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Title: Rousseau, Stiegler and the aporia of origin

Publication year: 2006

Journal title: Forum for Modern Language Studies

eISSN: 1471-6860

Publisher: Oxford University Press

Publisher's site: <http://www.oxfordjournals.org/>

Link to original published version: <http://fmls.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/42/4/382>

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# Rousseau, Stiegler and the aporia of origin

Ben Roberts

In his recent work *La technique et le temps* (*Technics and Time*) the French philosopher Bernard Stiegler has tried to rethink the relationship between the human and what he calls “technics” (*technique*). Stiegler uses this term to refer not only to modern technology but all “organised inorganic matter”, that is everything from flint tools, through systems of writing to modern telecommunications. Stiegler sees technics as the “exteriorisation” or “invention” of the human: the human is constituted through the “prosthesis” of technical supports. Of the three volumes of *La Technique et le temps* that have so far appeared, the first volume, *La faute d’Épiméthée* (1994), introduces the concept of technics and argues for understanding the origin of the human as the origin of technics.<sup>1</sup> The second volume, *La désorientation* (1996), discusses two crucial shifts in the history of technics: the birth of “orthographic” writing and the emergence of tele-technologies which Stiegler thinks of as the “industrialisation of memory”.<sup>2</sup> The third volume, *Les temps du cinéma* (2001), develops Stiegler’s argument about the industrialisation of memory in relation to cinema.<sup>3</sup>

Stiegler’s work can be seen as strongly indebted to that of Jacques Derrida. This is evident in two ways. Firstly, Stiegler incorporates and creatively transforms a number of key Derridean themes such as *différance*, supplementarity (which Stiegler pushes in the direction of a general

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<sup>1</sup>*La technique et le temps*, p. ; *Technics and Time*, p. .

<sup>2</sup>*La désorientation*, p. .

<sup>3</sup>*Les temps du cinéma*, p. . For an analysis of Stiegler’s arguments here, see “Cinema as mnemotechnics: Bernard Stiegler and the industrialisation of memory”.

theory of the technical “supplement”), and “aporia”. In particular he sees his work on technics as developing Derrida’s “logic of the supplement” into a “history of the supplement”.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, Stiegler generates his thesis through a deconstructive reading of philosophical and historical thinking on technology. One example of the latter which we will examine here is his reading of Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*.

The immediate context of Stiegler’s discussion of Rousseau is the chapter entitled “Technology and Anthropology” in the first volume of *Technics and Time*. In some respects what is at stake in this section of the first volume, as Richard Beardsworth suggests in his reading of Stiegler, is to bring out the “aporia of origin” that is at work in any anthropological discussion of the origins of the human, whether transcendental or empirical.<sup>5</sup> Stiegler is trying to show here that such an aporia is inseparable from the question of technics. He makes this case through a reading of two forms of anthropology. One form is that of the French palaeo-anthropologist Leroi-Gourhan whose work, for Stiegler, makes tremendous gains in terms of understanding the close relationship between the origin of the human and the origin of tools. Leroi-Gourhan, however, ultimately fails to understand the aporia at work in the relationship between the ‘who’ (the early human) and the ‘what’ (tools); he therefore does not, on Stiegler’s reading, see that the ‘invention of the human’ can have its origin in neither.<sup>6</sup> The other form of anthropology that Stiegler turns to — and it is this reading that we are concerned with here — is that of Rousseau, which Stiegler regards as transcendental anthropology.

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<sup>4</sup>For discussion of this move — and wider commentary on the relationship between the work of Derrida and Stiegler, see my own “Deconstruction and Technics”, “Emergencies”, “From a Genealogy of Matter to a Politics of Memory” and “Thinking technicity”.

<sup>5</sup>In his concern with this aporia, Stiegler is very close to Derrida’s reading of Rousseau of which Beardsworth comments: “This im-possibility of the event of the origin has become a familiar theme in Derrida’s works, one with which Derrida has always argued for the radical anteriority of the law ... In the context of Rousseau, it is precisely where Rousseau has a certain exemplarity for Derrida in the philosophical tradition the aporia of the origin (the origin as a non-event, the im-possibility of the aporia) concerns the passage from nature to culture, of the birth of society ...” (“From a Genealogy of Matter to a Politics of Memory”, p. 98). This exemplarity of Rousseau for both Derrida and Stiegler, as we shall see, is closely tied to the discursive form of his “transcendental” anthropology, that is to say, Rousseau’s “conjectural history”. However, Stiegler’s reading of the aporetic nature of this conjectural history takes him in a very different direction from Derrida.

<sup>6</sup>*Technics and Time*, pp. 134–79.

The significance of these readings for Stiegler's wider project is that he aims to show that in *both* empirical anthropology (Leroi-Gourhan) *and* transcendental anthropology (Rousseau) there is an aporia of origin at work and that a thinking of this aporia is inseparable from thinking technics. Stiegler is therefore not interested in criticising the anthropology of Leroi-Gourhan and Rousseau in order to advance an alternative anthropological account; rather, he reads them deconstructively in order to find the aporia of origin that is already at work in their texts.

It is no surprise that in his discussion of technology and anthropology Stiegler should turn to Rousseau, whom Leroi-Gourhan himself criticises<sup>7</sup> and who is also, as Stiegler puts it, "... the pivot between the anthropological question promoted to philosophical rank and the beginning of scientific anthropological theory".<sup>8</sup> The justification for regarding Rousseau in this pivotal role is on the one hand Lévi-Strauss's positioning of him as the "father of anthropological science"<sup>9</sup> and, on the other, Nietzsche's targeting of him as an example of the mistake a philosophical anthropology makes when it thinks the human on the basis of an "eternal man", rather than as a figure in a continuous state of becoming.<sup>10</sup> Stiegler's reading of Rousseau is centred on the latter's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality among Men*. Stiegler is not interested in Rousseau's arguments about inequality *per se*, but rather the "anthropological" aspects of Rousseau's *Discourse*.

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<sup>7</sup>"... Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one of the first to outline a 'cerebralist' theory of human evolution. By imitating animals and by reasoning, the 'natural man,' endowed with all the present human attributes but starting from scratch in terms of technical equipment, gradually invents everything within the technical and social order that will lead him to the present-day world. This picture, extraordinarily simplistic in its form ... still survives, bereft of any trace of philosophical genius, in lowbrow works of popularisation or prehistorical fiction of our day", *Gesture and Speech*, p. 10. For Leroi-Gourhan, as Stiegler reminds us later, human evolution begins not with the brain but with the feet, see *Gesture and Speech*, p. 19; *Technics and Time*, pp. 143–5.

<sup>8</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 104.

<sup>9</sup>"Rousseau did not limit himself to predicting ethnology: he founded it. First in a practical manner, by writing this *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men*, which poses the problem of the relations between nature and culture, and it can be considered the first treatise of general ethnology; then, by distinguishing, with admirable clarity and concision, the object proper to the ethnologist and that of the moralist and historian: "[quoting Rousseau, *The Essay on the Origin of Language*] When one wants to study men, one must extend the range of one's vision. One must first observe the differences in order to discover the properties", Lévi-Strauss, quoted in *Technics and Time*, p. 105.

<sup>10</sup>"Rousseau is Nietzsche's target as the father of anthropology, and above all the father of the question, what is man?, promoted to the rank of a philosophical, that is, transcendental question. But Rousseau is also, according to Lévi-Strauss, the father of anthropological science": *Technics and Time*, p. 104.

Rousseau's investigation of the origin of inequality seems to be inseparable from an investigation into the "nature" of the human. As Rousseau puts it, "how shall we know the source of inequality between men, if we do not begin by knowing mankind?"<sup>11</sup> In this sense the question of the origin of inequality is equally the question of the origin of the human.

Stiegler argues that, despite being for Lévi-Strauss the founder of modern scientific anthropological discourse, Rousseau's is an unapologetically transcendental anthropology. That is to say, Rousseau's conjectural history of the origin begins by excluding facts in the form of man's actual history. As Rousseau puts it:

Let us begin by laying facts aside, as they do not affect the question. The investigations we may enter into, in treating the subject, must not be considered as historical truths, but only as mere conditional and hypothetical reasonings, rather calculated to explain the nature of things, than to ascertain their actual origin; just like the hypotheses which our physicists daily form respecting the formation of the world.<sup>12</sup>

This "laying facts aside" (*"écarter tous les faits"*) is necessary because in order to find the origin of inequality one must first regress to a point before the origin of human history, that is one must distinguish the "natural" man from the artifice of culture and society. That such a natural man, as Rousseau concedes, "perhaps never did exist" does not take away from the need to "distinguish properly between what is original and what is artificial in the actual nature of man".<sup>13</sup> As Stiegler comments, in order to set up the argument that originally there was no difference among men, i.e., no inequality, Rousseau must assert that there *is* a difference between the originary "natural" man and the modern "fallen" man ("This discourse against difference passes therefore in turn through a differentiation; this is a discourse for difference as well. There is not difference at the origin, but originary equality: we must, but afterward, make an originary difference between what the origin is and what it no longer is . . .").<sup>14</sup> Moreover, since the undifferentiated origin is to be arrived at by

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<sup>11</sup>*The Social Contract and Discourses*, p. 43.

<sup>12</sup>*The Social Contract and Discourses*, pp. 50–1.

<sup>13</sup>*The Social Contract and Discourses*, p. 44

<sup>14</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 107.

distinguishing what is “artificial” from what is “natural” it might seem slightly curious that one can only arrive at this origin through the artifice of a fictional origin, of a “natural” man that “perhaps never did exist”. Stiegler comments:

At its limit, speech calls for a “special” discourse: to distinguish, in man’s nature, the original from the artificial, even if they have never been distinguished in fact, even if this state of distinction of the original and the artificial never was, never existed, a fiction will be related, a story told if not a myth — we are not in Greece but the approach of the *Discourse* is comparable to that of Socrates to Meno [Stiegler is referring to the myth of anamnesis which is Socrates’ response to Meno’s paradox about the origin of knowledge]. A distinction will be related to save the principle from the fact — from the fact of force and from the force of fact. But what is a fiction, if not an artifice? An artifice will be needed to distinguish the artificial from the natural.<sup>15</sup>

Of course it might well be argued against this reading that even though Rousseau begins by “laying facts aside”, he in fact reintroduces them through his constant references to what looks like factual evidence (for example, travellers contact with “primitive” peoples in other parts of the world).<sup>16</sup> However, the context for the introduction of these facts *in practice* is a discourse which does not cede them precedence *in principle*; Rousseau argues repeatedly from the very beginning of the *Discourse* that one cannot arrive at the what is necessary to man (the “natural”) except by excluding the contingent. As Rousseau poses the problem in his preface:

For how shall we know the source of inequality among men, if we do not begin by knowing mankind? And how shall man hope to see himself as nature made him, across all the changes which the succession of place and time must have produced in his original constitution? How can we distinguish what is fundamental in his nature from the changes and additions which his circumstances and the advances he has made have introduced to modify his primitive condition?<sup>17</sup>

Rousseau’s discourse positions, in effect, man’s nature on the side of necessity and human history on the side of contingency. Thus even if Rousseau is happy to introduce “empirical” evidence into his argument, it is within an investigation into nature or natural necessity that must appear

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<sup>15</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 108.

<sup>16</sup>For this argument see, for example, the translators’ notes on the English edition: *The Social Contract and Discourses*, p. 50n2.

<sup>17</sup>*The Social Contract and Discourses*, p. 43.

*transcendental* in its mode of argumentation. The need to isolate the natural from the artificial paradoxically requires that we exclude the, as it were, *natural* self-evidence of empirical facts. Stiegler thus argues that while Rousseau occasionally appears to have recourse to empirical history in the *Discourse*, this evidence is never the foundation of his argument:

The Caribs of Venezuela are this mythico-real figure — an obviously problematic reference since Rousseau does not intend to found his discourse on factual reality. But the Carib is not a simple fact, and Rousseau does not appeal to him as proof: he finds in him a source of inspiration . . . ; an already corrupted figure of the origin, he suggests the origin nevertheless, without ever revealing it.<sup>18</sup>

This, then, is the gambit of Stiegler's reading: conjectural history is to actual history as the transcendental is to the empirical. In order to understand how things *necessarily* are we must in fact put to one side contingent human reality. Stiegler's reading here is also to be found in Ernst Cassirer, who argues of Rousseau as follows:

In Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique d'établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1772) the eighteenth century found an inexhaustible mine of information about "exotic" conditions and an arsenal for their enthusiastic praise. When Rousseau wrote the *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, this movement was already under full way; but he himself seems hardly touched by it. He made it unmistakably clear right at the beginning of that essay that he neither could nor wanted to describe a historically demonstrable state of mankind . . . "The nature of things" is present to us everywhere — to understand it we need not retrace our steps through the millenia, to the sparse and undependable evidence of prehistoric times. [. . .] The true knowledge of man cannot be found in ethnography or ethnology. There is only one living source for this knowledge — the source of self-knowledge and genuine self-examination. And it is to this alone that Rousseau appeals.<sup>19</sup>

This exclusion of actual history and the investigation of nature as necessity is, for Stiegler, basically a transcendental argument. The special status of this discourse, this conjectural history, as Rousseau acknowledges himself, is thus found in the possibility of making this "fictional" distinction: how can we make such a distinction when we are already immersed in artifice, in society and

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<sup>18</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 110.

<sup>19</sup>*The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, p. 50.

culture? The answer is that we must listen to “the voice of nature” which can be heard immediately without the necessity of recourse to experimentation or reasoning (both of which are not natural, being the hallmarks of man after the fall).<sup>20</sup> Stiegler comments:

The natural is immediately there in original evidence . . . The guide, the light for having access to this original immediacy, the exclusive possibility of returning to the source through a questioning back, is *evidence* as such, *self-presence*, that which remains inside, does not pass through the outside, through the artifice of cultural, worldly judgments . . . The most originary is the most familiar, the closest, and therefore, the most removed, the most hidden. The usual structure: the simplest is the most imperceptible.<sup>21</sup>

The distinction that Rousseau seeks is thus for Stiegler the classic move of transcendental philosophy. What he calls here “the usual structure” is also to be found, Stiegler comments, in Aristotle’s comments about fish that, living in water, “would not notice that things which touch one another in water have wet surfaces” and the comment in Plato’s *Timaeus* that, as Stiegler paraphrases, “if the world were made of gold, gold would be the only thing that we could not know, since there would be nothing for us to oppose it to . . . no notion of it and yet gold would be the only thing we would truly know, for only gold would be in truth, the truth of all beings, being itself”.<sup>22</sup> (Perhaps surprisingly, given the direction of his thesis, Stiegler does not mention here the obvious analogy with onto-ontological difference in Heidegger where Dasein is what is ontically closest to us yet ontologically furthest away.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand what Stiegler is calling here the “usual structure” could perhaps equally be applied to the trajectory of Stiegler’s *own* thesis to the extent to which it aims to think a technological life in which modernity is immersed but which remains relatively unthought.)

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<sup>20</sup>“The nature of man is neither reason nor sociability. Originary man is neither a reasonable or speaking animal, nor a political or social one”, *Technics and Time*, p. 110.

<sup>21</sup>*Technics and Time*, pp. 108–9.

<sup>22</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 109.

<sup>23</sup>“Ontically, of course, Dasein is not only close to us — even that which is closest: we *are* it, each of us, we ourselves. In spite of this, or rather for just this reason, it is ontologically that which is farthest.”, *Being and Time*, p. H15/36. See also Derrida’s commentary on this passage in his essay “The Ends of Man”, *Margins of Philosophy*, pp. 126–128.

The other important aspect of Rousseau's fiction concerning the nature of man is the explicit way in which it opposes nature as the invariant *being* to the contingent variations of custom and society as *becoming*. This also, as Stiegler points out, excludes the zoological or palaeo-anthropological account of evolutionary change in nature itself and indeed Rousseau at an early point in the *Discourse* decides to exclude a "comparative anatomy" which has made "too little progress" in favour of the supposition of an originary man who has "always walked on two legs, made use of hands as we do".<sup>24</sup> Rousseau's assumption that at the origin man already walked erect and made use of his hands might seem slightly odd given that "... [for man] to make use of his hands, no longer to have paws is to manipulate — and what hands manipulate are tools and instruments".<sup>25</sup> For a large part of the *Discourse* is given over, at Stiegler points out at some length, to the argument that the fall from the state of nature (and hence, equality) is due to man's increasing reliance on tools and external supports. Originary man has no need of tools because, living like an animal, he finds nature abundant: "I see him satisfying his hunger at the first oak, and slaking his thirst at the first brook: finding his bed at the foot of the tree which afforded him a repast; and with that, all his wants supplied".<sup>26</sup> Stiegler argues: "Considering originary man as walking on two feet and making use of his hands therefore contradicts what follows in the text ... originary man is originary only because he is not contaminated by the artificial, the mediate, the technical and the prosthetic".<sup>27</sup> The point for Rousseau is to demonstrate that original man is lacking nothing and therefore has no need of any artifice or prosthesis, which for Stiegler, following Leroi-Gourhan, makes a nonsense of his anatomical specificity.<sup>28</sup> For Rousseau, the originary man has no need of

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<sup>24</sup>*The Social Contract and Discourses*, p. 52; cited in *Technics and Time*, p. 112

<sup>25</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 113

<sup>26</sup>*The Social Contract and Discourses*, p. 52.

<sup>27</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 113.

<sup>28</sup>"Rousseau, precisely, wants to show that there is no originary default (*défaut*), no prostheses, that the claws missing in man are not stones, or, should they be stones, they are precisely not cut or fabricated, being immediately at hand and not inscribed in any process of mediation': *Technics and Time*, pp. 114–5. As Stiegler comments wryly, for Rousseau the hand must "grasp" but not "manipulate" (113). Leroi-Gourhan, on the other hand, will want to argue that the anatomical adaptation of the human feet and hands is only possible in the context of an evolution that is already techno-zoological, that is already involving the manipulation of primitive tools. Stiegler comments that for Leroi-

tools because he still retains a bestial strength of which his later dependence on industry will deprive him. Likewise medicine is a technical aid which is ultimately to the detriment of that which it is meant to heal. (Stiegler comments that medicine is “as always, the paradigm of human artifice” and refers readers to the argument around writing in Plato.)<sup>29</sup> The emergence of tools and external aids, i.e., *technics*, marks a deviation from nature and hence the origin of inequality.<sup>30</sup> The savage, like the animal, has no need of medicine or tools to boost his strength. Rather, as Stiegler explains, for Rousseau:

This is an accident taking place after nature, after the origin, as a second origin, drawing man away from what the origin originally prescribed. This accident is the origin of remedies, prostheses, drugs — the origin of the fall and the second origin. It is an exterior accident, which does not come from the nature of man: it happens to him and denaturalises him.<sup>31</sup>

Nonetheless — crucially — originary man is not *simply* an animal. Effectively what differentiates him is free will. Unlike the animal, which Rousseau sees as equivalent to the clockwork toy,<sup>32</sup> man has “spirit” which allows him to deviate from the program or to choose. For the original man this is an advantage — the example given by Rousseau and highlighted by Stiegler is that of being able

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Gourhan, ‘[the] thematic of exteriorisation is central to Leroi-Gourhan’s definition of the process of humanisation’ (116).

<sup>29</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 115,117. As Derrida recounts in the essay “Plato’s Pharmacy” writing is portrayed by Plato in the *Phaedrus* as a *pharmakon*, a word whose meaning in Greek cannot be translated in French (or English) by a single word due to the “regular, ordered polysemy that has, through skewing, indetermination, or overdetermination, but without mistranslation, permitted the rendering of the same word by ‘remedy,’ ‘recipe,’ ‘poison,’ ‘drug,’ ‘philter,’ etc” *Dissemination*, p. 69. The ambiguity of the word allows Plato to denounce (via the word of the Egyptian King Thoth) writing as something which appears to be a remedy but is in fact a poison, since it replaces, supplements or supplants memory from the outside: “In order for writing to produce, as he [Plato] says the ‘opposite’ effect from what one might expect, in order for this *pharmakon* to show itself, with use, to be injurious, its effectiveness, its power, its *dynamis* must, of course, be ambiguous ... It is precisely this ambiguity that Plato, through the mouth of the King, attempts to master, to dominate by inserting its definition into simple, clear-cut oppositions: good and evil, inside and outside, true and false, essence and appearance” (*Dissemination*, p. 103).

<sup>30</sup>Stiegler remarks: “The prosthesis is the origin of inequality. The man of pure nature has everything about himself whole and entire about himself, his body is ‘the only instrument he understands’; he is never in himself in default; no fissure is at work in him that would be provoked by a process of differentiation on the outside of himself, nor a differentiation of an ‘outside’ that would be essential (interiorised) to him: he depends on no outside” (*Technics and Time*, p. 116). Again, this is contrasted for Stiegler with Leroi-Gourhan’s account of the emergence of the human.

<sup>31</sup>*Technics and Time*, pp. 117–8.

<sup>32</sup>“I see nothing in any animal but an ingenious machine, to which nature hath given senses to wind itself up, and to guard itself, to a certain degree, against anything that might tend to disorder or destroy it”, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, p. 59.

to choose between eating fruit or grain or meat whereas “a pigeon would be starved to death by the sight of a dish of the choicest meats, and a cat on a heap of fruit or grain”<sup>33</sup> — but it is also, in a sense, the possibility of man’s fall from a state of nature. As Robert Wokler puts it:

Rousseau also supposed, however, that mankind had a unique capacity to change its nature. While every other species of animal has been provided by Nature with the instincts and capacities needed to sustain its life, human beings are by contrast free agents, capable of choice. Unlike animals, always enslaved by their appetites, we are endowed with free will [. . .] He thought it was because humans in their natural state were able to *make* themselves distinct from other animals, rather than because they were endowed with any specific or distinctive attributes from the beginning, that our forebears must always have had an advantage over every other type of creature.<sup>34</sup>

It is precisely this capacity of human’s “in their natural state” to “*make* themselves distinct from other animals” that makes Rousseau’s account so fascinating for Stiegler. On the one hand, at the origin, as Stiegler points out, man is at one with nature and therefore has no need to deviate from it; deviation is therefore an “accident” or improvidence that will have to come from outside. On the other hand, the freedom to choose is, as the freedom to deviate from the program of nature, the very possibility of the fall, that is, of the development of tools, cultivation, enclosure of land and so on. Stiegler argues as follows:

The possibility of such a deviation is thus inscribed on the inside of the origin itself. The man of pure nature had no reason to deviate from the origin. But he nevertheless had the possibility . . . The presentation of human freedom is thus negative, for at issue here is man after the fall, not the man of pure nature. In this case [i.e., before the fall from a state of nature], freedom would indeed have been an advantage: it would have allowed man to partake of fruit in the absence of meat, of meat where there was no fruit, of grain in the absence of both meat and fruit.<sup>35</sup>

What Rousseau calls “perfectibility”, that is, the possibility of an exercise of freedom in the deviation from nature is therefore, for Stiegler, present at the origin, but only “virtually” (“*en puis-*

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<sup>33</sup>*The Social Contract and Discourses*, p. 59, cited in *Technics and Time*, p. 119.

<sup>34</sup>Rousseau, pp. 42–3.

<sup>35</sup>*Technics and Time*, pp. 119–20.

sance”).<sup>36</sup> As soon as the virtual possibility at the origin — a possibility proper to originary man — is actualised, it upsets or deviates from the origin. Stiegler observes: “Spirit proper to man, his nature, his being, his origin, is nevertheless what will upset the state of pure nature”.<sup>37</sup> Spirit is therefore to be compared with *technics* as the origin (or non-origin) of the technical prosthesis that deviates from nature:

Technics, as the power of man, is what destroys in its actualisation that of which it is the power. But if this comparison is valid, this would mean that power, that is, technics, is in the origin, is the origin as possibility of deviation *qua* the absence of origin . . . The origin is the origin only insofar as it opposed the fall as a possibility by deferring it, whereas the fall is the realisation of the origin, its becoming-real, its passage into actuality (the actualisation of the power it is), being simultaneously, by the same token, its derealisation, its disappearance or its oblivion — and a differentiation erasing original equality.<sup>38</sup>

The paradox, for Stiegler, thus appears to be that the origin just is its own disappearance as origin: its appearing, its realisation, *is* its disappearing. Natural man, at the origin, does not deviate from nature, but at the same time he defines himself (in relation to animals) by this “virtual” possibility of his deviation from nature. Stiegler summarises this apparently aporetic structure as follows:

There is no difference between man (in his essence) and animal, no essential difference between man and animal, unless it be an actual possibility. When there is a difference, man is no longer, and this is his denaturalisation, that is, the naturalisation of the animal. Man is his disappearance in the denaturalisation of his essence. Appearing, he disappears: his essence defaults [*son essence se fait défaut*]. By accident . . . Man is the accident of automobility caused by a default of essence [*une panne d'essence*, a “lack of fuel,” an “empty tank”].<sup>39</sup>

As Stiegler makes clear here, the fall (or decline from origin) not only inscribes itself as a possibility at the origin but in a sense also constitutes the origin of the human in its difference from

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<sup>36</sup>“Perfectibility is already there, indubitably, with freedom. But it is only there virtually.”: *Technics and Time*, p. 121; compare with Rousseau’s “human perfectibility, the social virtues and the other faculties which natural man potentially possessed [*la perfectibilité, les vertus sociales et les autres facultés que l’homme naturel avoit reçues en puissance*]”, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, p. 82; *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*, p. 64, my emphasis.

<sup>37</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 120.

<sup>38</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 120.

<sup>39</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 121, Beardsworth and Collins’s interpolations.

the animal. The essence of man therefore “*se fait défaut*” — it defaults or makes itself lack (the word *défaut* here bearing, as the translators of the English edition of *Technics and Time* point out, a complex set of connotations including “fault” or “lack” but also “default”).<sup>40</sup>

Now the fall from a state of nature in Rousseau is also, significantly for Stiegler, tied up with a new relation to death. For the savage does not fear death *as such*: ‘... the only evils he fears are pain and hunger. I say pain and death because an animal will never know what it is to die; the knowledge of death and its terrors being one of the first acquisitions made by man in departing from an animal state’<sup>41</sup>. For Rousseau the savage has an instinct of conservation but not an anticipation of death (“... the instinct of conservation is always, and above all, not the feeling of death”, comments Stiegler).<sup>42</sup> The knowledge of death is intimately tied here, at least on Stiegler’s reading, via *anticipation* to the relationship with time in general. The savage does not fear death because he doesn’t anticipate—“his soul . . . is wholly wrapped up in the feeling of its present existence without any idea of the future, however near at hand”.<sup>43</sup> Stiegler comments: “While he has “no idea of the future,” he nevertheless has projects, a kind of idea of an immediate future, although this is impossible without the whole future coming along in its stead . . . [the] origin is decidedly nothing but the almost of the origin, but here the almost is untenable”.<sup>44</sup> As Stiegler underlines here, the relationship between the savage man and time brings out the tension between the transcendental account of originary man and reality, which can only be covered over by the teleological structure of the “almost” (original man has *almost* no idea of the future). The “almost”<sup>45</sup> here therefore betrays the impossible opposition of essence and existence, the impossibility of Rousseau’s project

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<sup>40</sup>See the note from Beardsworth and Collins, *Technics and Time*, p. 280n12.

<sup>41</sup>*The Social Contract and Discourses*, p. 61.

<sup>42</sup>Death is only present for the savage as compassion for the death of the other — compassion, like conservation, being an instinctual feeling for originary man. See *The Social Contract and Discourses*, pp. 73–75; *Technics and Time*, p. 123.

<sup>43</sup>*The Social Contract and Discourses*, p. 62.

<sup>44</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 125.

<sup>45</sup>The almost (*presque*) is a word which for Stiegler plays a pivotal role in Rousseau’s account. See *Technics and Time*, p. 117.

(that is the desire to find a timeless essence of man):

Rousseau was never able to give an example of an original man originally outside time, for this would be a man before creation — a nonexistent man who would yet be the only natural man, the only man truly himself, true to himself. The essence of man that is not time, *that is* technics: here this is manifestly the *same* question.<sup>46</sup>

As with freedom, as soon as the originary man is realised there must be a deviation from nature or the origin which is inseparable from technics: "... death, time, their originary absence and their arrival *qua* the fall itself; the appearance of man as his disappearance, the realisation of his possibility *qua* his derealisation — it is here, then, in the double of the technical and the human, or rather in the double question of technics and the human, that *the relation between anthropology and technics* appears as a *thanatology*".<sup>47</sup>

Having established that originary man, or the man of nature is nothing like modern man, or the man of culture and civilisation — inasmuch as he does not use tools, fear death and anticipate in general, live in communities, or experience inequality — Rousseau needs to have an account of how the "fall" into civility or perfectibility comes about. Since none of the later characteristics of modern man are natural or essential to his character, this "second origin" or the origin of modern man is something which comes from the exterior and deviates original man from his origin. Rousseau is therefore forced to consider the "many foreign causes that might never arise, and without which he would have remained forever in his primitive condition" and collate "the different accidents which may have improved the human understanding while depraving the species".<sup>48</sup>

Stiegler comments:

This accidentality is witness both to the *quasi*-impossibility of explaining a second origin and to the fact that this second origin will have ended up being the *origin itself* while being but an absence of origin. It witnesses the impossibility of recognising, designating, and conceiving of any kind of beginning. (132)

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<sup>46</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 125.

<sup>47</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 125.

<sup>48</sup>*The Social Contract and Discourses*, p. 82; *Technics and Time*, p. 132.

The paradox of Rousseau's transcendental anthropological account will be that by opposing the transcendental origin or nature of man, which "may never have existed" to any *actual man* Rousseau leaves no possibility for an account of the origin of modern man, other than as a deviation from origin or an absence of origin. Stiegler observes:

Rousseau's narrative of the origin shows us through antithesis how everything of the order of what is usually considered specifically human is immediately and irremediably linked to an absence of property [*impropriété*], to a process of "supplementation", of prosthetisation or exteriorisation, in which nothing is any longer immediately at hand, where everything is instrumentalised, technicised, unbalanced.<sup>49</sup>

Paradoxically then, in his desire to exclude from the origin both any kind of technical support and anticipation in the form of fear of death, Rousseau nearly makes Stiegler's thesis for him. In order to demonstrate that originally there is no inequality between men Rousseau is forced into a demonstration that at the origin (and essentially) man is nothing like man as he appears in actual history. Moreover, since the origin is a fiction, there is nothing like an actual "man of nature". As soon as there is anything like a real man, man deviates from his origin (since what defines originary man is just the (suspended) possibility of deviation from origin). Stiegler continues:

... the "actualisation" of the power of man seems to be as well the derealisation of man, his disappearance in the movement of a becoming that is *no longer his own*. Rousseau will not, therefore, have been mistaken; he will have been right, *almost*, for this narrative has set us face to face with the problem: an attempt at thinking *in a single movement* (the origin) of technics and (the "origin") of the human — technology and anthropology — presupposes a radical conversion of one's point of view.<sup>50</sup>

The accident (or second origin) by which the man comes to deviate from both nature and his own origin which — as Stiegler has just argued — begins to look a lot like the "real" origin or man is just not an origin at all, it is rather a default (*défaut*) of origin or lack of origin. Rousseau is therefore "not wrong" because, as Stiegler wants to argue, the "origin" of man is just this *lack of origin* which is what one is destined to understand as soon as one thinks that the "'origin' of the human"

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<sup>49</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 133.

<sup>50</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 133.

is tied up with the “origin of technics”. The genius of Rousseau’s account — from Stiegler’s point of view — is therefore that he understands that as soon as there is technics, there is deviation from nature and from the origin, which means that technical man (which is also, as Rousseau himself demonstrates, any kind of actual man) must already have deviated from the origin. Since what marks *originary* man’s difference from the animal is just the possibility of deviation from the origin (or what Rousseau calls perfectibility), in a certain sense the deviation from or disappearance of origin is already inscribed *at the origin*.<sup>51</sup> That the origin of man is just the disappearance of origin is therefore a radical conclusion that one might draw from *The Discourse Concerning Inequality* itself. Stiegler’s aim here, however, will be to show that this problem of the disappearance or aporia of origin is tied to the question of technics and that, therefore, technics and anthropology must be thought together (even, or *especially*, by Rousseau).

Now what Stiegler seems to take from the critical reading of Rousseau we have just outlined is a general structure by which the origin of the human is just its disappearance as origin, a point he underlines by placing inverted commas around the word in the phrase “‘origin’ of man”. Yet he also underlines the fact that such an origin, non-origin or “origin” is tied to an “origin [not in inverted commas] of technics”. One might be entitled to wonder why the origin of technics is not marked by the same punctuation — is to talk of the “origin of technics” in some ways less problematic than to talk of the “‘origin’ of the human”? In the very next sentence, Stiegler seems to allay such a suspicion, as the quotes reappear when, commenting of the “radical conversion” he has just mentioned, he writes: “[the] question will be that of thinking the relation of being and time as a *technological relation*, if it is true that this relation only develops in the ‘originary’ horizon of technics — which is just as much an absence of origin”. Yet in some ways Stiegler’s phrasing here — “the ‘originary’ horizon of technics” — seems to underline the tension: if the horizon of technics really is “just as much an absence of origin”, and if the structure of technics is

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<sup>51</sup>In this approach to reading Rousseau, Stiegler is very close to Derrida’s reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*. See *Of Grammatology*, pp. 95–316.

fundamental, i.e. the “relation of being and time” itself, then does it not indicate a problem with thinking the “origin” or the “originary” *in general*? As Stiegler reminded us a little earlier, ‘... the question of the possibility of the human, of its origin, of the possibility of an origin of the human, cannot forget the question of the possibility of origin as such’.<sup>52</sup> If so, what are we to make of, or how are we to think, the “origin of technics” or even “an ‘originary’ horizon of technics’, with or without quotation marks? Indeed there seems to be a fundamental tension in Stiegler’s work between thinking technics as the absence of origin or as the aporia of origin (as in his reading of Rousseau here) and thinking technics as the *origin*, or as the “originary horizon” of this absence of origin (as for example when he says technics is constitutive of temporality). In some ways this is a quite a subtle tension: what Stiegler is concerned with in his reading of Rousseau is precisely bringing out this aporia of origin in the relationship between the human and the technical, yet at the same time there is an insistence on the fact that the horizon of technics is in some ways “originary” with respect to that aporia. The quotation marks around the word “originary” here may come to seem as subtle and significant for Stiegler’s discourse as the “almost” (*presque*) is in Stiegler’s reading Rousseau. The question remains open: does Stiegler resolve the aporia of origin in Rousseau’s conjectural history by replacing it with technics as “originary history” or the “real” history of the origin?

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<sup>52</sup>*Technics and Time*, p. 95.

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