure* of sensitivity, but rather a kind of misjudgment taking the form of an excess of sensitivity. Whether physiological or pathological, the functioning of the system *itself* does not really deviate from "normality," but in the case of anaphylaxis the supersensitive character of this functioning amounts to a fault of interpretation. The immune system is a *sensitive* system (even though it is not a "sensible" system, in the sense in which Aristotle talks about a sensible soul as distinct from a vegetative or a noetic soul), and it is so in both senses of the term: it is sensitive in the sense that it "detects" and is *moved* by what it detects; and it is sensitive in the sense that it is delicate, finely balanced, and susceptible to losing this balance by becoming either overly sensitive or insufficiently sensitive.

What I would here like to argue is that this way of thinking about the immune system can aid us in understanding what Stiegler says in *Pharmacologie du Front national*, when he states that the *pharmakon* has a "*third pharmacological dimension*," in addition to the fact that it is both curative and poisonous, a dimension "that has not previously been thematized or explored, namely, the dimension of the *pharmakos*—the scapegoat."[14] As others have noted, the tendency towards an extremification, in the sense of designating enemies of the system, is a kind of counter-tendency produced by the overall

13 Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological*, 206–7.
14 Bernard Stiegler, "The National Front and Ultraliberalism (extract from *Pharmacologie du Front national*, 2013)," trans. Daniel Ross, *Cultural Politics* 18, no.2 (2022): 133.

tendency of a capitalist system that eventually undermines every social regulatory mechanism, even though this system disavows this connection and almost always acts as if this "reaction" originates either from outside or from a cancerous element located within. In 2013, Stiegler understands this "logic of the scapegoat" as well as anyone, and, in particular, how it arises not just within industrial society, but especially in the latest intensifications of this technico-economic system:

> The Conservative Revolution unleashed the toxic and poisonous dimension of the industrial *pharmakon* by blocking all of its therapeutic possibilities, and the National Front extremized this ideology by making the *pharmakos* the cause of all ills. The *pharmakos* is the third dimension of the pharmacology that defines the human situation in general qua technical life […]. In the absence of a reasoned positive pharmacology, stated as such and explained widely, struggling against the negative pharmacology that, in the epoch of neoconservative globalization, has become diabolical in the strict sense (in the sense of the Greek *diabolē*)—that is, atomizing and disintegrating all social organizations, and thus all forms of attention and care—the exploitation of the logic of the *pharmakos* and the sacrificial persecution of scapegoats will continue, and will end by eventually bringing to power the extreme right.[15]

Furthermore, Stiegler understands better than anyone that these reactions are precisely a case of *over*reaction, that is, of supersensitivity. He knows that those who are most prone to be sensitive, to *suffer* in a protentional system that self-destructively undermines the protentions of the consumers on which it depends (by exploiting them), are those who are most prone to react, and to react by despair, by scapegoating, and by voting for the far right. It is because he recognizes this sensitivity and this suffering, it is because recognizing it makes *him* suffer, that Stiegler dedicates a lecture and a book to those who vote for the National Front, because these voters suffer "like you and I but perhaps more than you and I."[16]

6. Paranoia and the Default Mode of Interpretation

Let us pursue further the question of why *exactly* the industrial *pharmakon* produces the *pharmakos*, but let us do so in a slightly different, and perhaps unusual, direction. A more common approach might be to refer to Carl Schmitt, for whom the "specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy," where this criterion is irreducible, "not derived from other criteria," ultimately because it "denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of

15 Stiegler, "The National Front and Ultraliberalism," 147.
16 Bernard Stiegler, *Acting Out*, trans. David Barison, Daniel Ross and Patrick Crogan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 42, and see the dedication that appears on page 38.

an association or dissociation."[17] But even were we to accept Schmitt's claim of the irreducibility of this "antithesis," it would leave the question of the mechanism by which friends and enemies are identified, known or designated, which, even were this to give us the ultimate "what" of political distinction, and even were we to understand this criterion as originating from some fundamental characteristic of "life," would still require a *process*, and this process would seem to involve an interpretive aspect that would be equally irreducible, that is, unavoidable.

Instead of reading Schmitt further, then, let us approach this question from another angle altogether, by reflecting on what we could call the *anaphylactic default* of this discrimination of friend and enemy. What is this anaphylactic default? We will argue here that it is paranoia.

When someone speaks to us, how is it that we know what they mean? Perhaps this question is not as simple as it sounds. We might immediately answer by saying, very straightforwardly, "Because we share a knowledge of the same language, and this makes it possible to understand a speaker's words." A moment's reflection, however, will remind us that it is possible to speak in an ironic or sarcastic way, so that the intended meaning could very well be the very opposite of what we would call the "literal" meaning. And there are all kinds of shades and dimensions of meaning that lie between or to the side of the literal and the ironic. So how do we know what someone who speaks to us is *really* trying to tell us?

When someone becomes paranoid, whether because of an onset of schizophrenia or because of some other psychosis (and paranoia is in fact very common, at least as a tendency of personality, and very dependent on social conditions as well as psychological factors), there is often a preceding phrase, an initial period of confusion. There is a feeling that something is not quite right, that everything feels kind of off, but without being able to put a finger on exactly why. There is a loss of having a viewpoint on things. This is often characterized as a loss of common sense or "natural self-evidence," referred to as the *premorbid stage* of psychosis.

This premorbid stage is followed by a *prodromal stage*, consisting very often in a state of tension that is also a feeling of uncanniness, of something about to happen, of important meanings that are about to be discovered. But eventually, there occurs a third, *apophanic stage*, frequently involving what is known as the "aha experience," when all of the confusion and all of the tension suddenly fall away in the crystallization of a revelatory discovery: "Aha! All of these feelings I've been having are because of the signs I was picking up that there is a gigantic conspiracy going on, and, however unbelievable it sounds, it's all centred around me!" Psychosis, then, and in particular paranoid psychosis, often progresses

17 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (New Brunswick and New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1976), 26.

through these three stages.[18]

What is happening across the course of this movement through premorbid disorientation, prodromal uncanny tension and apophanic revelation? The way in which we will venture to approach this question here is through the interpretivity and sensitivity we have ascribed to immune processes. Our aim, again, is to show how conceiving the immune system as a retentional system makes it possible to reinterpret paranoia as a default of interpretation occurring when this sensitive system dysfunctions, and through that to be able to say something about the "third dimension" of the *pharmakon* (the *pharmakon* always being a kind of retention, an exteriorized memory): the *pharmakos*.

Returning to the question, "When someone speaks to us, how is it that we know what they mean?", we have to add: beyond the knowledge we have of the language being spoken, which is only one dimension of the conveying of meaning, there are many other expressive dimensions of the given that we are receiving when someone communicates with us. What is given to us, which we take in as a kind of "cinematic" stream of time-consciousness, unfolds before us and within us in such a flood that we are constantly making attentional selections from among the array of possibilities of what is given. What's more, we are "post-producing" what we are receiving in the moment of reception itself—editing "in camera," so to speak, which is to say, constructing and shaping in manifold ways what arrives, so that what arrives is always already a "production". And (therefore) an interpretation. All of these operations of reception, selection, production and interpretation, all of which also involve a return to, dredging up, recapitulation, rearrangement, reinterpretation and re-production of our accumulated stock of secondary retentions (of memories)—all of this occurs, to a very large extent, "behind the back of consciousness," without our being aware of it. And yet: sensitively, subtly, with potentially infinite complexity, infinite complication and in a limitless complicity between the "sender," the "receiver" and the multi-layered and supersaturated idiomatic milieu through which this multi-dimensional expression is conveyed.

Sometimes, however, this sensitive interpretive instrument goes awry. Precisely because it involves such a multiplicity of dimensions, where each of them involves a fine calibration, and where the synthesis of these dimensions is an operation that is mostly beyond description, let alone comprehension in the moment of reception/production—because of all of this, the "needle" of this instrument can start to go haywire. When it does so, it gives rise to the symptoms of the premorbid stage of psychosis: confusion, disorientation, loss of sense, a loss of *confidence* in one's ability to *make* sense or interpret *well*. From there, a struggle ensues, attempting to locate a new orientation, but when that struggle cannot make

18 See Paolo Fusar-Poli et al., "The Lived Experience of Psychosis: A Bottom-Up Review Co-Written by Experts by Experience and Academics," *World Psychiatry* 21, no.2 (2022): 168–88, available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/wps.20959>.

progress, behind the scenes there is the beginning of a "resetting" of that interpretive system, but in a kind of "default mode." As that faulty reinitializing of the interpretive system unfolds, one enters the state of uncanny tension of the prodromal stage.

What is the default mode of the interpretive system that allows us to orient ourselves in a cosmos of significance? All of a sudden, there is a crystallization, including in the sense of the crystalline freezing of what was hitherto liquid. All of a sudden, everything means one thing—every expression might seem to have great significance, but the significance of every expression proves to be identical. "All of these feelings I've been having are because of the signs I was picking up that there is a gigantic conspiracy going on, and it's all centred around me!"

Is this not the very tripartite process that occurs at a collective level when the crowd designates a scapegoat, and with all of those other reactive formations that amount to one or another form of collective psychosis, new forms of which seem to be emerging with highly disconcerting rapidity and variety (even if they all also seem somehow depressingly similar)? Post-truth, generalized distrust and suspicion, the susceptibility of just about anyone to falling under the sway of one or another species of conspiracy theory, the sense that one cannot find an authority with whom to reliably orient oneself: all of these socio-technically fuelled disorders and psychoses, which can befall individuals situated anywhere on the political spectrum, follow patterns that may have much to do with Schmitt's antithesis of friend and enemy, but all *also* resemble the premorbid, prodromal and apophanic stages of the onset of psychotic episodes in general and paranoid delusions in particular.

7. Resonance and Tension

What difference does it make if we examine such phenomena through this particular kind of lens? First, it is worth noting that this process of collective paranoia does not operate in the same way as those processes of the nervous system, as, for example, when my finger touches something very hot, causing the pain receptors in my finger to send signals along my arm, through my neck and into my brain, which responds by sending different signals back to my arm, my hand and my finger, stimulating muscle actions aimed at removing that finger from the source of the pain. This describes von Uexküll's "sensorimotor loop,"[19] but this "loop" is possible and necessary because of the linear, centralized character of the nervous system. But in the case of the psychosocial phenomena we are considering here, other terms are needed, because such processes are not best described as this kind of looping back and forth between centre and periphery.

19 Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the World of Animals and Humans, with, A Theory of Meaning*, trans. Joseph. D. O'Neil (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

The immune system offers terms that more closely conform to what occurs with this kind of mimetic contagion. Instead of loops of messages between centre and periphery, the immune system *resonates* through the body, as a spreading chain of antibodies. One might think: is this not to confuse the socially contagious character of certain forms of disease, or the spread of a virus or infection through a body, with the action of the system designed to defend against that contagion or infection? But this is the very ambiguity that characterizes the *psychosocial* immune reaction: to what degree the spread of such reactions is *itself* a sign of psychosocial disease (we might think of the xenophobic designation of scapegoats, for example), and to what extent a prophylaxis against a genuine threat (we might think of indigenous populations rising up against a colonial intruder, for example), has *something at least* to do with viewpoint. At what point does immune response shift, anaphylactically, so that it becomes a shock reaction whose rapid spread and crystallization becomes the very thing with the capacity to fundamentally threaten the organism itself (we might think of the rise of anti-Semitism leading to the fall of the Weimar Republic, for example)?

Resonance is possible only because there is tension. To be in a condition of tension is, for a physical system, to be in a situation where all of the elements are held within a mutually connected field of attraction and repulsion. In physical systems, this attraction and repulsion are the work of physical forces (in the physical systems with which we are mostly familiar, this tension is electromagnetic). In the noetic systems of exosomatic life, however, this attraction and repulsion are not a matter of electromagnetism, but nor is the attraction and repulsion here something that could be reduced to some primordial "antithesis" of friend and enemy.

Rather, what is at stake in the noetic tensions of exosomatic life involves a multi-dimensional and singularly complex question of the way in which the turns of all the idiomatic spirals greater than us and smaller than us meet in ways that either seem similar or dissimilar, fitted or unfitted, suitable or unsuitable, fruitful or sterile, or more generally, in Canguilhem's terms, *propulsive or repulsive*. The sensitivity of interpretation is a matter of negotiating the way in which these tensed possibilities are distributed across a heterogeneous field, and of negotiating and articulating them in terms of what these interactions, events and possibilities open up and what they close off. It is a sensitivity that inhabits this tension, a tension between individuals and groups of individuals, arising from the propulsive/repulsive diversity of their knowledge and desire.

This tensed diversity is what makes it possible for knowledge and desire to individuate, in ways that lead to conflicts and dissolutions, but also to singular resolutions that represent the individuation of knowledge and desire. And these resolutions amount to the production of new significance. To say that information is a kind of prodromal and protentive tension and resonance would be to say that it exists in a supersaturated field of possible meanings. And it would be to say that this is the condition

of possibility of noetic diversity, but also that it is the condition of possibility of that supersensitivity that anaphylactically crystallizes into shock reactions.

8. War, Peace and Beyond

Why does this matter? It matters because today, algorithmic platforms utilize their immensely powerful informational strategies in a way that tends to eliminate that tension. The tension of noetic life always depends on the cultivation of highly sensitive, delicately balanced interpretive instruments that *always* work through a multiplicity of dimensions simultaneously. In other words, tension is always a matter of forms of knowledge and desire that must be cultivated, transmitted and transformed intergenerationally, where this transformation sometimes occurs very slowly (with the rhythm of linguistic evolution, for example) and sometimes very quickly (at the accelerating pace that takes us through childhoods shaped by cinema, then by television, then by the internet, then by Facebook, then Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and whatever comes next, each successive epoch becoming more or less incomprehensible to the one that preceded it, and vice versa).

Tension is always a risk, precisely the risk that it will lead to supersensitivity, but tension is also productive: it is the tension between diverse viewpoints, the tension between the old and the young, or between men and women (seduction, for example, is a situation of tension, one that, at its best, can be electric, which is to say, a very short circuit), which forms the conditions in which what Canguilhem called propulsive constants can be followed, in which positive leaps can occur:

> There are two kinds of original modes of life. There are those which are stabilized in new constants but whose stability will not keep them from being eventually transcended again. These are normal constants with propulsive value. They are truly normal by virtue of their normativity. And there are those which will be stabilized in the form of constants, which the living being's every anxious effort will tend to preserve from every eventual disturbance. These are still normal constants but with repulsive value expressing the death of normativity in them. In this they are pathological, although they are normal as long as the living being is alive.[20]

The elimination of the tension of noetic and neganthropic life is a reduction of exosomatic life's multi-dimensional tension, leaving a form of "unlife"[21] that may still last for a long time, many of those it inhabits not *quite* knowing immediately or well that the efficient crystallization of frozen informational

20 Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological*, 206.
21 See Ross, *Psychopolitical Anaphylaxis*, 162–64.

"repulsive" norms inevitably produces pathologies of suffering that eventually prove unbearable and unliveable. The destruction of the knowledgeable and desirable conditions of this tension and this resonance—between diverse viewpoints, between the old and the young, (and *especially*, in some way, even though this received the *least* attention from Stiegler) between men and women—leads either to the grey of flattened indifferentiation, or to war. Or to both at the same time. Today, we bear witness in a thousand ways to this collapse of tension, to the conflicts to which it leads, and to the wars which it is generating.

Today, the question of politics is above all a matter of knowing how to live well within a situation of unavoidable pressure. And yet in some way it is also a question of reinflating a form of pressure that has been lost, so that it can cope with the road ahead—and, we could say, of inflating it to a cosmic scale. It is thus a question of adopting all of the tensions that define us and confront us, so that we can resonate fruitfully *in and through* these tensions, and beyond the deflationary depressions of an all-too-anthropic universe. For exosomatic life, tensions are first and foremost a matter of being protentively and prodromally held out to the possibility and improbability of what's coming, its significance, and its pathologies. In this way, protentional tension forms the very conditions of possibility of attention and paying attention, and, without the knowledge and desire to live with such tensions and within them, and of (genuinely) apophanically transforming our relationship to them, we are bound to see a series of anaphylactic reactions to the efficient installation of repulsive informational constants, reactions that amount to the self-destruction of the psychosocial organism by itself, and by technically-induced means.

If politics can still be defined as the counter to war, then what it is also crucial to remember is that it is not exactly the case that peace is the *antithesis* of war. Rather, the condition of any lasting peace is precisely a matter of living in tension: peace can never mean frozen states of idyllic tranquillity, and can only mean metastable states of tension. Such a metastabilization requires the cultivation of the knowledge and desire to live well within a tension that is *never* completely stable, and which, if it *were* completely stable, would mean that the situation has regressed—that it has succumbed to entropy, and to anthropy. It can only be a matter, then, of something towards which we rise, towards which we raise ourselves, and the knowledge and desire this requires are irreducibly matters of interpretation and sensitivity.

Today, we face an immense proletarianization of our interpretive and sensitive capacities. These capacities must be revived, at the scale both of the individual and the collective, and at a "cosmic" scale that exceeds them. Such an apophanic renewal of the *normativity* of exosomatic life can only be anchored to new propulsive values. This may well be something we should still understand as a question of establishing the conditions of peace, but only if the latter is defined as follows: peace involves the

perpetually renewed cultivation of the capacity for living well in all kinds of resonant tension, within an extended critical situation that always threatens to mimetically catalyse into anaphylaxis, that is, into war.

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