Virtual identity crisis: The phenomenology of Lockean selfhood in the "Age of Disruption"†

Michael F. Deckard[1]* and Stephen Williamson[2]

[1] *Philosophy, Lenoir-Rhyne University, Hickory, USA*
[2] *Independent scholar*
Correspondence: Michael.Deckard@lr.edu

ABSTRACT: From the end of the seventeenth century to now well into the 21st, John Locke's theory of personal identity has been foundational in the field of philosophy and psychology. Here we suggest that there are two fundamental threads intertwined in Lockean identity, the flux of perception-thought-action (i.e. continuity of consciousness) and memory. Using Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur, and Bernard Steigler as guides we will see that these threads constitute a phenomenological self (*l'ésprit*), a lived experience of our identity that is not only perhaps the most essential component of our humanity, but also the most threatened in today's ongoing, commercial convergence of the real and the virtual in the "Age of Disruption".

KEYWORDS: *l'ésprit*, memory, Merleau-Ponty, protention, self, Stiegler

† This article is part of a collection of papers on *Phenomenology and Virtuality,* with guest editor Jean du Toit

---

I suggest we now face the moment in history when the elemental right to the future tense is endangered by a panvasive digital architecture of behavior modification owned and operated by surveillance capital, necessitated by its economic imperatives, and driven by its laws of motion, all for the sake of its guaranteed outcomes (Shoshana Zuboff, 2020, p. 331).

Introduction

John Locke (1632–1704) and his theory of personal identity, added to the second edition of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1694, are specifically concerned with the relation of immortality to self and its identity. Locke indeed seems to reject not only the Platonic and Aristotelian but also the Cartesian view of immortality and is the first, with the exception of certain materialist Christians, to emphasise the "survival of the body". But, as some commentators have suggested, perhaps what he was really concerned about was the existence (after death) of the immortal soul, that is, the notion of identity which at death is or is not lost for ever (see Locke, 1975; Curley, 1982; Gordon-Roth, 2019). The invocation of Locke calls to mind nearly every theory of personal identity added to the canon of Western philosophy and psychology since, and thus, he marks the starting point for our exposition on identity. Unlike the metaphysical conception of self, such as found in Descartes or Spinoza, the empirical self begins from the blank slate (see Goldie, 2012; Strawson, 2011; Thiel, 2011). While indeed the concept of the "unscribed tablet" can be found in Aristotle's *De Anima* (429b29–430a1) as well as in the writings of

Ibn Sina and Ibn Tufail, it was Locke who codified the idea of the *tabula rasa* in Western philosophy.[1] Our interest, however, is not in what Locke and his metaphor may mean within, what Charles Taylor in *The Language Animal* (2016, p. 4) refers to as the "the confines of modern representational epistemology", but rather what it may mean for the psychologist cum phenomenologist of personality theory. Through such a lens we see that "that which we call ourselves", as articulated by Locke, has two essential, co-dependent features: 1) a continuity of consciousness (that which "accompanies thinking"); and 2) a retaining of memory that makes up the identity of an individual as a self.

But what is it about these essential features that makes them still part of the psychological discussion today regarding the elemental determinants of identity as it relates to memory and narrative? Perhaps it is the fact that Locke's criteria encapsulate the experience of self (what we will call *l'ésprit* in the last section of this article) which each of us, in common, hold individually. It is a phenomenological self, characterised by the privileged accessibility of these facets – a pre-reflective state that the phenomenological tradition may call the first person givenness of being in the world – the *principium individuationis,* in virtue of which we are distinguished from other things of a similar sort. The *principium individuationis* points to the question of consciousness as well as memory as immortality, that allows for continuity or permanence. Be it Mozart composing at age five, Pascal proving theorems on the wall with a piece of coal

---

1   See Müller (2015, p. 106), who writes: "Thus (Avicenna's) agent intellect functions like a kind of universally accessible external hard disk from which all the individual human souls can get the intellectual forms stored in it from the beginning". See also Russell (1994).

at eleven, or Von Neuman telling jokes in Ancient Greek at six, extreme genius in the very young is still a source of fascination. The use of the transmigration of souls as a "plot device" for the transmission of individual and collective memory has origins in the canon that are pre-Socratic, what some have called Orphico-Pythagoreanism. It is more than a coincidence that these examples all take as point of discussion the modified Παλιγγενεσια (regeneration) of the Pythagoreans.[2]

For the Greeks, however, it is Plato that illustrates the connection most strikingly. In the *Republic*, he tells the story of Er, son of Armenius who returns to life after being dead for twelve days. Er paints a picture of the afterlife in which he sees the souls of the dead choosing new lives. After this choice, they must drink from the river Lethe and thus forget, essentially consigning themselves to oblivion. Here again is the question of the identity that Locke speaks of which at death is or is not lost forever. Its asking thus marks the culmination of the divergence in the Platonic and the Lockean; what some now call the soul theory of identity and a Lockean theory more nuanced than to simply be called the material theory or even the mnemonic theory. Here is the core of what Locke is looking for: what makes a person different from any other person to ever exist (let alone an animal or vegetable)? It is a flux or synthesis, in the Kantian sense of the word, of the many factors we will explore below that coalesce to form an ever dynamic, *principium individuationis* living-in-the-world.

Constituents of the Lockean self I: The continuity of consciousness

Let us examine more closely the currents of the Lockean self and trace them through the more recent discussions of narrative identity by means of the continuity of consciousness. Setting the stage for Locke's break from Platonic tradition was Thomas Hobbes, most notably in his 1655 book entitled *De Corpore*. Here Hobbes writes his famous parable of the ship of Theseus that "the Sophisters of Athens were wont to dispute", in which he tells of the storied ship – renovated plank by plank –

> and if some Man had kept the Old Planks as they were taken out, and by putting them afterwards together in the same order, had again made a Ship of them, this without doubt had also been the same Numerical Ship with that which was at the beginning; and so there would have been two Ships Numerically the same, which is absurd...Wherefore the beginning of *Individuation* is not always to be taken either from Matter alone, or from Form alone either (Hobbes, 1656, 11.7; emphasis in original).

Mechanical to the last, Hobbes goes on to conclude that the key in accounting for identity was "the same beginning Motion, namely that which was in his generation".

At the same time as Hobbes, the scientist Robert Boyle's corpuscularianism is equally influential upon Locke, in which "the Body may upon the account of the more permanent structure of its stabler parts retain a fitness for divers of the same purposes it served before" (Ayers, 1991, II.208). Simply speaking, due to the material components of identity, the claim that "I have infallible knowledge of my own identity" (Hamilton, 2013, p. 54)

is due to the "permanent structure of our corpuscles". While consciousness shifts, the corpuscles remain. As Ayers (1991, II.209) writes,

> [t]he "much enquired after" *principium individuationis*, Locke concluded, is existence itself, "which determines a Being of any sort to a particular time and place incommunicable to two Beings of the same kind". The medieval doctrine that the principle of individuation of particular things in existence seems to have been a response to the supposed problem of how beings of the same nature are distinguished from one another: since particular existence is prior to the existence of universal natures, no special explanation of the individuality of particulars is called for (no *haecceitas* or "thisness") beyond that existence itself (Locke, 1975, 2.27.3).

Without mentioning Boyle's corpuscularianism or Hobbes's materialism per se, the substance that is replacing medieval doctrines is the body itself. Without digressing by entering into the individuation of plants or animals, incorporated into most traditions that espouse any form of transmigration of souls (e.g. Plato's myth of the Orphics choosing to return as songbirds), it is the identity of a human being in the flesh, in both the literal and as we will see below, the Merleau-Pontyan sense, that matters here.

In examining the identity of a human being, whether it is a "mass of matter", "a living body", an "organisation of parts", or as Bacon might describe it, "an eclectic array of...hair, humours, external shape, the affections, intellectual faculties, and finally various traits...and customs" (Carey, 2006, p. 16; cf. Locke, 1975, 2.27.3–5), there is in this description both the physical and corpuscular, on the one hand, and "natural history" or the anthropological, on the other hand. Without getting too far lost in the weeds of Locke's ontology or its validity, since we will remain agnostic in this article as to the metaphysics of this relation (see Goldie, 2012), here it is important to remember Locke's doctrine of real and nominal essences as it may apply to human personal identity, a key in understanding the nuance of Lockean identity (Vermeir & Deckard, 2012; in phenomenology, see Mohanty, 1997; Applebaum, 2014). In the terminology of today's philosophy of mind, one may equate the body theory of self with the corpuscular, shown to be insufficient with Hobbes's metaphor of Theseus's ship. In Locke's locution, this is the real essence. On the other hand, the anthropological and sociological, that is, the collection of conditional, observable properties that comprise one's idea of oneself or another which Locke called nominal essence and his scholastic predecessors might have referred to as accidental qualities. Overlooking the troubled philosophical history of essence, we may loosely correlate what Locke means here with the mental/mind theory of the self, be it rooted in some seemingly archaic metaphysical notion of essence or an equally mysterious "brain state" that performs the miraculous trick that is consciousness, bringing together in a form of continuity perception, thought, and action.

Constituents of the Lockean self II: Memory-based self

Building on this first constituent of continuity of consciousness through the body, we find that the second contributes to the way that modern psychology and neuroscience understand episodic

---

2   Παλιγγενεσια: Renewal of life, see Matthew 19:28.

and procedural memory, which for us can be linked to the difference between *technique* and the *technical*. Since episodic memory is simply "a form of recreative or simulative imagining that enables us to construct and entertain possible episodes" (Hutto, 2017, p. 197), this means that there is no difference between remembering and imagining. Memory can be further split into autobiographical memory or declarative memory, both of which are problematic as to the early self (say, before the age of four). What continuity of consciousness is meant to contain for Locke are all of these contemporary psychological terms for memory. If episodic memory retains this recreative or simulative imagining, as when we remember an event from a photograph or film as if it were our own, the technics of this are what is at stake in the development of a phenomenological self. Or, more profoundly, when technoscience begins to define the self by means of Facebook, Google, or your browser history, and that this in turn horribly turns against the self, we find the same virtual elements becoming part of personal identity. Simulation will be important for us when we look in the next section at phenomenological theories of memory, and how the self becomes virtual with a seeming loss of individuation. For now, episodic memory is subject to what could be, or what could have been (Hutto, 2017).

This technical psychological discussion of memory ties closely to what is called narrative identity. Nicola King (2000, p. 3; emphasis in original) describes it in the following way:

> In everyday social discourse, and in much conventional autobiography, these narratives tend to elide memory as a *process*: the content is presented as if it were uniformly and objectively available to the remembering subject, as if the narrating "I" and the subject of the narration were identical. Part of Locke's answer to his question about continuity of identity was: "To which I answer, that we must here take notice what the word *I* is applied to". The split between the two voices or identities – what Christa Wolf describes as "the memory of ourselves... and...the voice that assumes the task of telling it" – has now been clearly identified within narrative theory, and further emphasised and developed within Lacanian psychoanalysis. Greenman's experience [of his wife's shipment to Auschwitz] is an extreme example of this split: his narrative makes clear the radical break between the self who did not know what was about to happen to his wife, and the self who, belatedly, did know.[3]

We discover who we are, our memories and our identities, through stories and this in turn influences our actions. The continuity of consciousness and memory are split like the I to which Locke and King refer. King says in no uncertain words that what makes the "I" are the precise stories that *are retained* in the memory, consciously or not. She follows this passage with the following analysis (using Locke and contemporary forms of identity) of what it means to not know then fully what one knows

now: "what he also has to remember is the painful fact of his own ignorance, as if not knowing was in some way culpable, as if it deprived him of a degree of moral responsibility, or of human agency" (King, 2000, p. 2). The description of memory here assumes that Locke and others of his time believed there to be an absolute power of memory being uniformly and objectively available to the subject, as if on a computer or phone screen. But the I that becomes split here is precisely the virtual and the declarative memory that we spoke of earlier, echoing Avicenna's two intellects. The "two voices or identities" described by Nicola King *are the two kinds of memory*. Narrative identity attempts to bring these separate and distinct I's together into one thing.[4]

Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) has done more to explore the notions of narrative identity as it connects to memory than any other philosopher, but he has not ventured into the virtual memory we will look to in the next section. The way in which one narrates the self, according to Ricoeur, the way in which we recount our lives, almost from the point of childhood when we can speak, becomes a projection as if on a screen of what makes the "I".[5] By no means will all of the nuances of Ricoeur's complex notion of the self be unravelled here, but what is important is that part of what constitutes the I is other (external or outside) narratives to which the subject is either partially unaware or totally oblivious. Ricoeur falls upon Aristotle's *Poetics* to help the self (what we will call *l'ésprit* in the next section) become coherent to the self through a plot (*muthos*) and a representation (*mimesis*) of action. The speaking self is as important as the acting self, as when one "acts out" or performs certain actions that may not be articulable as to reasons why one has acted. This matters for character, in both a narrative and a moral sense. As Ricoeur (2005, p. 100; emphasis in original) describes it,

> [t]he unity of meaning that results rests on the dynamic equilibrium between a demand for concordance and the admission of discordances that, up to the close of the narrative, put in peril this identity of a unique kind. The unifying power applied to the episodic dispersion of narrative is nothing other than "poetry" itself. An important implication of this configuring operation for us is that emplotment applies no less to the "characters" than to the actions. A character is someone who *carries out* the action in the narrative. The category of character is therefore also a narrative category, and its role in the story stems from the same narrative understanding as does the plot itself. The character, we can say, is him- or herself emplotted.

Ricoeur's life work after being held in a camp in Pomerania from 1940 to 1945 was to "emplot" his own life with respect to the atrocities of the twentieth century. As in Nicola King's analysis above, the reason narrative identity is so important is that it allows a plot to make some kind of sense of the meaningless and diverse "memor[ies] of ourselves...and...the voice that assumes the task of telling it" to become identified,

---

3   King is quoting Locke's *Essay* and Wolf's *A Model Childhood*, but this split should also remind us of the distinction between agent intellect and possible intellect in Avicenna alluded to above and expanded upon in Müller (2015) and Russell (1994). The reference King is referring to regarding Greenman is the following: "Greenman describes the moment when, after arriving at Auschwitz, he saw his wife being taken away on a truck – to the gas chambers, although, as he said, he "didn't know that then". This phrase haunted his narrative..." (King, 2000, p. 1).

4   For the relation of this view to phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and contemporary philosophy of mind, see Deckard & Overcash (2016) and Deckard (2017; 2018; 2021).

5   see where Taylor writes the following: "The original wordless experiences of the new-born infant is so unlike the later linguistically constituted human identity that we can't understand them as differing only in some quantitative dimension: for instance, that the latter takes in more or more complex objects" (Taylor, 2016, p. 66).

as in chapter one of Ricoeur's (2005) *The Course of Recognition*: recognition as identification. This is precisely what is missing in Locke's account. If there is a single underlying theme to all of this following from Locke, it is that the self is complexly unified like a poem insofar as the author and the reader of the poem make up the meaning together – the character of the poem – but that the language of the poem has to be embodied (in consciousness) and narrativised (through memory) in life. Ricoeur's most succinct telling of this is in his "Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator": "Thanks to [the narrative quality of human experience] we have the right to speak of life as of an incipient story, and thus of life as an activity and a passion in search of a narrative" (Ricoeur, 2012, pp. 196–197).

The way in which narrative identity and memory are related is also a temporal problem, what Ricoeur refers to as *idem* and *ipse*-selves inasmuch as what Nicola King spoke of in terms of psychoanalysis when she speaks of "the self who did not know what was about to happen". One is the sameness of self, and other is the self that exists over time (see De Vries, 2010; Deckard 2021). That is to say, how autonomy or the Kantian reading of the self is expressed in terms of consciousness and memory *over time* does not take into account the vulnerability of the self to algorithms and manipulation (Anderson, 2003; Carter, 2014; Abbinnett, 2018). In his way, Ricoeur is defending *both* an unconscious and a conscious self that cannot be totally aware of itself but is nevertheless unified. This is also at stake in Ricoeur's discussion of Locke on identity (Ricoeur, 2004), and insofar as this has implications for memory, it is as much if not more the part of us that we do not remember that we repress or try to forget that makes us who we are, empowering the working through of the past (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2009).

The co-dependent facets of identity we have been tracing can also be described in Husserlian terminology using the concepts of retention and protention. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. 439) explains them as processes in the experience of directed (intentional) consciousness:

> Husserl calls the intentionalities that anchor me to my surroundings "protentions" and "retentions". These do not emanate from a central I, but somehow from the perceptual field itself, which drags along behind itself its horizon of retentions and eats into the future through its protentions. I do not pass through a series of nows whose images I would preserve and that, placed end to end, would form a line. For every moment that arrives, the previous moment suffers a modification: I still hold it in hand, it is still there, and yet it already sinks back, it descends beneath a line of presents. In order to keep hold of it, I must reach across a thin layer of time.

Protentions can be understood as anticipations of the coming moment. They become manifest in our experience as hope, desire, expectation, volition, etc. – the future side of Lockean continuity of consciousness. Retention, on the other hand, accounts for the present and the continuity into the past that facilitates memory.

Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. 69) describes this act of consciousness in the perception of a house:

> Our perception ends in objects, and the object, once constituted, appears as the reason for all the

experiences of it that we have had or that we could have. For example, I see the neighbouring house from a particular angle. It would be seen differently from the right bank of the Seine, from the inside of the house, and differently still from an airplane. Not one of these appearances is the house itself. The house, as Leibniz said, is the geometrical plan that includes these perspectives and all possible perspectives.

He then applies this same analysis to time. Again, taking up Husserl's sense of internal time consciousness, Merleau-Ponty (ibid., p. 71) continues:

> If I examine the house attentively and unreflectively, it seems eternal, and a sort of wonder emanates from it. Of course, I see it from a certain point in my duration, but it is the same house that I saw yesterday it was one day younger; an old man and a child gaze upon the same house…Each moment of time gives itself as a witness to all the others…Thus, the object is seen from all times just as it is seen from all places, and by the same means, namely the horizon structure.

This temporal analysis allows for a "double horizon" of protention and retention in which "my present can cease to be a present that is in fact about to be carried off and destroyed by the flow of duration" (ibid., p. 72). We cannot help but be subject to the flux or what he calls here the flow of consciousness that appears to affect our consciousness of objects in the world. "It must be given as if through a single act of vision comprising a thousand gazes", Merleau-Ponty writes. The house is thus like the self, and the retentions that he touches upon are subject to the same infinite reach. "We will forget our present perception of the house: each time that we can compare our memories with the objects to which they refer, allowing for other reasons for error, we are surprised by the changes the objects owe to their own duration" (ibid.). This account of consciousness touches upon the very flux of being.

L'ésprit: The flux or synthesis (of the continuity of consciousness and memory)

Perhaps we should also consider the way in which Hamlet (act two, scene two) sees the human being, for indeed there is, in addition to these elements, a further element constitutive of self. Besides the continuity of consciousness and memory, there is what Locke calls mind, which we will call following recent phenomenology *l'ésprit* (i.e. *Geist* or *Psyche*). This should recall Plato's discussion of the soul mentioned earlier. In Locke, he describes it in one place as a "dark room, a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little opening left, to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things without" (Locke, 1975, 2.11.17) In another place, it is a blank slate or "white paper" (Locke, 1975, 2.1.2; Armstrong & Tennenhouse, 2006).

Whereas the philosopher Charles Taylor describes this view of the self in terms of the "punctual self" (Taylor, 1989) or, more recently, a "designative-instrumental" view of language in place of an "expressive constitutive" one, what is important about this distinction, as related to identity, is whether the self can be transparent to the self (Strawson, 2011; Taylor, 2016). While Locke stresses the fact that consciousness and memory constitute personal identity and that it is only as far as this

consciousness extends and only as far as a self can consider "it self as it self...in different times and places" that seems essential to personal identity, he neglected to spell out how and why this matters (Taylor, 1989, p. 49).

Bernard Stiegler (1952–2020) calls this the cinematic flux of consciousness:

> Thinking, in all its forms, is a temporal fabric woven from what Husserl called primary and secondary retentions and protentions. A temporal flux or flow, such as for example a speech that you might listen to, as in fact you are doing at this very moment, can constitute itself as such only because it is an aggregation of what Husserl called primary retentions...These primary retentions are, however, selections: they are retained only on the basis of retentional criteria, criteria that are formed in the course of my prior experience. And my experience is, precisely, an accumulation of secondary retentions, which are former primary retentions that have subsequently become past, and which constitute the stuff of my memory (Stiegler, 2020, p. 19).

Here we must explore further this Husserlian concept of retention and protention. Since all of phenomenology stems from Husserl, *l'esprit* points us to the fundamental intentional experience of consciousness (Husserl, 2002; Applebaum, 2014) What makes for consciousness is intentionality and this must be differentiated from the psychologistic ego (Husserl, 2002).

These ideas become enfleshed in a way in which personal identity and forms of memory connect to/from the past. This is where Stiegler calls this period of time that of the *epokhe*, which is a phenomenological term for bracketing or suspending reality. While impossible to easily summarise his thought, his point is that the media (and film, internet, Google, etc.) determine our "cultural industry" through manipulation and mind control in subtle ways. "Everything derives from consciousness", Adorno and Horkheimer write, "for Malebranche and Berkeley, from the consciousness of God; in mass art, from the consciousness of the production team" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, p. 98, translation modified; Abbinnett, 2018). Instead of Hollywood, however, it is media who decides. What is going on in our heads, on our screens, in the world as a whole is mediated entirely through these very similar channels. What we believe and understand about science, about memory, about health, about coronavirus is almost entirely from media sources. We have to go back to childhood and replay all that we have learned to realise what is real and what is virtual in our identities. The media is the sum total of messages that make up in some sense our minds, "*l'ésprit*". Just as Facebook was founded to measure the "hotness" factor of female bodies, thus emerging out of misogynistic intentions or at least reducing bodies to sex objects, so it is now, during the height of COVID-19, used to spread untruths and influence elections (Oliver, 2016). Stiegler does not say that media, film, internet, etc. are all bad, but that big corporations (like Amazon, Google, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) need to be held accountable (Stiegler, 2009). This means that memory can include photographs that are taken and that those images somehow instil themselves on our mind such that this instilling is as much if not more from a "media" source meant to manipulate us as from our own self-knowledge and communities.

In *Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*, Stiegler (2011) recapitulates what he thinks is his central idea. He begins by taking up the desire for stories, which he thinks is an ancient desire. Modern society is "animated by the most complex, and most secret, of social movements". This is precisely what Adorno and Horkheimer mean by culture industry, which now "constitute the very heart of economic development, whose most intimate power is clearly always the most ancient desire of all stories". All of cinema and media then, for Stiegler, with their "technics of image and sound – now including informatics and telecommunications – re-invent our belief in stories that are now told with remarkable, unparalleled power" (Stiegler, 2011, pp. 8–9).

Episodic memory and procedural memory become effaced on Stiegler's view in terms of an individuating principle. This is in continuity with what we saw in Locke as identity being based on two constitutive elements. Influenced by sociologists such as Simondon and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Stiegler's analysis of individuation includes both elements of Locke's "I". While discussing television, specifically the "poverty of its public" which is "of extreme deprivation", it is partially the cause but also the effect of what he calls the "cinematographic consciousness...which is what makes television possible (in the sense of thinkable), yet which necessarily leads to (though this remains unthought) consciousness's paralysis in the face of television" (Stiegler, 2011, pp. 84–85). The question of television time, for Stiegler, is both one of political economy and the "industrial ecology" of *l'esprit*, which means that the mind is defined in some sense virtually by this external object. Political economy here is also a philosophy of history as well as a philosophical psychology in which the machine becomes a "memory support". Stiegler (2011, 86; emphasis in original) writes that

> [t]he question of time and television must be posed as part of the sector of industrial activity of *program* diffusion because of the flux of the audiovisual temporal object presupposes the enslavement of one machine to another. Just as the time of proletarized work requires the enslavement of the machine (in the mechanical sense of the word) and of the machine operator, so a worker who is deprived of all knowledge and skill and renamed not a *worker* but a *proletarian* is also enslaved. As Simondon has shown, this process of worker enslavement leads to the worker's loss of individuation and displacement in the machine "carrying tools".

All three volumes of Stiegler's *Technics and Time* concern the distinction between *techne* and *episteme*. The act of writing itself is a *techne* for memory. As we have seen, the triggering of virtual memory by all machines, computers, phones, cars, and letters from a loved one, etc. are prosthetic devices that enable the recall of meaning. Our identities are hidden to us by means of these machines. When Marx speaks of the *material* of technics and technology, Stiegler emphasises its relation to memory and here the worker loses his self, that is, his personal identity through his work. The viewer of television, the poster photo, the Facebook wall all become prosthetic devices for the self. Stiegler (2011, p. 86) continues,

> *On Television* [by Bourdieu] follows the disastrous spirit of a long scholarly tradition as old as philosophy itself in which technics and technology are trivialities and, as a result, engage in no analysis of television's technical

dimension – and even less of its phenomenological consequences in terms of individuation. The outcome is the pauperization, the impoverishment, the starvation of consciousness, resulting in the fact that this disastrous de-spiriting within the framework of *l'ésprit* as the metaphysical attitude par excellence, is thus in great need of a radical critique and a revived criticism, rooted in a total inattention to questions of objective memory and to retentional devices of which machines are the concretizations.

Taking up the social imaginary, in which fantasies influence our desires and our reactions to external stimuli, the cinema and media in general have more power over our actions than most of us realise. They impose a kind of "normality" between what is viewed, saved, programmed and how we act, think, or buy. But this normality can be questioned. Since the images themselves are a form of violence, in that they force themselves on our fantasies and our imagination as Plato saw more than two millennia ago, it is now all the more necessary to challenge the status quo. It is not only that we should not subject ourselves to these images – since it is almost impossible to avoid them when they are on every billboard, petrol station pump, bus station kiosk, and television screen – but that we should proactively (by means of activism) change the way that images are perceived.

Conclusion

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the structures of power: "The plague-stricken town, traversed throughout with hierarchy, surveillance, observation...is the Utopia of the perfectly governed city" and that "Bentham's *Panopticon* is the architectural figure of this composition" (Foucault, 1978, pp. 198, 200). There are many similarities in our current cultural moment to Foucault's plague-stricken town. There is, of course, the unfortunate literal comparison to our own, now quarantined societies, but beyond that is the fact that, in what Stiegler calls *The Age of Disruption* (2019, p. 7) where "billions of devices...connected by the industry of 'cloud computing', data centers, geostationary satellites and the algorithms of intensive computing". An age in which

> individuals and groups are thus transformed into data-providers, de-formed and re-formed by "social" networks operating according to new protocols of association...they find themselves disindividuated: their own data...enables them to be dispossessed of their own protentions – that is, their own desires, expectations, volitions, will and so on (2019, p. 7).

We are all now in some sense both the prisoner within the panopticon that "is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" as well as the guard representing a power "visible and unverifiable", the consumer of data and the source of the data consumed (Foucault, 1978, p. 201). Each aspect of the Lockean "I" taken up again by phenomenology is under siege, a moment in history in which, even our freedom of choice is, as Shoshana Zuboff (2020, p. 331) writes in our epigraph, "endangered by a panvasive digital architecture of behavior modification". It is a virtual identity crisis that can only be subverted by a recognition that

what we always already are as selves includes *l'ésprit* in all of its diverse features.

References

Abbinnett, R. (2018). *The Thought of Bernard Stiegler*. Routledge.

Adorno, T., & Horkheimer, M. (2002). *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. (E. Jephcott, Trans.). Stanford University Press.

Anderson, P. S. (2003). Autonomy, vulnerability and gender. *Feminist Theory*, 4, 149–164. https://doi.org/10.1177/14647001030042004

Applebaum, M. H. (2014). Intentionality and narrativity in phenomenological psychological research: Reflections on Husserl and Ricoeur. *The Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 14(2), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.2989/IPJP.2014.14.2.2.1241

Armstrong, N., & Tennenhouse, L. (2006). A mind for passion: Locke and Hutcheson on desire. In V. Kahn, N. Saccamano, & D. Coli (Eds), *Politics and the Passions, 1500–1850* (pp. 131–150). Princeton University Press.

Ayers, M. (1991). *Locke* (Two Vols.). Routledge.

Carey, D. (2006). *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511490453

Carter, J. (2014). *Ricoeur on Moral Religion: A Hermeneutics of Ethical Life*. Oxford University Press.

Curley, E. (1982). Leibniz on Locke on personal identity. In M. Hooker (Ed.), *Leibniz: Critical and Interpretive Essays* (pp. 302–326). University of Minnesota Press.

Deckard, M. F. (2017). Of the memory of the past: Philosophy of history in spiritual crisis in the early Patočka and Ricoeur. *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy*, 9(2), 560–583.

Deckard, M. F. (2018). *In limine primo:* The difficulty of reality in Paul Ricoeur and J. M. Coetzee. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal, 4*(2), 55–75.

Deckard, M. F. (2021). The miracle of memory: Working-through Ricoeur on *Nachträglichkeit*. In A. Thiriez-Arjangi, Dierckxsens, G., Deckard, M. F., & Bruzzone, A. (Eds), *Le mal and la symbolique: Ricoeur lecteur de Freud*. De Gruyter.

Deckard, M. F., & Overcash, C. (2016). The (Bergsonian) memory-image in history and film. *Yearbook of Moving Image Studies*, 4, 60–84.

De Vries, K. (2010). Identity, profiling algorithms and a world of ambient intelligence. *Ethics and Information Technology, 12*, 71–85. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676–009–9215–9

Foucault, M. (1978). Panopticism. In *Discipline and Punish*. (A. Sheridan, Trans.) (pp. 195–228). Pantheon.

Gobodo-Madikizela, P. (2009). Working through the past: Some thoughts on forgiveness in cultural context. In C. Van Der Merwe & Gobodo-Madikizela, P. (Eds), *Memory, Narrative and Forgiveness: Perspectives on the Unfinished Journeys of the Past* (pp. 148–169). Cambridge Scholars Press.

Goldie, P. (2012). *The Mess Inside: Narrative, Emotion, & the Mind*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199230730.001.0001

Gordon-Roth, J. (2019). Locke on personal identity. In Edward N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/locke-personal-identity/

Hamilton, A. (2013). *The Self in Question: Memory, the Body, and Self-Consciousness*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137290410

Hobbes, T. (1656). *De Corpore*. In W. Molesworth (Ed.), *English Works of Thomas Hobbes*. https://archive.org/details/englishworkstho21hobbgoog/page/n162/mode/2up

Husserl, E. (2002). Logical Investigation. In D. Moran & T. Mooney (Eds.), *The Phenomenology Reader* (pp. 59–108). Routledge.

Hutto, D. (2017). Memory and narrativity. In S. Bernecker & K. Michaelian (Eds), *Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Memory* (pp. 192–203). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315687315–16

King, N. (2000). *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self*. Edinburgh University Press.

Locke, J. (1975). *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (P. H. Nidditch, Ed.). Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1690)

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012). *Phenomenology of Perception*. (D. Landes, Trans.). Routledge.

Mohanty, J. M. (1997). *Phenomenology: Between Essentialism and Transcendental Philosophy*. Northwestern University Press.

Müller, J. (2015). Memory in medieval philosophy. In D. Nikulin (Ed.), *Memory: A History* (pp. 92–124). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199793839.003.0004

Oliver, K. (2016). *Hunting Girls: Sexual Violence from* Hunger Games *to Campus Rape*. Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/oliv17836

Ricoeur, P. (2004). *Memory, History, Forgetting*. (K. Blamey & D. Pellauer, Trans.). University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226713465.001.0001

Ricoeur, P. (2005). *The Course of Recognition*. (D. Pellauer, Trans.). Harvard University Press.

Ricoeur, P. (2012). Life: A story in search of a narrator. In *On Psychoanalysis: Writings and Lectures, Volume 1* (pp. 187–200). Polity.

Russell, G. A. (1994). The Impact of the Philosophus Autodidactus: Pocockes, John Locke and the Society of Friends. In G. A. Russell (Ed.), *The "Arabick" Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century England* (pp. 224–265). Brill Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004247062_013

Stiegler, B. (2009). The Theatre of Individuation. *Parrhesia, 7,* 46–56.

Stiegler, B. (2011). *Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*. (S. Barker, Trans.). Stanford University Press.

Stiegler, B. (2019). *The Age of Disruption: Technology and Madness in Computational* Capitalism. (D. Ross, Trans.). Polity Press.

Stiegler, B. (2020). *The Nanjing Lectures*. (D. Ross, Ed. & Trans.). Open Humanities.

Strawson, G. (2011). *Locke on Personal Identity: Consciousness and Concernment*. Princeton University Press.

Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the Self*. Harvard University Press.

Taylor, C. (2016). *The Language Animal*. Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674970250

Thiel, U. (2011). *The Early Modern Subject: Self-consciousness and personal identity from Locke to Hume*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199542499.001.0001

Vermeir, K. & Deckard, M. F. (Eds.) (2012). *The Science of Sensibility: Reading Burke's Philosophical Enquiry*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2102-9

Zuboff, S. (2020). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power.* Public Affairs.