Zeigam Azizov

The Time of the Image

A Philosophical Exploration of the Image
in the Work of Bernard Stiegler

CONTENT

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Themes and Ideas of this Book

This work is a philosophical exploration of the image as technics of access to the world in the age of proliferation.[1] It poses the question of the understanding of the role of the image in the constitution of the subject. How does the proliferation of the image constitute the subject? The question emerges in the situation of an endless proliferation of images that poses the necessity to distinct between images used in art and images circulated in the culture industry. The line of the argument emerges from the condition of the image being connected to time: they are temporal objects. The crucial relationship between the image and time provides the possibility for the constitution of the subject. This relationship is recorded in images, which I call recorded memory.

I am interested in explaining the process of the constitution of subjects. The process of the constitution of subjects is closely related to technics, and my own understanding of it is based on the critical exploration of the work of the French philosopher and cultural theorist Bernard Stiegler on technics and memory. I develop this question through the critique of the notion of a ›temporal object‹ as explored in the work of the German philosopher

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1   Throughout this work I will use the term ›technics‹ rather than technique while in some circumstances retaining the traditional use of the term depending on the context. Here ›technics‹ is the term that brings together the triad of technique, technicity and technology. This term is used by Stiegler following Gilbert Simondon (SIMONDON 2012). The term is translated into English as ›technics‹ and has its origins in the Greek term ›techne‹. It also relates to questions of ›poesis‹ and ›binary praxis‹, problematised in Greek philosophy, and it continues to be a point of contention today.

and founder of the phenomenological movement Edmund Husserl, combined with the recent problematisation of this question as the ›temporal industrialisation of consciousness‹ by Stiegler (STIEGLER 1998, 2007, 2010). Stiegler is also a philosopher of technics, and in his unprecedented work he argues for technics as a primary focus of philosophy and demonstrates that technics precedes thought. This position was ignored until his work appeared, and it now provides many opportunities to think of technics as prior to thought and its impact on the process of individuation. Examples of this date back to primary societies: the freeing of the hands helped to open the face to see the surrounding world. In this process, ›bipedality‹ is the technical act of remembering the gesture of looking directly. This gesture remembered through repetition and imitation.

In the highly developed and never-ending space of new technologies and the proliferation of images, it is crucial to reconsider the role of technics. Taking this study as a starting point, I argue for the contested notion of the image as a technics, because it is in images that memory is recorded. This recording itself is highly technologised; cinema is just one example of it. My interest stems from the view that the proliferation of images is not inert and that this is inextricably linked to the question of time. It poses the question of the grammatisation of the image at work in the understanding of time-images. Grammatisation here is understood as the capacity of building up a new grammar of images, analogous to the way the science of linguistics creates a grammar of natural languages. Coupled with this notion of ›grammatisation‹ and the contested notion of imitation, I argue for the image as technics that provides a possibility for thought systems alongside concepts.

The associative space of the image is not an empty container but a technical potential, providing space for thinking. Alongside concepts, images give rise to thinking and as such play a role in the constitution of thought. ›To constitute‹ means to give a new meaning and to imitate. The intersection between the grammatical and the imitational generates my own understanding of ›first contact‹ and the return to a primal impulse, which is explained in the course of the book. In this sense I insist that making images is the reconstruction of the image that is operated by imitation. Imitation takes an image from one time to another by the virtue of recorded memory.

The notion that time is manifested in images and any new image is made out of the existing image gives way to the further proliferation of images crucial to the whole project. Further, I engage with the question of

the proliferation of images as the reconstruction of time. With the growth of technologies, the usual understanding of time is challenged by the ›cutting and mixing‹ of images, sometimes installing them in a more convenient way to appear as traditional, sometimes arranging them as radically different and new. It poses the question of the contingency on the one hand and connectivity on the other. In both cases the result ultimately constitutes ›montage-consciousness‹ (STIEGLER 1998). I argue that this situation provides a new mimesis, where imitation is imitation not of ›the real‹ but of images. The real is no longer directly available, having been replaced by the cinematic. This process – sometimes based on conventions of how ›the real‹ should appear to us and sometimes provoking surprise – engenders the ›pharmacological effect‹. It also opens up two possibilities: on the one hand it makes ›the real‹ look more banal and on the other hand it provides the possibility to create ›a new grammar‹ based on the mechanism of imitation.

The focus here is on cinematic images, with their flexibility for editing by ›cutting and mixing‹. I will most often use the term ›cinematic images‹ with reference to those images that appeared after the adventurous effect of cinema provided a ›blueprint‹ for new media through the use of these effects to obtain form and content. More generally, by ›cinematic images‹ I mean images that are used in the cinema and other visual media, such as the Internet, TV or photography. The important point is the relation of these images to cinematic means, such as their montage and circulation in the processes of pre-production, production and post-production. Cinema has created a new visual language by combining various attributes of text, sound and the image; in doing so it has changed visual culture as such.

In this context I also try to grammatise the ›time-image‹ by re-classifying the subject of art through the prisms of its recent development. I argue that the current state of images comes close to making possible a new mimesis in the emergence of imitation as a mode of production. I argue that the ›time-image‹ establishes the legitimacy of a) the image as container of ›time‹, i.e. memory of the past and the index of the future and the present as the search for being; b) the ›time-image‹ as technics of access to the world, in which the illusion of an immediate access to the ›real‹ that currently dominates philosophy (for instance, speculative realism) is abandoned. The ›time-image‹ in this sense is defined as ›a temporal object‹ and identified with what I call ›a fuzzy object‹ after Lotfi A. Zadeh (ZADEH 2012). Time and image are temporal, non-essential fuzzy objects.

This understanding provides the possibilities for decision making. It also challenges another trend in contemporary thought, namely, the ›post-human‹, by showing that humans themselves are technics, as demonstrated by Stiegler in his study of Leroi-Gourhan's work (STIEGLER 1998). Following Stiegler, I claim that it is impossible for subjects to improve themselves without ›recorded memory‹, which is translated in and by images. In this theory the question of memory plays the crucial role. Stiegler understands memory as ›a tertiary retention‹: it is recorded by technical means, from alphabetic writing to instant electronic messaging, and in this way it is translated into images (STIEGLER 2009a). The image is the place of storage of recorded memory. This recorded memory constantly assists the subject to memorise. Both remembering and forgetting take place by tracing images. Since recorded memory is non-linear and non-direct, the tracing of images is fragmented and exists as a derushage (a first assembly or the rough cut), which is constituted again as ›the montage-consciousness‹. It is close to the notion of »the Kuleshov effect« as it is called in the world of cinema (STIEGLER 2010: 20). Associated with the theory of Lev Kuleshov, which will also be discussed below, montage in this sense brings together the disseminated subject by cutting and mixing fragments that seem not to have any connection at first glance (KULESHOV 1973: 183). Cutting and mixing may also involve juxtaposing images with concepts which cause them to co-exist as mixture. This can be applied to the contemporary subject. ›Montage-consciousness‹ helps subjects in their attempt to grasp the world of instantaneity, constant change and paradigm shift. Cinematic images help the contemporary person to grasp the world. The world appears in images, which manifest time and condensed memory.

I distinguish two kinds of images in my research:[2] the image as art as a determined historical activity and all other images seen elsewhere in the culture industry, in a chaotic circulation of forms and their various associations. Both are the ›recorded memory‹. My primary focus is on the ›cinematic image‹; however, the proliferation of the image creates a connection between the art and the culture industry, which will also be explained. I claim that the cinematic image is a condensed fragment of the time-space.

2   As a result of the proliferation of the image, the notion of the image itself became blurred and needs to be reformulated to correspond to recent developments. This may be another large research project; for now, I will focus on ›cinematic images‹.

I will discuss the argument that time-based technologies obliterate space in favour of time and that a kind of ›time-space‹ compression has created what is commonly called globalization (HARVEY 1989).

Although I agree with the definition of globalisation as ›time-space compression‹, I disagree with the claim that the use of the time-based technologies has obliterated space in favour of time. In my view the use of the time-based technologies has opened a new dimension of globalization, which does not obliterate anything. Rather, it makes proliferation possible by opening up new spaces. The proliferation of images, which opens up a new space, is analogous to nuclear proliferation, the proliferation of ideas, means, gadgets etc. In other words, the trace that memory left is transformed into the image and stretched in the frame of the screen. In this sense a certain ›time-space‹ became a temporal entity which can only be grasped by images and in images. Cinematic images are images of alterity, because they are images of the present recapitulated from the past, and therefore, they are images of the other. This makes it possible to speak of cinematic images as traces. To speak of images as traces is impossible if they don't contain memory. Memory is always in the accusative case, it is always memory of someone or something and therefore memory of the other, which in itself is the trace of the lived past. Cinematic images may be moving or static, photographic. In both cases they are records of memory and traces of time. As such the image is an evidence of what happened in time.

To repeat again, the image in its turn is inseparable from the question of time. In this constant dynamic movement of proliferation, there is a need to develop a form of thinking to a certain degree of abstraction in order to be able to grasp the complex world with relatively little application of thought. In order for this to happen, there is an urgent need to develop a new form of thought capable of playing such a role. It is difficult to define the time as a category, but the proliferation of images opens such a possibility in the sense that watching a film can be defined as ›the time of the film‹. In the same way sending an SMS is ›the time of the messaging‹ etc. As such these are temporal objects and they are fuzzy objects, since they don't purely determine time and themselves are not determined by time. These temporal objects are the recorded memory that stores time in images. When I speak of time as ›the time of watching the TV‹, ›the time of the internet‹ or ›the time of messaging‹, I claim that the time of watching the film or sending and receiving an e-mail provides the possibility of the materialisation of time in these fragmentary and temporal activities.

Therefore it is possible to speak of time as the time of the image! Time as such is not present but may only be perceived in its traces, in the recorded memory as an image. The image, then, is the remembered past, and when we encounter images, we retain the possibility of reconstructing this past. This is why the image as the recorded memory is the technics of remembering and reconstructing. Time is stored in images, and therefore there is nothing outside of the image. It is also the reason that we can speak of ›time‹ as it is stored in images, as in ›Tarkovsky's apples‹ or ›Kiarostami's motorbikes‹. ›Tarkovsky's apples‹ are very different from the apples we see in the garden because in Tarkovsky's film apples are approached as images that store the traces of the time recorded in his films.

In this setting *The Time of the Image* is an exploration of the image in the light of Stiegler's work combined with ideas derived from the cultural theory. By taking the notion of ›temporal objects‹ (objects in time) as the starting point for his philosophy of time and technics, Stiegler elaborates upon the triad consisting of technique, technicity and technology (their combination is called ›technics‹) in order to provide a new grammar of images for the ›organology‹ of the future. This means that we as a part of nature are organically embedded in it and at the same time are separated from it through the development of culture (non-organic); in this, the embeddedness itself is articulated in this separation. This is why there is a constant return to ›organic‹ nature, the return to the primary impulse, which doesn't exist and is disseminated as non-existent. Nevertheless, this impulse creates ›the passion for real‹ (BADIOU 2010): it articulates the search for the ›miserable treasure‹ (KRISTEVA 1988) of personal identity and opens up this possibility. Derushage is such a possibility, the first step towards re-assembling the trajectory of being. It is first expressed well in art, which arbitrarily ›reduces‹ the trajectory, and the second is the programming industry, which seeks to ›reduce‹ the same trajectory with no change, as exactly as possible. As the proliferation of images takes place, temporal objects play a crucial role in the constitution of the human subject and cultural memory and for the relationship between the ›organic‹ and ›non-organic‹ forms of existence. This includes the study of images as temporal objects through the critique of the ›industrial temporalisation of consciousnesses‹. The basic idea is that the object of culture is an absolute surrogate of the ›real‹, but how to understand this situation when there is no easily defined ›real‹? I understand the real not as a substance but as a notion, like the ›ideal‹ or ›speculative‹. In this sense I insist that culture

is the absolute surrogate of the temporal. The real, as already mentioned above, is also cinematic rather than real, and it includes the question of memory. There are many ways of recording memory in art, science or philosophy: memory that works at the present and provides the ground for the future. For memory itself is always in the past since time is always in delay (DERRIDA 1981a).

The notion that the developments of multiple cultural technics destroy memory is a myth created by the Western metaphysics.[3] What happened is the result of the proliferation of memory, which is disseminated, is elsewhere and may be discovered in and through images. Once recorded, memory provides for the twofold action of remembrance and oblivion. In this way memory is technologised as soon as memory is recorded and articulated in images. Images are everything from the graphic imaging of words to paintings, mathematical formulas, philosophical ideas, but also electronic messaging, SMS and Twitter all may be categorised as images. Different images differently manifest memory.

From this position I look at the current situation as ›imitational‹, in that it fosters repetition as a de-formalisation of time by de-familiarising.[4] Further repetition and division leaves traces in cinematic images. The potential contained in this twofold action is that of imitation understood as image-making on the one hand (reconstructing images and therefore time) and simply blindly repeating what already took place on the other.

Alongside Bernard Stiegler's work, my project is an attempt to sketch a new theory of the image or what I call ›cinematic images‹ through the notion of temporality and its traces in contemporary art. This work was initially called ›Time and Image‹. I later adopted the title from Abel Gance's sentiment: »the time of images has come« (WOLLEN 1974: 57). In my research ›the time of the image‹ means two distinctly related things: first, the images as trace of time; second, that time is never present and its absence is always presented in images (traces).[5] When we talk about a particular time,

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3   According to Plato, writing replaced the orality and destroyed memory; Rousseau said something similar about the printing replacing written memory etc.

4   In a sense it was used in the work of the Russian formalist Shklovsky on art as *techne* (SHKLOVSKY 1998).

5   Initially understood in Greek philosophy as *techne*, artistic images are understood as good objects to think with. Reality is largely fabricated by technology and images are inseparable components of this reality. In this sense I consider the image as technics only in its connection to time, in which it works as the reminder of thought.

we refer to images that establish the time. For example, when we speak of the October revolution, we refer to Sergei Eisenstein's films, historical archives etc. that once recorded this memory.[6] The same is also true of the emergence of concepts. For example, when we refer to a concept like ›flaneur‹, we look for its traces in the work of Charles Baudelaire and as traced by Walter Benjamin. Images are traces, and as such they are witnesses of time.

1.2   Outline of the Project

These questions will be developed through a close reading of Bernard Stiegler's work, with some references to the sources used in his philosophy. In this philosophy, images are an important source of cultural memory. Following this I will look at the image in its relationship to technics to show how the externalisation of internal power provides the basic principle of the constitution of the subject. I argue that images create the space that conditions thought. The image externalises internal power, and externalisation is grasped through associations. Associations help to form the relationship between internal and external objects while providing support to memory. In this way associations enable the articulation of thought within memory, along with its assimilation into the stream of images. This makes possible the constitution of the subject. Technics already contains thought, because any technology is the construction, and therefore the product, of thinking. Thought contained in technics can be discovered through the process of constitution. Technics contains thought, but thought becomes

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6   Although I am very well aware that that there are other scientific and popular studies of cultural memory, I am focused on the notion of the ›recorded memory‹, which helps to constitute subjects differently. If the artificial use of ›memes‹ or ›memeplexes‹ cuts the subject off from the other because memeplexes are ›narcissistic trance‹, to use McLuhan's term, the supplement is the use of human memory by the human, which provides the chance not to defy subjectivity as inscribed in emotional bonds connecting the self with the other. Memeplexes will not replace the human subject, because while creating an artificial memory, memeplexes lose the connection with the symbolic and as such ignore the subject and subjectivity, whereas the human subject always gives priority to the symbolic, albeit symbolically (unconsciously, in that the subject's relation to the symbolic is always unconscious). This is how proximity to the other is maintained. In McLuhan's words, the problem with electronic communication lies in a lack of emotional bonds, a condition that defies the symbolic, leaving its subjects in a narcissistic trance (MCLUHAN 1964). ›Friendship‹ on Facebook is just one example. Media and art can be differentiated in these terms: media produces programs, whereas art deconstructs objects.

possible through its articulation with other dimensions of technics. These are: 1) technicality, the element of construction, which plays a role in proliferation; 2) meaning, which depends both on technics and on the constitution; 3) cultural memory, which resides in associations.

Any attempt to constitute the subject is also an attempt to discover this subject, since as a result of the process of exteriorisation of the internal both an inclusion and exclusion take place, with the result that the subject is missing. The process of constitution becomes possible only as the reconstruction of the missing subject. The role of the image should be understood here as the re-discovery of the subject in its irreducibility. The subject is irreducible and always missing. This is also the indication of the emergence of the new subject. The future is a matter of repetition and the emergence of the repressed: the subject can only be projected towards the future and then only through a return to a primal impulse. I would question the necessity of this kind of thinking. The constitutive is always outside. A return to a primal impulse captures this ›outside‹ and inserts it into the subject. The subject standing outside resides in the incomplete inventions of the past. Constitution works by combining this ›incomplete‹ with already existing material. This is possible by the virtue of ›associations‹.

Bernard Stiegler states that »humans are in default«, unable to bring about constitution. Memory, as he rightly puts it, is ›industrialised‹: this industrialised memory – otherwise known as technics – opens the space for further improvement. In order to compensate for the ›default‹, subjects adopt the missing dimensions of time from memory of the past. The past is memorised in images, and memory as such became technics. The re-articulation of cultural memory in images helps to enrich the fullness of the vision. Therefore ›the image as recorded memory‹ is a technics to discover the missing dimension. »Technics is unthought« (STIEGLER 1998: 202).

Further, I will explore the theory of the image through the notions of ›temporal objects‹ and ›derushage‹. This will be followed by a recapitulation of relevant theoretical and critical discourses and a demonstration of the role of ›the image as technics‹ in order to show how the image as technics plays the role of grammatisation of the visible and therefore constitutes the subject.

This work is both an overview of the work of Bernard Stiegler and an attempt to formulate a new theory of images as far as they constitute the subject in the situation of the proliferation of images and the disorientation of coordinates. Based partly on my experience of working as an artist,

partly on my studies of philosophy and cultural studies, and additionally on a new consideration of images as indices of memory, I argue for new vectors of meaning and their role in the liberation of memory and exteriorisation of knowledge. These concepts are configured as used in Stiegler's work via Jacques Derrida and Gilbert Simondon. In order to define ›new vectors‹ of meaning, I also explore the ›subject-object relation‹ as set out by Theodor Adorno (of the Frankfurt School), whose argument concerns the dissipation of meaning. I will compare this to the notion of ›articulation‹ in Stuart Hall's work (British Cultural Studies) and will finally return to the notion of ›dissemination‹ in Derrida, which is crucial to any understanding of how meaning is not dissipated but vectorised by dissemination. In the condition of the proliferation of images, the understanding of meaning as a vector of this dissemination puts images in relation to ›new subjects‹. In the contradictory space of contingency and connection, it becomes possible for subjects to position themselves through imitation in a new ›grammatisation of the visible‹, taking subjects further into the territory of a new mimesis. I will also try to show this through a case study of the work of the French filmmaker and artist Chris Marker.

This work is also an attempt to develop a theory of derushage for a new grammatisation. It constitutes a step towards the philosophical exploration of ›new mimesis‹ based on the old notion of ›imitation‹, a fresh approach in which ›cutting and mixing‹ gives ›a new voice‹ to the increasing banalisation of images under the general condition of proliferation. It addresses the question of, firstly, temporal objects and of film-viewing as encounter with these objects, which is defined as ›the cinematic‹ and as a new dimension of time; secondly, of derushage, the proceeding from the first assembly and its concentration to the ›origin‹ of cinematic images in this first assembly, so as to ›decode‹ further possibilities for a grammatisation emerging from the fuzziness of images; and, thirdly, assembling the imitation in order to grammatise the intensive becoming that is based on this imitation.