

Democracy, Authority, Narcissism: From Agamben to Stiegler

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I

'Democracy' finds itself today in a paradoxical condition. *On the one hand*, it remains the unsurpassable horizon of our time. This thought may *generally* be true if one takes 'democracy' as the system of representative parliamentarism, in its contrast with the declining fortunes of, say, *Marxist* political practice. It is absolutely true if by 'democracy' one means the thought that the sole ground of sovereignty is 'the people'. Cast in these widest of terms, democracy is equally inclusive of liberalism, socialism, communism, and nationalism. Even National Socialism imagined itself in terms of direct mutual communication between *Führer* and *Volk*. But it is also the case that 'democracy', the very *word* democracy, has expanded to fill the space left by the decline of all those *other* modern species of popular sovereignty. From the Left to the Right 'democracy' is the concept *governing* political imagination. This is so even if the beginning of the 21st century has also witnessed the return of the repressed, that is, theocratic politics, both Christian and Islamic.

On the other hand, if 'democracy' remains the horizon beyond which it seems impossible to think, it is nevertheless and without doubt a concept in *crisis*. Where is a self-assured 'democracy', content and comfortable with itself, trusting in its own foundation and practice? Where does democracy exist as the assured expression of truths taken to be self-evident? As though responding to this lack of assurance, 'democratic' government (which always claimed a monopoly on legitimate violence) seems progressively to be expanding the kinds of violence undertaken in its name, if it is not indeed the case that violence—under the umbrella heading 'security'—is becoming the very means *and end* of the state. Even as 'democracy' crowds out its competitors, it is less and less clear that the word continues to be *effective*, that the concept continues to hold *potential*. If modern conceptions of democratic sovereignty are born of the decline and secularization of theological sovereignty, that is, of a loss of putative certainty, then the uncertainty of democratic foundation continues to reveal itself ever more transparently. Democracy has become default politics, the political default position, in every sense.

II

Giorgio Agamben has shown that, if modern democratic thought begins with the French revolution, ever *since* that moment 'democratic' governments have been engaged in undermining its radical character and embracing the control afforded by the thoughts of 'necessity' and 'emergency'.¹ Whatever pockets of democratic radicalism have flourished momentarily here and there, the *tendency* has not been an increase of popular control over government, but rather of increasing governmental control over populations. Agamben's tendential approach is thus not so much historical as historico-paradigmatic. After outlining the 'state of exception' (or state of emergency) paradigm, a more or less synchronic if variegated *form*, Agamben traces the diachronic *movement* of this form, in order to describe a certain historical direction.²

On the one hand, Agamben describes the process by which the thought and practice of democracy has been colonized by the state of exception, exposing a trend toward the gradual undoing of democracy in many places and over decades if not centuries. On the other hand, Agamben's account of the camp as the *nomos* of the modern spectacularly anticipated the most recent and singular intensification and acceleration of this trend in the wake of September 11, as the United States and increasingly the West in general apparently heads toward a permanent state of exception.³ This is not only a question of the prisons and the camps formed within and beyond the territories of various democracies since September 11, nor is it a matter simply of all those processes and techniques of control and surveillance applied to citizens since then. Rather, what is being undertaken is a reconfiguring of the very thought of the 'public', and hence of the political as such. It was National Socialism that most *literally* confounded 'law' and 'life', exemplified by the extermination camp *and* by the fact that the *Führer's* 'will' embodied the people's law. What is remarkable about the contemporary movement toward this undoing of the (modern) separation of law and life is that it is being accomplished less explicitly, in some ways more deceptively, *and yet* more *transparently* and *openly*.

But if this suffices to indicate the continuing significance of the state of exception paradigm, where, precisely, does this leave democracy? The future of democracy is, of course, exactly what Agamben places in question, as do 'deconstructive' approaches to the question of law and its futures. Nothing is more available for deconstruction than 'democracy' since, not only in its implementation but also in its very *idea*, democracy seems nothing but a set of aporias. *However* democracy is imagined in every case it depends on a set of impossible concepts: people, border, law, life, liberty, decision, foundation, sovereignty, etc. It is not difficult to make manifest the aporetic if not simply contradictory basis of each of these democratic pillars.

Yet the concept of 'democracy' *itself* somewhat eludes Agamben's schema. At the end of any accounting of its constituent concepts, when it becomes a matter again of accounting for any possible future for politics, it turns out that democracy *remains*—or that the remains of democracy remain—as though democracy 'itself', beyond all the concepts by which it is

created, and on which it seemingly depends, were untouchable. Democracy ‘itself’ appears unreachable by critique or deconstruction, even where it is explicitly stated that it can be no kind of regulatory ideal. The question is this: does this constant *return* of the thought of democracy represent the *infinity* of this thought (an infinity akin, perhaps, to ‘love’), the fact that democracy, as idea or ideal, is never finished, never done with, *or* does it return simply as a *resort*, in the absence of anywhere else to turn?

It may be significant that neither *Homo Sacer*, nor *State of Exception*, nor the “Notes on Politics,”⁴ end with any mention of democracy, although they all conclude with reflections on the future of politics. Agamben is concerned in each of these texts with stating the impossibility of any return to the stable concepts of law and life, any return to a ‘classical’ (which here means ‘modern’) politics of sovereignty. With the biopolitical collapse of the historical distinction between law and life, figured in the camps, law seeks constantly to become life itself, and life is constantly succumbing to the *rigor mortis* of law. This indicates not only that the categories of philosophico-juridical thought have been confounded, but that they have been *exposed*. For Agamben, only a transformation of law—untying it from all violence against life—will enable any new politics. Only by escaping the violence of political ends, only by becoming action without relation to ends, only by becoming ‘pure means’, can there be any political future. In other words, only with the invention and installation of forms-of-life not dictated by the ends of ‘law’ and ‘life’ can there be an exit from the biopolitical tyranny of the coming permanent state of exception.

Would such a possibility still be called democracy? To the extent this question is posed from out of the classical political tradition, thus in the name of the restoration of classical political categories, Agamben’s answer is clear enough: if by democracy one means the separation of law and life that has *always* given (modern) sovereignty its possibility, *or* if one means the confounding of these things accomplished in the contemporary democratic travesty, then the future of politics, if there is one, cannot be bound by the idea of democracy. Those who continue to insist on speaking uncritically about democracy “literally do not know what they are talking about.”⁵

The question, however, remains: does the word ‘democracy’ have signifying *force* in this possible future? Does ‘democracy’ survive, and if so, how, and if not, can there be a substitute, a surrogate, for its carcass? Or can democracy simply be buried, and (political) life carry on without the need for reinvesting our (political) desire in any new object? Agamben states, for instance, that the concept of sovereignty must be abandoned or, at least, utterly rethought.⁶ But abandonment and rethinking seem to be two quite different paths. To call for a non-juridical, non-statal, politics of means without end—is this still to call for democracy, or not?

III

What would be the consequences of listening to one of the most risky and disconcerting formulations of the *question* of democratic futures, by a speaker whose biography inevitably provokes distrust whenever politics is in question?

During the past thirty years, it should meanwhile have become clearer that the planetary movement of modern technology is a power whose great role in determining history can hardly be overestimated. A decisive question for me today is how a political system can be assigned to today's technological age at all, and which political system would that be? I have no answer to this question. I am not convinced that it is democracy.⁷

Martin Heidegger is speaking here in 1966. The thirty years to which he refers, therefore, are those commencing from the time of *An Introduction to Metaphysics* and the Nietzsche lectures—that is, from that time when, for ‘all those with ears to hear’, he undertook his ‘confrontation’ with National Socialism. What is implied in 1966 is thus clear: Heidegger's *earlier* confrontation was nothing other than an encounter with the way in which, *as* politics, National Socialism decisively failed to measure up to the fact of ‘global technology’, constituting little more than its *symptom*. Translating this into the terms of Jean-Luc Nancy, who has coined the word ‘ecotechnics’ to describe the contemporary worldwide systematic integration and penetration of economics and technology, Heidegger (in 1966) can be understood as making the following claim: his 1935 confrontation with National Socialism consisted in the realization that the National Socialist ‘movement’ was in reality nothing other than “ecotechnics in the guise of Cause.”⁸ But, in the thirty years since, Heidegger has come to doubt that victorious democracy is any less symptomatic, if it is not indeed more so.

A decisive ambiguity in Heidegger's remark is, of course, whether an appropriate politics would *counter* ecotechnics or *enable* it in some non-symptomatic way. The idea of assigning a politics to our contemporary situation suggests, perhaps, it is a matter of conforming to the ecotechnical *fact*. Contrary to those who see Heidegger as simply ‘against’ modern technology, it is clear he sees ‘resistance’ as failing to measure up to the demands of the situation. It is with *this* in mind that we should recollect that in this interview Heidegger calls upon the absolutely novel arrival, in the form of the statement that ‘only a God can save us’. If a particular politics could still be appropriately assigned to the situation of global technology, then the uncertainty about what this politics might be reflects that global technology has not simply assumed its final form, but remains a process of becoming that is still only getting underway.

Heidegger's account of technology is precisely a matter of recognizing that the separation of ends and means by which until now technology has been imagined has, in the contemporary situation, been exposed. And that, consequently, the future of human being, framed by an evolving technological situation ungoverned by any ends, lies in the *form* of its technologically mediated being-together. To that extent, one could say that Agamben's possible future politics

of pure means, whatever differences there manifestly are, nevertheless remains a species of thought related to the Heideggerian account of our global technological situation and its future.

The colonization of democracy by the state of exception could thus be understood as an *element* of the unfolding process by which ecotechnics *undoes* politics. It is in this vein that Agamben refers to the “spectacular-democratic state.”⁹ But at this point a difference between Heidegger and Agamben suggests itself. Agamben is concerned, largely, with the ways and means by which governments, scientists, lawyers, ethical committees—in short, *authorities*—undertake and control this process, even if he would readily acknowledge they are equally controlled by it. Agamben is concerned to describe the effect of the *actions* by which action is eliminated, the legal and political decisions by which law and politics are dissolved. It is a question of ‘authority’. Heidegger, thinking, so he imagines, beyond politics, thinks the process itself insofar as *it* produces the human beings who inhabit it. And what the ecotechnical process *does*, among other things, is destroy ‘authority’ as such—and *therefore* politics.

Let’s say that ‘politics’ is the name of the endless *problem* of articulating or composing the individual and the collective. One way of understanding Heidegger’s political catastrophe, then, as Stiegler has argued, is his failure to articulate the existential analytic (focused on individual *Dasein*) with the (collective) history of being.¹⁰ In Heidegger’s account of enframing, the individual is more or less dissolved into the ecotechnical fact, with the result that politics becomes essentially inconceivable. Exploring the potential for a *future* politics, today, means taking up the existential question of the individual in its encounter with the collective—or more particularly, how the individual is *constituted* through its encounters with the (collective) other, including the others in itself. It may turn out that the critical terms for such a question are not ‘law’ and ‘life’ as much as their ‘erotic’ counterparts (heard in both a psychoanalytic and Socratic key): authority and narcissism.

IV

Sigmund Freud famously spoke of a threefold narcissistic wound suffered by humanity in recent centuries.¹¹ These are, in brief, the Copernican, the Darwinian, and the Freudian revolutions. Each casts humankind out of a presupposed *centre*—in turn physical, biological and psychological. Each of these narcissistic wounds disrupts human certainty, or rather human self-certainty, human ‘subjectivity’. ‘Man’ is no longer master in three of his concentric houses, or in three of his natures: in the cosmological house, in the biological realm (‘nature’) in which he is installed, and as master of his own consciousness, the ego.

There is an obvious difference between the Freudian account of the threefold narcissistic wound and the Heideggerian account of the dissolution of human ends and means achieved by technological enframing. The Freudian narrative is the story of three ‘sciences’, that is, of

three kinds of knowing, three examples of 'discovered fact'. Freud can thus be understood as arguing that true information, cognitively grasped, transforms our being. Even if this transformation works itself out at the unconscious level, or in the relation between conscious knowledge and unconscious process, nevertheless the *cause* of this transformation is the discovery of realms of knowledge. Discovery necessarily occurs at the conscious level at which science, even psychoanalytic science, operates. It is discovery that wounds our narcissism, and to that degree a kind of residual idealism operates in Freud's historical paradigm.

In Heidegger's account, on the other hand, scientific discovery can only happen by way of epochs in the history of being, which prepare the ground for scientific advance. And this history of being itself, while charted almost entirely through the history of philosophy (but where the commencement of the history of being *predates* 'philosophy'), is nothing other than the history of the dissimulation and the forgetting of being. Rather than a history of progressing knowledge, the history of being is more like the history of the proliferating effects of forgetting, repressing, *not* knowing what is *also* and *already* known. In a strange way, then, Heidegger's account of the epochs of human being could be understood as *more* 'psychoanalytic' or 'erotic' than Freud's account of the narcissistic wounds suffered by humankind.

A genealogy of human narcissism and its discontents should be elaborated, retracing each of these wounds beyond Freud's indications. This cannot simply be a matter of translating them into Heideggerian terms. Each one must be grasped as more than a cognitive 'discovery' perpetrating unconscious effects, but on the other hand they are not merely epiphenomena within a history of being in which science simply "does not think."¹² Each wound is singular: they cannot simply be *fit into* a pre-existing and universal architectonics of reason or science. On the contrary, each event is precisely the unleashing or the branching off of a *particular* history of *particular* reason. But, as well, if this is to suggest that each science, inventing its object, invents as well its own reason, then this *invention* is not simply the work of conscious thought, but something that happens *materially*, that is, already, *technologically*.

V

Such a genealogy of human narcissism would have more than three chapters, but it is only possible here to indicate one path into the first of those wounds identified by Freud. Rather than the Copernican revolution itself, consider its delayed and different confirmation in the Galilean event. This event—involving not just its astronomical aspect but *equally* the description of the laws of motion (conjoined via the observation of the periodicity of the pendulum)—is usually taken as the discovery or invention of modern science. It is presented, therefore, as the triumph of certain reason over mere opinion, mere tradition. But as a narcissistic *wound* it is the very opposite: if the *most* obvious thing in the world—that the Earth is *still*, unmoving, that what moves moves precisely *in relation to* the Earth—if this

most obvious thing can be made to appear false, then no truths remain which may be taken as self-evident. Is this not *also* the event's perlocutionary effect?

But, as Isabelle Stengers has shown, the Galilean event did not merely substitute one fact (the Earth revolves around the Sun) for another (the Sun revolves around the Earth).¹³ Rather, what Galileo proposed, and what he had to establish, was that it is *reasonable* to translate from observation to abstraction. The reasonableness of this idea is precisely what is rejected by those who today resist the second narcissistic wound by arguing that fossils may have been placed by divine will as a 'ruse' to hubristic reason. The argument put to Galileo was that, no matter how many observations one gathers, nothing ever guarantees the *interpretation* by which these are translated into the abstract form of *laws*. Abstractions are always and necessarily merely fictions, human artifices, never 'proofs'.

How does Galileo contend against this? Stengers shows that it is the experimental apparatus itself, the artifact, the inclined plane, that is essential for showing that *this is the necessary fiction*. The force of the apparatus makes it possible to insist, to *say*, that the law must be believed. Rather than technology *following* science, the apparatus makes something visible for the first time, in a singular way, and then repeatedly. The invention of scientific reason finds its possibility in technical invention, the invention of the inclined plane as an apparatus for *seeing* motion, the apparatus for grasping movement theoretically. It is *not* a question of disproving that abstractions from observation are always 'fictional', and Galileo's choice of the dialogical form (in which the founding scientific text replays the founding philosophical text) is in this regard significant. It is a matter of an invitation to *submit* to an experimental result until this is overcome by a countering experiment.

This is the key to understanding the Galilean event beyond either eternally celebrating the triumph of reason over tradition ('analytical philosophy'), or withdrawing to the *Angst* that attends the experience of the question of the death of God ('continental philosophy'). Yes, on the one hand, all absolute certainty of explanation is overturned, threatened by the possibility that in the future our illusions will be exposed (or, worse, may *never* be exposed). All knowing is in the process of becoming, which means it is not quite knowing and not quite non-knowing, requiring an element of structural and structuring fiction. On the other hand, this is nothing other than the *condition* of knowing, the condition of human being itself. The artifact is not only a gift from the past to hold off forgetting; it is equally a gift to the future granting us what certainty we have, insofar as we have it. Galileo's laws of motion, after all, remain in force.

It is not reason that inaugurates science, but the technics of the apparatus that grants, in its repeatability, the possibility of a heritage of belief, that is, the possibility for pre-individual memory to be adopted in the course of centuries of subsequent individual and collective individuations. As Bernard Stiegler puts it, technics is the condition of *life that knows*.¹⁴ This is the thought of *epiphylogenesis*, the thought that the experience of the death of God is made possible *through* the inclined plane, the artifact, through technics, and that, if this eternally threatens to rebound upon our own 'knowledge', this is, equally, what must be conserved for there to *be* the possibility of experiencing anything new at all, the possibility of there being a *future*.

Without doubt this history bears upon the emergence of the Leviathan, that separation of law and life from which classical sovereignty and modern democracy emerge. On the one hand, the experimental apparatus inaugurates a visibility of phenomena permitting the *leap* into the abstraction—the fictive form—of physical laws. On the other hand, and following from this, a vision of humankind's originary 'state of nature' arises. A certain 'nature' of humanity is invented or discovered, *authorizing* the abstracted form of law on which modern democracy is based. And, in that vein, it is more than coincidence that at this Hobbesian origin, the political imagination is immediately *split* between the original horde of 'natural' individuals and the subsequent more or less *mechanical arrangement* of individuals in a collectivity.

VI

This genealogy must be extended to the second and third narcissistic wounds, but the first is not a template. The inauguration of the theory of evolution, for instance, *cannot* be described *in the same way* as depending upon an experimental apparatus. It depends, rather, on the constitution of the environment, the terrain, as visible and *readable* in a very particular way, a readability that has itself evolved since Darwin. Despite the extraordinary success of the Darwinian paradigm, the science of evolution is decreasingly a matter of *reducing* all biological phenomena to the iron rule of natural selection, and increasingly a matter of describing the endless diversity and contingency *of* the 'law' of natural selection itself. 'Survival of the fittest' is a phrase increasingly unsuited to the range of data uncovered and described by evolutionary science, even if it remains pedagogically useful.

As for Freud's *third* narcissistic wound, is this not simply wounded narcissism itself? That the ego is no longer master—is this not to say that my narcissism can no longer be reduced to the narcissistic assertion of my 'identity', of my identity to myself? Was not this Freudian discovery made possible by (and itself enabled) a collective transformation in the conditions of self-relation? A transformation of the conditions of individual and collective existence has brought the individual into view, and therefore into doubt, yet has at the same time made possible the elaboration of an understanding of the conditions of what Gilbert Simondon calls psychic and collective *individuation*.

The contemporary convergence of law and life is both a response to and an example of the violence and insecurity in which we live. For Bernard Stiegler, this violence and insecurity are, above all, a question of narcissism, that is, of the loss of narcissism.¹⁵ What Stiegler means by narcissism may not be precisely what Freud means when he is speaking of individual psychology (Stiegler speaks of 'primordial narcissism' to differentiate it from Freudian pathology). It does, however, have *something* to do with that conception of narcissism as what has suffered more than one collective, historical wound. But for Stiegler this destruction is not merely the result of 'scientific discoveries', nor is it a result of the becoming of the

'history of being' ending in global technology. For Stiegler, following Simondon, the ongoing destruction of narcissism is a consequence of the destruction of individual and collective individuation. From that perspective, however significant each of the concentric decentrings of which Freud spoke happens to be, more important is the way they fit into an overall historical and technological tendency.

Narcissism, as Stiegler intends it, is not a deafness or blindness to others, but the very condition of being-with-others. Primordial self-love is the capacity without which the extension of love to others is impossible. It is, then, the very possibility of being an *I* as much as it is the possibility of belonging to a *we*. It is only *if* there are *Is* that there can be a *we*, but every *I* is an *I* only as belonging to one, or more than one, *we*, and to this extent narcissism is the condition of being-together. *I* and *we* are not substances, not identities, but individuations in the course of becoming, without stability if nonetheless capable of metastability. Achieving metastable rather than stable equilibrium, *I* and *we* are always unfinished, never quite identical to themselves, always more or less *out-of-phase* with themselves, conserving themselves *in the form of* permanent individuation. They are therefore capable of becoming, of *movement*.¹⁶ For Stiegler, following Simondon, this process of permanent individuation must not be reduced to that entropic becoming of the universe described by physical laws. Human individuation is, on the contrary, *negentropic*, a matter of *life*.

Stiegler understands human evolution along the lines of André Leroi-Gourhan: the evolution of bipedality freed the hand for grasping (tools), which in turn freed the face for the possibility of expression *rather than* grasping. The eventual enlargement of the brain is thus the *result* of this increase in freedom, that is, in the range of behavioural potential.¹⁷ The tool or the apparatus, then, is not merely an extended phenotypical expression, but an epiphylogenetic fact with its own evolutionary consequences.¹⁸ The technical milieu, with its ever expanding realms of memory and anticipation, develops its own tendencies, detaching itself from biological constraint. The furthest point of this detachment is signaled by the rapidly advancing ability to control biological inheritance through genetic manipulation. For human being, technics becomes the form and force of evolution itself. Individual and collective individuation are then the result of a process whereby human being progressively and negentropically disengages itself, *frees* itself, from its environment, its milieu. In determining one's own milieu, in constructing and building the environment, the conditions are reached for a process of becoming that does not occur at the level of species but rather at the level of the territorially separate intra-species group, that is, at the idiomatic level that defines 'culture'.

Every tool opens up a technical milieu about itself, making possible the invention of yet another tool, eventually constituting a *system*, a prosthetic milieu pervading a territory. But a point is reached at which the expansion and acceleration of the technical system are no longer limited to any particular territory. This is the beginning of deterritorialization, the gradual undoing of the prior territorial specificity of the human group. To this contraction of space, this universalization of the territory, there *also* corresponds a process of contraction in time, by which greater and greater swathes of information (text, then sound and imagery), materially stored and materially transmitted, are carried over increasing distances with decreasing

delay to ever greater volumes of individuals. And this mass broadcast of information and synchronization of experience is conducted today according to no imperative other than the co-ordination of mass consumption.

The outcome of this process is what Agamben calls the spectacular-democratic state, what Heidegger describes as global technology and what Nancy names ecotechnics. It is Stiegler, however, who has drawn particular attention to the way in which this is nothing other than the destruction of individual and collective individuation, and *therefore* the destruction of narcissism and authority, that is, of politics. Unlike Heidegger, for whom technology is something like the pernicious elimination of the ability to suffer (suffering grasped as the *awareness* of one's own life), for Stiegler the consequences of this process are the violence and suffering that pervade us.

The endpoint of this process is the destruction of existence, of *my* existence insofar as it is different from yours, and insofar as it is *connected* to yours. With the destruction of the possibility for primordial narcissism, then, comes a process of social decomposition. And this implies the destruction of *authority*, in the sense both of the capacity for *authorizing* the transmission of the past (memory), *and* of the capacity for *authoring* the future—foresight, anticipation. In a world consumed by the ever accelerating and engulfing synchronization of mass experience, governed by the logic of consumption (that is, *production*), the father, the mother, the priest, the government, lose their authorizing and authoring power. Authority, taken in *this* sense as the possibility for authorizing and authoring, as the condition of inheritance and foresight, is the ever diminishing defense against the reduction of human experience to the entropic, physical becoming engendered by the technical logic of mass consumption.

We might say that narcissism and authority are conventionally taken as threatening democracy—defining, for instance, the features of the tyrant. Thought primordially, however, or taken to their conceptual limit, narcissism and authority are the conditions of existence as such, individually and collectively. The total loss of narcissistic and authoritative potential would mean the destruction of my and our existence. For Agamben, modern politics has been defined by the separation of 'law' and 'life' enabling the picture of sovereignty on which democracy has until now staked its claim, and the contemporary confounding of 'law' and 'life' in the permanent state of exception represents, in effect, the destruction of both. But if we translate these biopolitical terms into the philosophico-psychoanalytic (that is, erotic) terms we have spelled as authority and narcissism, then what matters is that they are neither opposable nor confoundable. Rather, they must be *composed* in thought, each grasped as the condition of the other.

Narcissism and authority are, in that sense, the conditions of politics as such. Although Agamben is concerned with the working of authority insofar as it undermines the radical thought of democracy, authority in the sense of the potential for authoritative and authoring transmission is precisely what is most threatened. Narcissism and authority are the condition of the group, of any group (which precisely does not mean a group 'identity'), *upon which* democracy has until now depended, but the radical implications *of which* it has until now wanted to suppress. Without authority and narcissism, law and life cease to *function*. To the

extent the loss of individual and collective individuation implies the destruction of politics as such, democracy cannot be expected to survive this process.

Before the question of democracy, then, comes the question of the survival of politics itself. If this seems unnecessarily dramatic, it should be recalled that humanity has not always grasped itself as essentially political. What is born is capable of dying. Or: the form into which what survives metamorphoses may not be recognizable. Perhaps it is in this sense that Heidegger questioned whether 'Democracy' was an idea sufficient to cover that which may yet have the power to save us.

What is in question is whether there is to be any longer an 'us' at all. Heidegger well knew that if any 'us' is to survive global technology, it is not a matter of 'conserving' 'we Germans' or 'we Europeans'. Equally, he knew that the progressive and accelerating dissolution of the authority of memory threatened not just conservative tradition, but existence as such. The undoing of individuation threatens to render life, existence, disastrously intolerable. Only the freeing made possible by memory enables the anticipation of any future at all. There is a trend of thought assigning all political possibility to the impossible arrival of the unpredicted and unpredictable other. But what matters today is just as much, and more than ever, the question of what future, if any, *can* be anticipated. What is at stake today is the destruction of primordial authority (that is, the destruction of the possibility of inheritance, of a heritage of memory, hence the destruction of obligation, that is, responsibility), and the destruction of narcissism (that is, the destruction of my desire, of my capacity to love myself and others). The political question today is thus that of the *suffering* of existence, and whether this will permit any future for politics, that is, for human being.

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Notes

1. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago & London: U of Chicago P, 2005). See esp. 11–22, "A Brief History of the State of Exception."
2. See Agamben in Ulrich Raulff, "An Interview with Giorgio Agamben," trans. Morag Goodwin, *German Law Journal* 5 (2004): 610.
3. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998) 166–80.
4. Giorgio Agamben, "Notes on Politics," *Means without End*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti & Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis & London: U of Minnesota P, 2000) 109–18.
5. Agamben, *Means without End* 110.
6. Agamben, *Means without End* 112.
7. Martin Heidegger, "Der Spiegel Interview," *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*, ed. Günther

- Neske & Emil Kettering (New York: Paragon House, 1990) 54.
8. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis & London: U of Minnesota P, 1997) 90. For Nancy this is the very formless form, senseless sense, of the crisis of and in 'democracy'.
 9. Agamben, *Means without End* 86.
 10. Bernard Stiegler, "Technics of Decision: An Interview," *Angelaki* 8 (2003) 162.
 11. Sigmund Freud, "A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, trans. & ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955) 137–44.
 12. Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 8.
 13. Isabelle Stengers, *The Invention of Modern Science*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis & London: U of Minnesota P, 2000) 71–87.
 14. Stiegler, "Desire and Knowledge: The Dead Seize the Living. Elements for an Organology of the Libido," unpublished lecture.
 15. Bernard Stiegler, *Aimer, s'aimer, nous aimer: du 11 septembre au 21 avril* (Paris: Galilée, 2003) 13.
 16. On metastable equilibrium, cf., Gilbert Simondon, "The Genesis of the Individual," trans. Mark Cohen & Sanford Kwinter *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary & Sanford Kwinter (New York: Urzone, 1992) 297–317; see Stiegler, *Aimer, s'aimer, nous aimer* 85 & 89.
 17. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth & George Collins (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998) 145.
 18. On the extended phenotype (meaning phenomena such as the beaver's dam) see Richard Dawkins, *The Extended Phenotype: The Long Reach of the Gene*, 2nd edn. (Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 1999) and Richard Dawkins, *The Ancestor's Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2004) 157–61.

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