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## Introduction

Peter Skafish

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# Introduction

PETER SKAFISH

So many of us concerned today with thinking feel acutely the deep burn of what is doubtlessly one of its core problems. Still living, as we are, through the forced joining of the entirety of the planet into a political, economic, and rational system that continues to erode and destroy many of the traditions of thought, symbolic-aesthetic schemes, and languages—that is, the worlds—that once thrived there, we realize that thought, whatever it is conceived as being (critical theory, philosophy, “humanistic” inquiry, literature . . .), can no longer be undertaken solely through or in respect to those European traditions of knowledge that rarely manifestly opposed the colonial domination at the source of this situation, or else, as happened for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, showed to those crushed by it only cold indifference. We know full well that thought, if it is to be that at all, cannot simply go on reconstituting itself in relation to these traditions as if they were the only ones, as if there would be no violence in doing so, and as if the conditions of the catastrophes of the last centuries could really then be understood and a future in which they are no longer in place reached. But what we can nonetheless only dimly see is how thought might be reconceived. Just what, we struggle to ask, must it transform into if it is to understand the profound epistemic ethnocentrism undergirding not only the present global

order, but even many of those discourses most opposed to it? What must thought become in order to help found another world without at the same time violently reinstituting the conceptual bases of the modern, “new world” whose current metastasis may yet consume those inhabiting it? And how can it be opened to those worlds presently at risk of passing away, so that conceptual transfers from them can begin to enter into and change it?

The articles that here follow all respond to these questions in their own ways, the first of them—Bernard Stiegler’s—by forcefully declaring, as philosophers (whether French or otherwise) only too rarely do, that the future of thinking can be considered only when the accidental character of its European history is as well. So even as he takes France’s recent centrality in philosophy as the point of departure for his endeavor of thinking technics and sociopsychic individuation, Stiegler insists that “philosophy, at the end of the twentieth century, *is not* French” and that “the ‘French’ accident [. . .] must not be overestimated” since philosophy will have, at the present historical juncture, “to become global” and other to itself—“de-Europeanize”—or else face gradual extinction. The reason for this, according to Stiegler, is that as long as European-derived thought continues its long tradition of conceiving technics as secondary and exterior to some transcendental or anthropological first principle, it will remain incapable of comprehending the consequences of the dissemination across the planet of the information and media technologies it has recently spawned. The old philosophical conception of the technological, that is, as what perverts the human and alienates it from its essence occludes both the integral role technics in fact plays in constituting and transforming it and thus those specific changes right now being wrought in it by mass and new media. Only where philosophy manages to give up on its suppression of technics and therefore its perhaps most characteristically Western trait does it prove capable of formulating concepts adequate for assessing these mutations.

What is striking about this acknowledgment of its inevitability and ethical necessity is that “de-Europeanization” does not for Stiegler consist in rejecting those thinkers he identifies as “the main interlocutors of the French” (Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Husserl, and

Heidegger) but in approaching them in a novel manner that involves continuing to read them, as Derrida did, against their metaphysical assumptions about technics, but also now for how they illumine the concrete historical problem of the havoc being wrought on the human psyche through it. For from Stiegler's perspective, a series of social phenomena peculiar to advanced industrial countries in the last decades—the explosive growth of depression, the spread of the violent, paradoxically self-destructive narcissism psychiatry conceives under the rubric of “the personality disorders,” the profound social disaffiliation resulting from the shrinking of networks of friendship and kinship, and the resurgence of mass psychological and social formations—effectively amount to the destruction of the social and psychic individual; and this fact, according to him, can neither be recognized nor understood unless its technological conditions in media and consumerism also are, which in turn necessitates an assessment of what the above thinkers can say about the industrial, temporal, and psychosymbolic nature of these. So even though Stiegler redeploys in his work the same modern philosophical canon often now derided for ostensibly being relevant only to Western problematics, it turns out that this is precisely what enables him to assess the existential and social costs of the Europeanization of much of the globe through the technologies of consumerism (something with which few critics of liberalism, capitalism, or philosophy have heretofore been concerned) while also proposing a nonmetaphysical, de-Europeanizing means of countering this process, in the form of a liberatory technique of individuation.

All this does not of course mean that Stiegler's particular problematic and the retrieval of philosophy he articulates to contend with it could be the only mode of theoretical de-Europeanization. What Enrique Dussel repeatedly shows in his work is that the devastation that has been suffered throughout the world by peoples subject to colonial domination in its different historical forms also ought to be regarded as one of the problems thought has most repressed in itself, and that a rejection of some of European critical theory's basic assumptions about history, alterity, and power thus might be required in order to conceive the possibility of liberation

from the current, and by his account, neocolonial global system. Hence his own articulation of the view that philosophy is foremost ethics and his mode of interpreting its classical texts in light of how they respond to the political situations that were the conditions of their writing and that, insofar as they are analogous to the contemporary domination of countries of the Southern Hemisphere by some from the North, show how these texts are still salient in the present.

The depth of the challenge Dussel poses to the new mainline of contemporary philosophy is well in evidence in his article here, which takes up the political theology of Saint Paul in a manner quite different from the approach of almost all of those philosophers—Agamben, Badiou, and, before them, Heidegger, Benjamin, and Taubes—for whom it has recently been important. After noting that outside “those originating in peripheral countries,” contemporary philosophical engagements with Paul “tend not to link the[ir] hermeneutic process with the concrete political-economic reality of the exclusionary, globalized system of the time,” Dussel elaborates an instance of the latter sort of interpretation. He argues apropos of Agamben’s work on Paul, for example, that the parts of the epistles most integral to it have as their central biological and politico-legal problem not *homo sacer*, but the virtual and real enslavement suffered by the noncitizens that then constituted the vast majority of the Roman Empire’s subjects. This political situation is addressed in the letters, he continues, by means of a Jewish or “Semitic-Egyptian” anthropology that diverges from that of Greek and Roman thought in its conception of life and how it can be preserved against law. Against the ancient philosophical construal of the body as a principle of evil that must be transcended by a semi-divine soul if salvation is to be achieved, Paul’s at once Judaic and early Christian understanding of the *anthropos* (as *soma psikhikos*) conceives soul and body alike as corrupt and deathbound and accordingly reconceives salvation as the transmutation from this condition into a *spiritual* body (*soma pneumatikos*) whose double character makes it capable of existing in the world but without being subject to the imperial power that rules there. This anthropology is neglected in readings of Paul like Agamben’s, Dussel explains,

for the precise reason that they fail to conceive the political and economic domination of the global South as their central problematic and therefore do not require an account of how another order of politics could be actualized in the real (instead of just transiently interrupting into it). No matter how the details of this claim will be assessed, it leaves little doubt that a whole range of other, similar hermeneutic elisions are resulting from the continued presumption in much of Europe and North America that neocolonialism constitutes neither a genuine nor integral philosophical question.

Yet even while de-Europeanization necessitates reversing this situation, it will also require that “literary” and “philosophical” traditions that almost never intersected with those of the modern West be seen again as sources of the very terms of thought. Although a variety of projects that endeavor to do this have been long underway (work on African philosophy being the most obvious example), these often do not attempt to thoroughly identify the basic traits of Europe-derived intellectual discourse and then inquire into the consequences of proceeding with or without them. In his reflection here on his work on the divergences between ancient Chinese and ancient Greek thought, François Jullien offers an account of what these traits might be along with some suggestions about how and why they might be significantly dispensed with. Although Jullien’s inventory of them is scarcely different from those philosophers have tended to draw up—he treats as the basics the principle of noncontradiction, the notion of essence, and the understanding that thoughtful discourse is at bottom predicative—his method of contrasting them with the core elements of ancient Chinese thought allows him to take distance from them in a way philosophy has largely not, and to furnish on the basis of this uncommon answers as to how their often violent consequences might be avoided.

Ancient Taoist thought, for instance, because it refuses the assumption (entailed by the above principles) that speech is always a matter of signification and instead proceeds through an indexical, processual, and nonculminating kind of discourse, offers a method of thinking ripe for the present. Following its refusal to draw oppositions or resolve them into conclusions as well as its preference

for insinuating meaning rather than bringing closure to it could be quite timely in contemporary theoretical exchanges, where the calling into question of predicative language has not yet resulted in a form of interlocution capable of not devolving into a combat of propositional judgments. Constant movement between discrepant positions could be a way of joining them together without becoming mired in either their apparent contradictions or empty statements about the “resonances” between them, and such a non-dialogic mode of dialogue could be crucial in an effectively planetary space of thought—one where profoundly divergent perspectives would not be subject to coercive universalisms, and European thought not form the horizon of the thinkable.