Artistic Re-Appropriation and Reconfiguration of the Medium's Milieu

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ABSTRACT Drawing upon Bernard Stiegler's and Jacques Rancière's conceptions of medium as a *milieu* this article seeks to address the question of the political aspects of the aesthetic in relation to the notion of medium. Based on the analysis of this theoretical question the article interprets and discusses artistic endeavors to re-appropriate and reconfigure conservative symbolic orders and media milieus that have become dissociated in relation to works of art by Alfredo Jaar and Thomas Hirschhorn.
KEYWORDS Medium, re-appropriation, Bernard Stiegler, Jacques Rancière, Alfredo Jaar, Thomas Hirschhorn

"The way it is: An Aesthetics of Resistance" was the title of Alfredo Jaar's retrospective exhibition in Berlin in the summer of 2012.[1] But what might such aesthetics of resistance consist of? Is there any possibility left in our post-political society for artistic critique of "the way it is"? "The way it is" being a historical situation of post-Fordist cognitive capitalism in which the production of symbols is a central goal, and in which artistic production has a central function in the process of capital valorization.[2] The artist himself claims that there is still room left for artistic and cultural resistance stating: "The world of culture is *the only space left* for me to do what I can do, there's nothing else."[3] What Jaar does is a politics of images. He resists the present society of the spectacle by engaging with and reconfiguring the way in which images and symbols are circulated and exchanged, by re-appropriating the medium of the image and by making visible what is not visible through the news media.

Before I return – towards the end of this article – to two pieces by Jaar and one by Thomas Hirschhorn as examples of politics of images and artistic reconfigurations and re-appropriations of the medium of the image, I will take Jaar's "aesthetics of resistance" as my point of departure for a more theoretically inclined investigation of particularly French philosopher Bernard Stiegler's conception of "medium".

I

Recently within aesthetics there has been a tendency to take a critical stance towards employing the notion of medium. Noël Carroll, for instance, is an exponent of this tendency when he, in his book *Engaging*

the Moving Image, suggests that we "Forget the Medium!" (incidentally the title of the first chapter) and states that:

> Obviously what is meant by the phrase "artistic medium" is very vague, referring sometimes to the physical materials out of which artworks are constructed, sometimes to the implements that are used to do the constructing, and sometimes to formal elements of design that are available to artists in a given practice [e.g. line, colour, volume, shape, motion, juxtaposition, and so on, JL]. This ambiguity alone might discourage us from relying on the notion of the medium as a theoretically useful concept. In fact, I think that we might fruitfully dispense with it completely, at least in terms of the ways in which it is standardly deployed be aestheticians. But be that as it may, it should be clear that most artforms cannot be identified on the basis of a single distinctive medium, since most artforms correlate with more than one medium.[4]

The last sentence is of course a variation of W. J. T Mitchell's famous observation that "all media are mixed media" which nowadays is relatively uncontroversial. But I am not convinced that these observations should make us dispense with the notion of medium. Instead I would like to argue that we need to think of the concept of medium in another way. Not least in relation to the mass media of television and digital technology and networks.

Wolfgang Welsch, among others, claims that the pictorial demands of visual media codetermine what might count as news, meaning that aesthetic considerations to a much higher degree enter into our apprehension of reality. The "real" becomes the "aesthetically presentable". According to Welsch we witness a "derealization of reality" due to the ways in which our sense of reality – which is largely generated by the media – is affected by the increasingly aesthetic mode of mediation.[5] Reality is presented ever more playfully, and everything is potentially open to manipulation and transformation – "Reality these days, as you know very well, is manipulated to an extreme that makes it virtually impossible for us to actually decipher what is real," Jaar remarks in a conversation with Simon Critchley.[6] Thus, in many cases the manipulation is not only potential, but also actual: "Consider reports from the first Gulf War, replete with technological simulations and the reality of victims and losses erased. It is often unclear whether we are being shown a playback of reality or an aesthetically effective simulation."[7] Our capacity to distinguish between representations and mere simulations of reality is weakened, and we begin to change our comprehension of reality. This general attitude toward media reality has, according to Welsch, been extended to other spheres

of everyday life. The overwhelming persistence of media representations does not affect us, on the contrary: it leaves us indifferent. We tend to respond to the ways in which the media works by considering reality altogether as a simulation.[8] Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle for instance addresses the way that reality is de-realized and manipulated by the news media in his work *Phantom Truck*, that was made for the Documenta 12 exhibition in Kassel in 2007. The installation is a full-scale reproduction of a mobile biological weapons lab as described by Colin Powell when addressing the UN Security Council in 2003, prior to the US invasion of Iraq. The sculpture is a hybrid of renderings used by Colin Powell and photographs of actual trucks taken after the subsequent invasion of Iraq. This manipulated object of speculation was used to justify the invasion, but it turned out not to be capable of biological weapons production. The evidence was fabricated. Manglano-Ovalle's installation is cloaked in darkness, only illuminated by mediated natural light and becomes slowly visible as the light changes or our eyes adjust to its darkness.[9]

II

We may find theoretical help to expand our understanding of the significance and the functioning of the medium in the work of French philosophers Bernard Stiegler and Jacques Rancière who both in different ways conceive the medium as a *milieu*.

The fundamental assumption in Bernard Stiegler's thinking is the assumption that the human being is an accidental being originally in need of technical prostheses and therefore fundamentally constituted and conditioned by technics.[10] The human being is vulnerable because it is a being that continuously evolves through processes of technical exteriorization that necessarily involve processes of interiorization and appropriation of technical prostheses and procedures (e.g. speaking, writing, painting, performing, installing etc.). According to Stiegler the Aristotelian definition of man as a political animal means that I am only human insofar as I belong to a social group.[11]

> This sociality is the framework of a becoming: the group, and the individual in that group, never cease to seek out their path. This search *constitutes* human time. And if the time of the *I* is certainly not the time of the *we*, it takes place within the time of the *we*, which is itself conditioned by the time of the *I*s of which it is composed.[12]

These two dimensions of the temporality of the political animal are tied together by what Stiegler – with a notion he adopts from Gilbert

Simondon – calls "individuation", or "trans-individuation". The concept of "transindividuation" does not refer exclusively to the individuated *I* or to the inter-individuated *we*, but designates the process of co-individuation within a pre-individuated milieu or medium in which the *I* and the *we* are interdependent and in which they are transformed through one another.[13] Transindividuation takes place through an "associated symbolic milieu" where all members belonging to this milieu participate in the milieu and are functions of it.[14] Transindividuation, then, conditions all social transformation (the work of art takes part in a kind of transindividuation, and according to Stiegler the question of the reflexive aesthetic judgment is a question of transindividuation).

Language, of course, is one dimension of the pre-individuated milieu:

> At the very moment I speak to you, I am in the process of individuating myself: individuating myself means seeking to constitute the symbolic coherence of my utterances. But I will only succeed in individuating myself *if I succeed in making you individuate yourselves with me*. If my individuation succeeds, it will have to have succeeded *in you* – but not at all in the same manner, because what I am in the course of telling you I understand and interpret as some thing *that you understand as some OTHER thing*, and this is what is interesting. This is the *condition of the we*, and it is what develops 'potentials,' *powers*, or in Greek, *dunameis*.
>
> However, in individuating the *we together*, you and I separately, and also you and I insofar as we form a group, we participate as well in the individuation of *that which ties us*: language, philosophy, law, etcetera, that which constitutes for us a preindividual fund.[15]

The individual's participation in the social, then, is an element in a much vaster individuation. We also participate in the individuation of *that which ties us*, that is, the media through which we communicate, the symbolic milieu of sign-making and exchange: Language, images etc. The individual, the social, and the symbolic milieu of the media are intimately interrelated – an interrelation or interweaving that is also stressed in Paolo Virno's reading of Simondon:

> [T]he *subject* consists of the permanent interweaving of pre-individual elements and individuated characteristics. [...] By participating in a collective, the subject, far from surrendering the most unique individual traits, has the opportunity to individuate, at least in part, the share of pre-individual reality which all individuals carry within themselves. [...] Only within the collective, certainly not within the isolated subject, can perception, language, and productive forces take on the shape of an individuated experience.[16]

The milieu, however, is structurally forgotten because it is what is closest to us – like water is closest to the fish. The milieu is forgotten because it disappears in front of that which it lets appear, or gives place.[17] The fact that a milieu always already exists escapes us in the same manner that, as Aristotle observes, "aquatic animals do not notice that one wet body touches another wet body".[18] The fish never sees water because water is what it always sees. Wittgenstein's image of the fly in the fly-bottle and the task of philosophy: *Der Fliege den Ausweg aus dem Fliegenglas zeigen*, that is, to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle, of course also springs to mind here. The glass of the bottle is, for the fly, not a thing but rather that through which it sees things, that through which things appear.[19] In the same way we as humans see the world through language but we do not – at least in our everyday life – see language itself.

In Stiegler's thinking the milieu is a milieu of the supplement in general, of which language is one dimension and technical artifacts consisting of things are another dimension. Like Wittgenstein's endeavour to show the fly the way out of the bottle, Stiegler considers the milieu while extracting himself from it in order, through this extraction or abstraction, to bring the milieu into view as the condition of individuation ("the condition of passage from the potential of the intellective soul to its act, to its *for itself*").[20] He tries to consider and make visible the milieu understood as "the framework of artifacts forming relations sustaining social relations" – like a flying fish that intermittently leaves the water, leaves its element.[21]

III

The ever more omnipresent so-called mass media of television, newspapers, and the internet poses particularly urgent questions in terms of the medium as milieu – as that which is in-between, as that which ties us together and conditions our individuation:

> The human milieu is symbolic, which means that it is a milieu of exchange where exclamations [...] make signs circulate, and that it is a milieu of sign-making where each one participates in symbolic life. Such is the process of trans-individuation by which we co-individuate in symbolic milieus, which are associated milieus. However, the associated milieus have become dissociated. The industrial division of labor has meant that there are producers of symbols and consumers of symbols who do not participate in the elaboration of meaning, causing these symbols to lose their meaning.[22]

Our continuous evolvement through processes of technical exteriorization

and interiorization of prostheses and procedures depends upon an associated symbolic milieu. When this milieu becomes dissociated, the processes of evolvement and transindividuation stop and we are made aware of the importance of association of the milieu – "I believe our daily language is corrupted, dissociated from the truth," Jaar states.[23] Thus, a parallel to Stiegler's description of the dissociation of the symbolic milieu may be found in Giorgio Agamben's "Marginal Notes on *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle*" from 1990:

> Even more than economic necessities and technological development, what drives the nations of the Earth toward a single common destiny is the alienation of linguistic being, the uprooting of all peoples from their vital dwelling in language. But exactly for this reason, the age in which we live is also that in which for the first time it becomes possible for human beings to experience their own linguistic essence – to experience, that is, not some language content or some true proposition, but language *itself*, as well as the very fact of speaking. Contemporary politics is precisely this devastating *experimentum linguae* that disarticulates and empties, all over the planet, traditions and beliefs, ideologies and religions, identities and communities.[24]

Like Stiegler, Agamben, in an even bleaker manner, points toward how the dissociation of the symbolic milieu and the expropriation of language, of our means of communication, entails the possibility of experiencing language itself, of seeing the media or milieus through which we see the world. This is connected to Agamben's idea of "the being-in-a-medium of human beings" and gesture – not least artistic gestures, for instance the gestures of Beckett's tv-play *Nacht und Träume* – as "the exhibition of a mediality: [...] the process of making a means visible as such."[25] In relation to language it is the exposure of "the word in its own mediality, in its own being a means, [...] communication of a communicability."[26] Art, in other words, may exhibit the medium or milieu as such, and the way in which we depend upon it and are constituted through it.

Literary books, other kinds of artworks and forms of creative work take – or can take – part in the process of transindividuation. With reference to Wolfgang Iser's theory of the aesthetics of reception Stiegler claims that we can individuate – that is, transform – ourselves by reading a book, or experiencing a work of visual art. A book does not exist as such, it is a process of individuation, which means that a book can be a power of individuation, but not individuation as such. It is "the long circuit created by the readers, which is the individuation of the book".[27] Stiegler draws upon Iser's understanding of the literary text according

to which the text is not a representation of a meaning that was given ahead of the literary text. The text is not actualized until the process of reading; the significance of the text is only created through the reading process. Signification, then, is a result of an interaction between text and reader, not something that is encapsulated in the text. This means that the significance of the text is produced by the individual reader and that it therefore appears in an *individual form* – every reader concretizes the artistic artifact in an individual way. This has to do with transindividuation in the sense that the creation of circuits has to do with transindividuation. Important artists – or philosophers – are, according to Stiegler, singularities who have created new types of circuits that other people can continue (a bit similar to Michel Foucault's concept of "founders of discursivity" including Marx and Freud in "What is an Author?"). The decisive point is not whether the artist has produced a unique work, but whether there has been produced a curcuit to which others can add themselves – that others can appropriate – by building on it. The value of the work depends on the capacity for trans-individuation, determining entry and continuation of the circuits.[28]

The conditions for creating circuits of transindividuation are always what Stiegler terms "organological". You have to be able to practice the technics of this organology, you have to have certain technical skills – for instance of reading and writing, or of producing music and images – that are common in order to enter the circuits of transindividuation and open spaces for relationships between people. This organological arrangement – understood as the co-individuation of human organs, technical organs, and social organisations – forms the milieu through which we see. As I indicated before, contemporary society, however, is, according to Stiegler's analysis, a society in which organology has become industrial. With reference to Adorno and Horkheimer's chapter on "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" he locates a change in the organology of transindividuation that began in the twentieth century when a new organology was developed through the mass media of television, cinema, radio and nowadays also through digital technology and networks, which in turn has created a new organization of the circulation of the symbolic:

> Within this new mode of organization, suddenly the production of the symbolic becomes industrial, subject to industrial processes. Here you encounter the production of symbols on the one hand, and the consuming of such symbols on the other – an *aporia* because it is impossible to consume a symbol.

> The symbol is not an object of consumption; it is an object of exchange, of circulation, or of the creation of circuits of transindividuation. So this situation suddenly produced what I call short-circuiting – of transindividuation.[29]

The destruction of symbolic exchange entails a blockage or short-circuiting of the processes of transindividuation that results in a dis-individuation, a proletarianisation of the consumer. The programs of the program industry, for instance – which is a central component of the culture industry – are produced industrially and broadcast through various audiovisual media. According to Stiegler these programs modify our experience of time, through our consciousnesses adopting the time of the programs (by watching the same daily programs or the same global live broadcasts), and constantly solicit our attention and try to modify our behaviour, especially our patterns of consumption.[30] A telling example of the way of thinking of the program industry is the herostratically famous statement by Patrick Le Lay in July 2004 when he was managing director of TF1, the main French TV-channel:

> There are many ways to talk about television. But from a "Business" perspective, let's be realistic: basically, TF1's job is to help Coca-Cola sell its product, for example. To make the advertising message well received, the audience's brain must be available. Our shows are here to make the brain available [*disponible*] – to entertain it, to relax it, to prepare it between two messages. What we're selling to Coca-Cola is available human brain time. Nothing is as difficult as securing this availability.

In this situation the role of contemporary art is to participate in the reconstitution of a symbolic milieu or organology that enables a participation in the weaving of *long* circuits of transindividuation. The role of art is to reconfigure the organology that has been destroyed by the consumerism of the culture industries, and try to re-appropriate and re-associate the media and technical milieus that have become dissociated.

IV

In order better to understand the relationship between art and medium in a political context, and how this reconfiguration may come into being, it seems fruitful to supplement Stiegler's theory of medium with that of Jacques Rancière.

Stiegler speaks of "an aesthetic war", *une guerre esthétique*,[31] and claims, in accordance with Rancière, that the political question is an aesthetic question and vice versa, that the aesthetic question is a political

question.[32] If cultural and artistic practices take a central function in the formation, configuration and reconfiguration of our common sense and our conception of reality, artistic practice is political in that it takes or can take part in reproducing "the way it is" or in dissenting from the established order. The political, on the other hand, is aesthetic in that it has to do with the symbolic ordering of social relations and our coexistence.[33] Stiegler uses the term "aesthetics" in a wide sense, that is, as sensation in general, not only "perceptibility" but taste, feeling, and sensibility in general. This understanding of aesthetics is an invitation to the art-world to comprehend its role politically. He is not saying that the artists should "engage" themselves; he is saying that their work is originarily engaged in the question of the sensibility of the other. The political question is in essence the question of the relation to the other in a common or shared sensing [*sentir ensemble*], a kind of sympathy.[34] Perception, sensation, feeling, taste, are not only individual but immediately social phenomena. The political problem is to know how to be and to live together beyond our singularities and our conflicts of interest. Politics is the art of securing the unity of the city, the polis, in its desire for a common future, its individuation and its singularity as becoming-one. Such a desire supposes a common aesthetic ground, a common aesthetic medium or milieu. The being-together is a sensible being-together, and a political community is thus – in agreement with the Kantian idea of *sensus communis*, i.e., our shared ability to have feelings in common – a community of sensing.[35] If we are not able to appreciate, or love, things like countrysides, cities, objects, artworks, language etc. together, we are not able to love ourselves. This, Stiegler claims, is the sense of "philia" in Aristotle, and to love oneself is together with others to love other things than oneself.

But the human aesthetics is not stable, it has a history and it is an endless transformation of the sensible. Even though Edouard Manet's break with the tradition in the nineteenth century gave rise to a multiplication of aesthetic conflicts, these conflicts are a process of the construction of the sympathy that characterizes the human aesthetics, a creativity that transforms the world in order to build a new common sensibility, a new common sense and understanding of reality, and forms a coming aesthetic community.

The problem today, according to Stiegler, is that a large part of the population is excluded from any aesthetic experience and subjected to the alienating aesthetic conditioning of the culture industry that deprives them of the capacity for connecting aesthetically to singularities and singular objects and make them passive consumers of symbols.[36]

Rancière agrees with Stiegler that we live in an epoch in which art has become separate from politics, and where a large part of the population is excluded from participation in the aesthetic or the symbolic. Rancière locates the connection between aesthetics and politics in the partition of the sensible, *le partage du sensible*, in the possibilities of sense and its distribution in terms of sensible forms and practices. Rancière distinguishes politics from the exercise of power that belongs to the police order. The police determines the social configuration, "the partition of the sensible",[37] and administrates the emotional life of the citizens and the composition of the society and its ways of living, on which it tries to establish a *consensus*. Political action, on the other hand, is an action of *dissensus*, where someone tries to be heard or seen even though, or perhaps rather *because* they are not allowed to speak: "Political subjectivity thus refers to an enunciative and demonstrative capacity to reconfigure the relation between the visible and the sayable, the relation between words and bodies: namely, what I refer to as 'the partition of the sensible'."[38] Art is a critical break with the established, consensual common sense that opens up the possibility of a new commonality of sense. The politically active art changes the conditions for what we see and what we speak about; it challenges the borders between the visible and the invisible, between the sayable and the unsayable. It is thus through art that the world can be articulated in new ways, and through art that this political reconfiguration of the police order's configuration of the relationship between the visible and the sayable, between words and bodies, this making the unheard heard and the invisible visible, can take place.[39]

According to Rancière, artistic 'means' are "the means of participating in the configuration of a specific milieu". In a text entitled "What Medium Can Mean", Rancière discusses two modernist approaches to the concept of medium: On the one hand the medium as the intermediary between an idea and its realization, that is, as a means to an end; and on the other hand the Greenbergian idea of the medium as the specific materiality defining the essence of art where the medium is no longer a means to an end but that which prescribes this end – when art is freed from the tasks of representation and exclusively becomes the execution of its own idea in its own specific materiality.[40] He then tries to synthesize these two contradictory approaches by claiming that art is art "when its productions belong to a sensory milieu in which the distinction is blurred between that which is and that which is not art. In short, the 'means' [*le moyen*] is also a means to achieve something

other than its own end. It is also the means of participating in the configuration of a specific milieu."[41] Like Stiegler, Rancière thus considers the medium as milieu: "The milieu in which the performances of a determined artistic arrangement come to be inscribed, but also the milieu that these performances themselves contribute to configuring."[42] Endowed with a relative autonomy art can participate in the creation of a reconfiguration of the established milieus of experience; it can work against the dissociation and expropriation of the milieu, in which we communicate, of language and images.

V

I can only hint at how this may come about in specific contemporary works of art. By way of conclusion I would like to return to Jaar and Hirschhorn in order to give a few examples of works of art that in different ways oppose and criticize the way in which the image circulation of the mass media functions. Two of them were presented at the 2012 Paris Triennale at the newly converted and extended *Palais de Tokyo*, namely Thomas Hirschhorn's *Touching Reality* (2012) and Alfredo Jaar's *May 1, 2011* (2011), while the last one, Jaar's *Lament of the Images* (2002) was made for Documenta 11 and also included in the Berlin retrospective.

Their common point of departure might be summed up by Rancière's observation that the widespread idea that there is an excess of images, seducing and anesthetizing us, is a cliché marketed by the masters of the machinery of power that lies behind these images:

> Whatever people say, our news bulletins present us with very few images of the wars, violence, or distress that characterize the present on our planet; hardly any violent, mutilated, or suffering bodies. What we see mainly are the faces of those who "make" the news, the authorized speakers: presenters, editorial writers, politicians, and experts, specialists at explaining or debating matters. The "images" on the screen are "their" images.[43]

The task of the artist is not to get rid of the excess of images, but to draw attention to their absence, "the absence of certain images in the selection of what those in charge of the distribution of images consider to be interesting to show".[44]

Hirschhorn's video installation *Touching Reality* features a hand scrolling through images with its fingertips on a touchscreen. The images are photographs of corpses and destroyed human bodies. They go by quickly and every now and then the hand stops to zoom in for detail or to select a portion to enlarge.

Thomas Hirschhorn, Touching Reality, 2012. Video, silent, endless loop, 4′45. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.

Thomas Hirschhorn, Touching Reality, 2012. Video, silent, endless loop, 4'45. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.

In relation to the piece, Hirschhorn clarifies "Why it is important – today – to show and look at images of destroyed human bodies?" With reference to the formulation: "Death has a tendency to encourage a depressing view of war," by Donald Rumsfeld, former US Secretary of Defence, he claims that the nonvisiblity and invisibility of destroyed bodies in the news media is not innocent but a strategy of supporting the war effort, of not discouraging it and thereby making it acceptable.[45] "I want to see with my own eyes. Resistance to today's world of facts is what makes it important to look at such images."[46]

Thus, I would claim, that Hirschhorn – even though he balances dangerously on the border of spectacle and sometimes seems to tip over – reconfigures the partition of sensible in the milieu of the news media by making visible the mutilated bodies that are excluded or left out by the news bulletins – while also, through the hand touching the images, addressing our individual *relation* to or *association* with these images.

On the night of May 1, 2011, the image of Barack Obama and his political and military team in the White House Situation Room during US Navy SEAL team 6 killing Osama Bin Laden was transmitted throughout the world.[47] The image of the scene in the Situation Room, documented by official photographer Pete Souza, would come to play a central role in the image politics of the "war on terror". In his installation, *May 1, 2011* Jaar uses the official photograph from the White House. The image had been visibly retouched to disguise sensitive information before being disseminated. The execution of the operation was broadcast live to the White House by cameras physically mounted on the Navy Seals who conducted the mission. No trace of the body of bin Laden, and no image of him, was shown to the media. Jaar has adapted the image of the group at the White House and juxtaposed it with a blank white screen, representing the absent and never-authorized image of the act that was said to be real. The non-image occupies the position of the invisible screen, on which all the imaginative imagery called forth by the press icon can be projected. The caption to the right of the photo of the White House identifies all political figures in the press image, while on the left side next to the white screen there is no one to be identified.

In my reading Jaar thematizes how the media image is a staging of the visible, a particular configuration of the visible and what it says, and of the spoken word and what it makes apparent for us to see.[48] He does not produce another image, but he reconfigures the existing one by creating and choreographing our encounter with and reflection upon the encounter with this omnipresent media image.[49]

May 1, 2011 echoes another blank screen in Jaar's work, namely the blank screen of the *Lament of the Images* installation. The first part of this piece consists of a dark space with three blocks of texts that describe paradigmatic cases of image deprivation from public space: The first recounts that there are no photographs that show Nelson Mandela crying when he was released after 28 years of detention by the South African regime. "It is said that the blinding light from the lime [he was forced to labor in a limestone quarry on Robben Island, JL] had taken away his ability to cry." The second describes how Bill Gates's company Corbis is about to bury the Bettmann and United Press International archive, comprising around 17 million historical photographs, including a photograph of Mandela in prison, in an old limestone mine, whereafter the photographs will be inaccessible and only digital scans of the them will be for sale (less than two percent have been scanned, which means that it will take 453 years to digitize the entire archive). The third describes the US airstrike against Afghanistan and how the Defense Department, just before the attack, purchased exclusive rights to all available satellite images of Afghanistan and its neighbors in an exclusive contract with the private company Space Imaging Inc. whose CEO said: "They are buying all the imagery that is available." The text concludes: "There is nothing [i.e. no effects of the bombing, JL] left to see." After reading the texts the visitor walks through a dark, roughly 25 meter long corridor before turning left and entering a huge room filled with blinding light, emitted by a cinema-size white screen.

In one of his comments on *Lament of the Images* Jaar emphasises: "Images are important. Very important. In creating this work I was trying to lament their loss, mourn their absence. In doing so, I ended up creating a new image, which is unavoidable. An image of an intense, blinding light that could possibly become the blank screen on which we project our fears and our dreams. [...] I was trying to create perhaps the ultimate pensive image. A space of resistance. A space of hope."[50] Jaar's aesthetics of resistance reveals the invisible and exhibits the milieu and medium through which we comprehend the world and stresses the need to re-establish an association with this image-milieu.

In concluding, I would claim that the artistic practices of Thomas Hirschhorn and Alfredo Jaar are examples of the ways in which the putatively damaged or empty common media and symbolic milieus are being re-negotiated in contemporary art, whereby senses of community may begin to be re-installed.

Alfredo Jaar, Lament of the Images, 2002. Courtesy of the artist,
New York.

Alfredo Jaar, May 1, 2011, 2011. Courtesy of the artist,
New York.

Notes

1. The exhibition was shown at the Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlinische Galerie, and at Alte Nationalgalerie, 15 June–19 August/17 September/16 September 2012 respectively.

2. Cf. Chantal Mouffe, "Alfredo Jaar: The Artist as Organic Intellectual", in *Alfredo Jaar. The way it is: Eine Ästhetik des Widerstands/An Aesthetics of Resistance*, ed. Jan Ketz (Berlin: NGBK, 2012), pp. 266–82; 266.

3. Alfredo Jaar quoted in Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn", p. 307, note 23.

4. Noël Carroll, *Engaging the Moving Image* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 6.

5. Wolfgang Welsch, "Aesthetics beyond Aesthetics", in *Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy, and Art Practice*, eds. Francis Halsall et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 178–92; 182f.

6. "Between Baudrillard and the Cave: Alfredo Jaar and Simon Critchley in Conversation", *Mute online*, March to May 2011, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/between-baudrillard-and-cave-alfredo-jaar-and-simon-critchley-conversation [accessed October 12, 2012].

7. Welsch, p. 183.

8. Cf. ibid.

9. Cf. the description of the work in the exhibition catalogue *Documenta XII. Kassel. 16/06–23/09 2007*, p. 280.

10. Cf. Bernard Stiegler, *La technique et le temps,* vol. 1, *La Faute d'Epiméthée* (Paris: Galilée, 1994).

11. Cf. Bernard Stiegler, "How I Became a Philosopher", in *Acting Out*, trans. David Barison et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 3f.

12. Ibid.

13. Cf. Bernard Stiegler and Irit Rogoff, "Transindividuation", in: *e-flux journal* #14, March 2010, p. 01/06. http://www.e-flux.com/journal/transindividuation/ [accessed May 22, 2012].

14. Cf. Bernard Stiegler, "Technics, Media, Teleology. Interview with Bernard Stiegler", *Theory, Culture & Society* 24 (2007), no. 7–8, pp. 334–41; 335.

15. Bernard Stiegler, "How I Became a Philosopher", p. 5.

16. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti et al. (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), p. 78f.

17. The standard reference regarding this structural oblivion of the medium is of course Marshall McLuhan's seminal study *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965), in which he likens his own position to that of Louis Pasteur who told the doctors that their biggest enemy was completely invisible and not even recognised, p. 32.

18. Aristotle, quoted Bernard Stiegler, "How I Became a Philosopher", p. 14.

19. Cf. Giorgio Agamben, "The Idea of Language", *Potentialities*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 46.

20. Bernard Stiegler, "How I Became a Philosopher", p. 14.

21. Ibid. Stiegler became a philosopher while incarcerated for five years, from 1978–1983, for armed robbery.

22. Bernard Stiegler, "The Tongue of the Eye: What 'Art History' Means", in *Releasing the Image: From Literature to New Media*, eds. Jacques Khalip and Robert Mitchell (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2011), pp. 222–35: 230f.

23. "Exhausted States: Alfredo Jaar and Simon Critchley in Conversation," *Mute online*, March to May 2011, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/exhausted-states [accessed October 12, 2012].

24. Giorgio Agamben, "Marginal Notes on *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle*", in *Means without End: Notes on Politics* [*Mezzi senza fine,* 1996] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 85.

25. Giorgio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture", in *Means Without End*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 58.

26. Ibid., p. 59.

27. Bernard Stiegler and Irit Rogoff, "Transindividuation", p. 04/06.

28. Cf. ibid.

29. Ibid., p. 05/06.

30. Bernard Stiegler, "Suffocated Desire, or How the Cultural Industry Destroys the Individual: Contribution to a Theory of Mass Consumption", *Parrhesia* no. 13, 2011, pp. 52–61; 53.

31. Bernard Stiegler, *De la misère symbolique* (Paris: Galilée, 2004), p. 16.

32. Cf. Bernard Stiegler, *De la misère symbolique*, p. 17, and Bernard Stiegler: "De la misère symbolique", *Le Monde*, October 10, 2003.

33. Cf. also Mouffe, "Alfredo Jaar: The Artist as Organic Intellectual", p. 269.

34. Cf. Bernard Stiegler, "De la misère symbolique", *Le Monde*, October 10, 2003.

35. Cf. Daniel Ross, "Politics and Aesthetics, or, Transformations of Aristotle in Bernard Stiegler", in: *Transformations* no. 17, "Bernard Stiegler and the Question of Technics", 2009. http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_17/article_04.shtml [accessed May 29, 2012].

36. Cf. ibid. Interestingly, Jaar divides his work in three main areas: "Only one third of my time is dedicated to working within the so-called art world [...] where we address a limited audience which is a very priviledged one, a small elite. It is because of this that I have dedicated another third of my time to create what I call public interventions, works that try to address real life issues in places and communities far removed from our little art world. Finally the last third of my time is

spent teaching, directing workshops and seminars around the world [...]. By direct-ly addressing the elite, I may be able to affect change in those that have the power to actually trigger those changes. By working on my public interventions I try to expand the limited outreach of the art world and reach much wider audience, in a context where I can be much more radical, without the normal constraints of insti-tutional spaces. And by teaching I try to lead the new generations towards a more radical kind of practice, one that is responsive to the needs of our times and more particularly to the context in which it takes place." Alfredo Jaar: "Interview with Luigi Fassi", *Klat*, Winter 2009–2010, p. 73f., quoted in Mouffe, p. 274.

37. Cf. Jacques Rancière, *Le partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique* (Paris: La fabrique, 2000).

38. Jacques Rancière and Davide Panagia, "Dissenting Words – A Conversation with Jacques Rancière", *Diacritics* 30 (2000), no. 2, pp. 113–26; 115.

39. Cf. also Jacques Rancière, "From Politics to Aesthetics?", *Paragraph* 28 (2005), no. 1, pp. 13–25.

40. Jacques Rancière, "What Medium can Mean", *Parrhesia*, no. 11 (2011), pp. 35–43; 35.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., p. 36.

43. Jacques Rancière, "Theater of Images", in *Alfredo Jaar: La politique des im-ages*, ed. Nicole Schweizer (Lausanne: Musée cantonal des beaux-arts, 2007), pp. 71–80; 73.

44. Ibid., 72.

45. Thomas Hirschhorn, "Why it is important – today – to show and look at images of destroyed human bodies?", *Le Journal de la Triennale #2*, ed. Émi-lie Renard, Paris: Centre national des arts plastiques (CNAP), February 2012, pp. 62–67; 64.

46. Ibid.

47. This description of Jaar's work draws heavily upon the catalogue text, *In-tense Proximity. La Triennale 2012*, p. 100, and a description by Leonie Radine for SCAD Museum of Art, http://www.scadmoa.org/art/exhibitions/may-1-2011 [accessed May 30, 2012].

48. Cf. Jacques Rancière, "Theater of Images", p. 74.

49. Cf. also Griselda Pollock, "Not-forgetting Africa", in *Alfredo Jaar: La poli-tique des images*, ed. Nicole Schweizer (Lausanne: Musée cantonal des beaux-arts, 2007), pp. 113–35; 132.

50. "Between Baudrillard and the Cave: Alfredo Jaar and Simon Critchley in Conversation", *Mute online*, March to May 2011, http://www.metamute.org/edi-torial/articles/between-baudrillard-and-cave-alfredo-jaar-and-simon-critchley-conversation [accessed October 12, 2012].

"Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals"

Bernard Stiegler

This text is an excerpt from the introduction to Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals: Disbelief and Discredit (*Vol. 2*) *by Bernard Stiegler, translated into English by Daniel Ross © Polity Press, Cambridge 2012.*

Symbolic misery leads irresistibly to *spiritual* misery. By this expression I refer firstly to that which paralyzes the functions of the human spirit. The word '*esprit*'[1] refers here to a noetic process that is both psychic *and* collective (cerebral and social): spirit is what *exceeds* the *I* and connects it to the *we*, the condition of the '*and*' of psychic *and* collective individuation, just as is, moreover, technics. The spirit I am referring to is not some kind of vapour or pure idea, a pure form, or even what one calls 'pure spirit', but that which, *passing through the organization of matter*, opens the process of conjunctions and disjunctions, and thus of trans-formations and trans-individuations, in which psychic and collective individuation *consists*.

And it is in this way – insofar as it is always already *both* psychic *and* collective – that knowledge [*connaissance*] is a fruit of spirit: knowledge only exists to the degree that it is *circulated and transmitted*, and to the degree that, through this transmission, it is trans-formed, engendering new knowledge(s) (thereby constituting the history of what Husserl called a 'transcendental we'), and therefore also as such forming and trans-forming the *course* of individuation at its highest level. Knowledge [*connaissance*] is, however, itself only a highly refined form of those types of knowing [*savoirs*] that constitute spirit. Now, the latter are, first and foremost – including in those societies that lack knowledge [*connaissance*] (understood here as theoretical formalization) – the knowledge of *savoir-faire* (know-how, skill) and *savoir-vivre* (knowledge of how to live).

The process of individuation today, and insofar as it consists in a permanent trans-formation of *savoir-faire*, of *savoir-vivre*, and of knowledge [*connaissance*], only occurs in *conditions of extreme control*, to the point that it becomes doubtful that this is still a matter of individuation. Gil-