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Doing Academia Differently: Taking Care of Humans, Technologies and Environments in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

In this SoTL undertaking, we reflect on two of the most prominent issues of our time: new algorithmic ecologies and the ecological crisis. In particular, we are interested in what these mean for teaching, and teaching differently. To do so – and using the 'Socratic method', a dialogic technique of questioning and cooperative cross-examination that provokes critical thinking – we consider the refrains of death immanent to digitality and the Anthropocene, and how they affect not only subjective formation, but also knowledge production. Reflecting on these issues in our classrooms, for example the widespread disaffection prevalent in universities, aided by internet addiction, dopamine loops, the disintegration of societal rituals and bonds, and the looming 'end of the world' (at least as we know it), we consider the role of practices of care, drawing on the work of Stiegler, and Deleuze and Guattari. Our argument is that what is needed, against the intensified bureaucratisation and neoliberalisation of academic institutions, is careful experimentation for the production and circulation of healthier intensities that tend to and nurture life in the face of the refrains of death all around us.

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A Deathly SoTL Undertaking (By Way of Introduction)

Death, it would seem, has been strangely entwined with the practice of philosophy from the outset. Recall the pre-Socratic Ionian philosopher, Heraclitus, who, after having lost all hope in humanity, is said to have absconded into the mountains where he "lived on a diet of grass and herbs" (Critchley, 2008). It should come as no surprise that this led to severe malnutrition which gave the poor philosopher dropsy – an olden-day term for oedema – which basically comes down to an excess of fluid in the body's tissues. This drove Heraclitus back to the city where he asked to "be covered in cow dung, which he believed would draw the bad humours out of his body" (Critchley, 2008). In some versions of the story's ending, the philosopher drowns because the cow dung is wet; in others, it is said that the cow dung was dry, and he was baked to death in the sun. At any rate, it's not a happy ending.

Gilles Deleuze, the philosopher who has most influenced our philosophical and pedagogical thought and practice, also died rather dramatically after defenestrating himself on 4 November 1995. To be fair, he had been suffering from respiratory ailments for a protracted time after having contracted tuberculosis in his younger years which, eventually, led to the removal of a lung (Dosse, 2010:3). Isabelle Stengers points out, rather poignantly, that Deleuze's last message to us had "nothing to do with the way he eventually crossed his last threshold", because his death was no less than "the act of someone who knew that the threshold that really mattered for him had already been crossed" (n.d.). For her, then, his last message to us is contained in his final book with Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (1994), as well as a late essay in which he ruminates on a life – "reaching the point where 'my life' becomes 'a life', with all the terms of the series coexisting and resonating together as they escape the times and circumstances that marked each of them" (Stengers, n.d.). We will return to this idea later but, first, we want to recall one more philosopher's death – possibly the most famous of them all. We are, of course, speaking of Socrates, who was born and lived in Athens from 470 BCE to 399 BCE, when he died in prison after drinking hemlock for having corrupted "the youth of Athens" (Grayling, 2019:58). This same Socrates is also responsible for what we know as the 'Socratic method', a dialogic technique of questioning and cooperative cross-examination that provokes critical thinking – still used by many educators in philosophy (and other) classrooms all around the world. Although it is not precisely the method we use for this Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) undertaking, we do draw on its dialogic techniques in our conversation with each other to think on the theme of death – in its literal and more figurative iterations – in order to consider the problematic of life and finding reasons for living, which include dreaming and hoping,

despite the omnipresence of ecological, social and psychic ruination. Taking these threads into consideration we ask, moreover, what it means to do academia differently in the face of death and destruction without relapsing into individualising neoliberal uber-productivity paradigms.

Of Death, Dopamine and Dreaming

> *Chantelle Gray (CG): Delphi, since we're thinking on death and its attendant refrains – loss, destruction, illness, and so on – I wonder if you would mind expanding on these as they configure in your thoughts at the moment?*

As your examples of Socrates and Deleuze attest, death presents possibilities for thought and practice that we have no choice but to seize upon, especially in these bleak times of individual, social and environmental crises when, as you observe, death and its associated refrains loom large. Writing together with Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze writes of life and death in terms of intensities. Whereas pre-modern societies had various rites of passage for navigating the perilous passages of such complex events as death and birth, the mechanistic, reductive and logical representations and mediations of modern secular neoliberal society do not seem up to the task. That we are in a crisis as a direct result of the mediations of what Guattari (1996) refers to as "Integrated World Capitalism" (IWC) is beyond question. These mediations have led us into all "the death places of the Anthropocene" – mass species extinction, unpredictable climate change, socio-economic chaos, and burgeoning mental-health crises (Rose, 2011:28). More and more, as Guattari writes, it has become necessary to "escape the systems of modelling" that are "in the process of completely polluting us, head and heart" (1996:132). These defective systems of modelling – techno-scientific, economic, political, social, ethical, etc. – have by now made such "a mess of things that it is unclear whether life on earth can continue" (Tsing, 2015:vii).

What fascinates me the most about Deleuze and Guattari is their hermetic take on philosophy as a spiritual ordeal for navigating zones of indiscernibility and crisis by mobilising and revolutionising the potentials inherent in defamiliarising events like death, precarity, upheaval and madness. Their rhizomatic philosophy encourages us to deal with zones of indiscernibility by making maps, not tracings, of the territories we are traversing. "What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely orientated toward an experimentation in contact with real," thereby fostering "connections between [multiple] fields" and vectors (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:12). Death and its attendant refrains invite us to forge nomadic maps instead of tracings or reproductions of the same

old (and often unquestioned) dualistic ways of thought with their attendant blockages and redundancies. The best way to respond to intensive events like death, mental illness or other crises are not through "pre-traced destinies" but, rather, via "performances" that carry within them "options" for navigating the problematic of death via secret "entryways and exits" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:13). Death and its attendant refrains invite us to learn from and with the uncanny. The multiple overlapping crises – individual, social and environmental – that contemporary humans find themselves entangled in are no less than ontological, epistemological, political and ethical disturbances: "crises of the 'natural', touching upon everything that one might have thought was 'part of nature': one's own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world" (Royle, 2003:2). The tracings of secular reason cannot navigate such complex terrains, calling for more fluid, rhizomatic cartographic approaches that are able to transversally integrate approaches from multiple disciplines of learning, artistic praxes and speculative fabulations. A cartography of the present cannot place knowledge "at a remove from the uncanny in sensation, the difficult in emotions, or the paradoxical in thought" (Ramey, 2011:179). "Far from contrasting the instability of sensation with the stability of the idea," pedagogy – seen from a Deleuzoguattarian perspective – is something that must "confront and even create encounters with indiscernible movements," which includes sad passions and difficult experiences as much as more joyous encounters (Ramey, 2011:177). It is, after all, direct pedagogical confrontations with such intensities that provoke the minds of learners into making new maps of the territory by interpreting, creating and thinking along different axes and gradients. This can be done by working themes of death into curricula so that learners and teachers are obliged to deal with our contemporary crises head-on.

The Deleuzoguattarian onto-ethical approach to teaching and learning takes onboard ontological, ethical and political problematics relating to a multiplicity of lived experiences and perspectives in a complex more-than-human world. Such a pedagogical "ontoethics" needs to find ways of addressing not just the relations between humans themselves, both individual and social, but also between "humans and the entire world," addressing questions of "how to act in the present and, primarily, about how to bring about a future different from the present" (Grosz, 2017:1). The task of pedagogy, seen from an ontoethical perspective, is to draw students towards new modes of thinking, being and doing that are focused not only on "the healing and transformation" of individual-selves and their societal milieus, but also on the healing of "the body of the earth itself" (Ramey, 2012:217). Seeking out the false comforts of binary logics – the same modelling systems that have polluted our minds and, as a result, the earth – are no longer viable recourses. As a matter of urgency, pedagogy needs to embroil itself in direct confrontations with the uncanny – and even death itself – because, more

than ever before, "uncertainty", whether intellectual or otherwise, "is a crucial dimension of any teaching worthy of the name" (Royle, 2003:52). Teaching well in times of death and uncertainty means not only embracing the uncomfortable intensities of the world, but also recalibrating the classroom stories that we tell about it and the concomitant possibilities for thinking and doing academia differently. This, I think, is the central problematic of death and its attendant refrains for education today: while each death – human or otherwise – represents an agonising loss of possibility and potential, we have no choice but to mobilise such losses as incentives for learning and doing otherwise; discomforting spurs that encourage us to think transversally about the problems we now face, and how to remain open to new domains of thought and action.

> *Delphi Carstens (DC): Chantelle, could you say more about the 'refrain' in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, as well as the refrains of addiction and 'madness' that I know have been important touchstones in your recent work and pedagogical experience?*

The idea of the refrain is, of course, very dear to Deleuze and Guattari. Originally from the French word, ritournelle, it was translated as "refrain" in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), though Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam – the translators of *Dialogues II* – have explained that Deleuze actually preferred the English word "ritornello" because it connotes both "the musical sense" and "the repeated theme of a bird's song" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007:xiii). Deleuze, moreover, viewed the ritornello as a proper philosophical concept that he and Guattari created to deal with "the problem of the territory and of exiting or entering the territory, that is, to the problem of deterritorialisation" (Boutang, 2011). So when we speak of death and its attendant refrains, they should be understood in their relations to territorialisation and deterritorialisation. On that note, then, I want to tease out two refrains which, for me, are closely tied to death, namely addiction and 'madness'. In particular, I am thinking of those addictions and psychoses induced by digital technologies. Although the emergence of algorithmic governance as we know it today only fully developed in the last decade or two – aided by the "profusion of data" and "deep convolutional networks of algorithms" that can identify patterns in "the deluge of raw data" (Gray, 2022:83) – the term *Internet addiction* first started circulating in 1996 when indicators for this compulsion were being developed to be in line with those of alcohol addiction as set out in the DSM-IV. Interestingly, these new computer-related addictions were linked to dopamine, a monoamine neurotransmitter and hormone in the brain that is most commonly linked to feelings of pleasure and wellbeing. Unsurprisingly, it is correlated with actions that lead to rewards, or at least the *feeling* of being rewarded. More importantly, it is now

widely accepted "that the mesocortical-mesolimbic dopamine circuit is" the "major driver of dreaming" (Solms, 2021:23). But while dopamine has positive physical and psychological effects, *high* levels of dopamine have the opposite effects: increased aggression, lack of sleep and poor impulse control. For this reason, I would argue that it is in fact more appropriate to think of dopamine as what the late philosopher, Bernard Stiegler, calls a *pharmakon* – that which is both a poison and a remedy at the same time. "What determines which of these immanent conditions becomes amplified depends on our attention to and care" – or lack of care – of it (Gray, 2022:94).

In our contemporary societies, dopamine has, by and large, become toxic, especially for younger generations, "powerfully captured in" Stiegler's "reflection on many teenagers who no longer dream" (Gray, 2022:121). It is no secret that social media and similar platforms are designed to create a dopamine loop – more accurately described as a *compulsion loop*. Lizzie O'Shea argues in fact that there "are many troubling parallels" between digital technology and "the electronic gambling machine industry" which "is built on active and sophisticated attempts by technology designers to create a dynamic of addiction between person and device" (2019:32). Long before terms like *data mining* and *dopa mining* entered the social imaginary, "technologists in the gambling industry were pioneering methods of amassing large amounts of personal data about users, cultivating consumer loyalty and finding pain points at precisely timed moments to deliver effective marketing messages" that would prompt gamblers to become lost in "the zone" (O'Shea, 2019:32).

In the same way, devices like smartphones are designed to hijack our attention and dopamine pathways via mechanisms like scrolling and clicking. Facebook's first president, Sean Parker, recently conceded that "features such as the 'like' button" were *purposefully* "designed to give users a "dopamine hit" (Deibert, 2019:30). This leads to technological overdependence and addiction, along with an increase in mental illnesses, for example anxiety and ADHD; dysmorphic syndromes such as snapchat dysmorphia; depression, loneliness and isolation; and so on. The fact that we are practically in continuous connection with devices such as smartphones also means that we unremittingly and near-automatically 'dump' our memory into these devices where it is externalised without being used. Stiegler calls this process *algorithmic grammatisation*. Recall that grammatisation refers to "the history of the exteriorization of memory in all its forms", be that "nervous and cerebral memory", "bodily and muscular memory", or "biogenetic memory" (Stiegler, 2010:71). This is not necessarily a problem per se – humans have always exteriorised their memory and knowledge vis-à-vis tools, artifacts, writing, printing, painting and rituals. This kind of

hypomnesis not only frees up functional memory or *anamnesis* from its overall dependence on the human mind, but also allows for the transmission of knowledge and memory across generations.

What is important, then, is that grammatisation constitutes a "relationship between understanding, reason, imagination and intuition that comes to be transformed" (Stiegler, 2019:240). Stiegler describes this process of *exosomatisation* as an originary trauma, which in its "greatest generality constitute[s] experience" (2020:2-3). In other words, exosomatic processes are a normal but traumatic part of life and therefore require *care* in order to be transformed from a trauma – or a shock, and even a shock to thought in Deleuze's parlance – into something remedial. Put differently, and in terms of our new digital reality, we can say that the "stage of techno-logical shock" has induced a disadjustment between the new technical system and society, so much so that it needs a "stage of readjustment, that is, of care" (Stiegler, 2020:7) in order for the transitional event to be adopted in a healthy way. In our contemporary societies, however, the speed of technological innovation has far surpassed our capacities to adjust to the techno-logical traumas induced by these inventions, be that individually or collectively, provoking a kind of madness – an excess of unreason.

But this excess of unreason – or psychosis, in more colloquial terms – cannot simply be "controlled via a limit point at the threshold of madness because the essence of" algorithmic or digital "logic is to generate that threshold, to adapt and modulate it over time" (Amoore, 2020:110). In other words, the propensity that the digital has for madness is not an aberration, but a condition of its functioning. More to the point, apps and platforms powered by algorithms are designed to get us addicted through simple actions like scrolling, liking and clicking because they affect – and in fact hijack – our dopaminergic pathways. These actions, in turn, "teach the algorithms how to predict our behaviours and prompt our movements and activities from which they 'learn' yet again and improve their predictions, creating a closed loop system that goes from dopamine hit to dopamine deficit state to dopamine hit, on and on and on" (Gray, 2022:79). This, of course, has huge implications for teaching and learning or, more accurately, for the *motivation* to learn.

Of Accelerated Time and Ecological Collapse

> *CG: Delphi, what do you think of the entanglement between the digital and the environment? What are your thoughts on death and its attendant refrains in this regard?*

Facing the uncanny spectre of ecological collapse doesn't exactly help the situation you've described regarding 'techno-logical traumas'. Ecocide is death on such a large scale that the human mind cannot quite begin to comprehend it. It is, in fact, what Timothy Morton describes as a *hyberobject* – something that is "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (2013:1) and functions according to a temporality "that is radically different from human-scale time" (2013:197). This is certainly one powerful motivator for staying online. But then, in a cruel twist, the very technologies that provide such escape routes turn out to be deeply implicated not only in environmental destruction, but also in the toxic modelling systems that are polluting us, head and heart. On a surface level, we need only think of the toxic harm of big-tech: the colossal carbon footprint of server farms and electrical power-grids; the built-in redundancy of appliances and gadgets; the mountains of toxic e-waste exported to developing nations; the monotony and horror of sweatshop labour; human rights abuses, such as child labour in cobalt mines; and rampant environmental-poisoning, also linked to the extraction of cobalt and other rare-earth metals central to the communications revolution (Sassen, 2014).

In fact, to deploy a Deleuzoguattarian turn of phrase, we can say that the desiring-machines of capitalism deterritorialise the actual flesh of the Earth (its geological, biological and social formations, its bodies and habitats) and reterritorialises it all into raw materials, commodities and online experiences. As Deborah Bird Rose (2011:218) puts it, "species, ecosystems, habitats, relationships, and connections that sustain the web of life" have become "collateral casualties" in the forward "rush of consumption" that we call technological progress. To make matters worse, the dopamine-fuelled thrills of the information superhighway have plunged billions of users into a "a sort of luminous chaos" – a zone of intensity in which "sensations of vertigo and disorder" have been transformed into "sources of pleasure" (Virilio, 2009:22). There are, of course, innumerable potentials for learning the uncanny inherent in this scenario, but we cannot mobilise them without first honing in on the central problematic: that information-density washes up, often brutally, against our capacity for care. The dopamine-fuelled rushes of the information revolution keep us in a hyper-individualised state of perpetual disruption and mental anxiety. They keep us living – albeit barely alive – in a compartmentalised world where we are coerced into remaining alert on-screen and, as a result, unresponsive to the outside world, always desiring more of that sugary affective online rush.

Instead of opening us up to the world, information density has lured us into a situation of aesthetic poverty in which we have lost touch with the fact that we are interdependent beings enmeshed in

more-than-human entanglements that urgently require our care in order for continued living to be possible. We live in a globally interconnected world, yet we have never been more disconnected. We are embedded, yet insensible; adrenally primed, yet profoundly asleep behind the wheel. In our dopamine-fuelled online world of perpetual diversion, "not seeing anything intelligible has become the new normal" (Steyerl in Heiser, 2010:n.p.). I am therefore extremely wary about all the buzz in academia around the so-called fourth industrial revolution. While there are, of course, wonderful potentials inherent in information technologies, they also represent a derangement of social memory that is eroding our capacity to pay attention to matters of mental, relational and ecological care. These derangements are the result of commodified, manipulated, and simulated desire.

Corporate practices, technological cultures and modes of social reproduction – like education – are all complicit in generating an Anthr*obscene*: a situation in which the entire earth has been reterritorialised "both as a resource and as transmission" for semiological-chemical-neuro-affective mediated economising (Parikka, 2014:8). The desiring machines of IWC have carved chain stores, along with "televisions, computers, video games, mobile phones, text messaging and the Internet" out of open-cast mines, sweatshop labour and burnt-out rainforests, "taking ordinary people into unnatural worlds where no wildlife [or wild imaginings] can possibly intrude" (Lloyd, 2008:294). This invokes the central problem of liquid modernity: has it really become easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of the necrotic desiring flows that are consuming our planet? "Species, ecosystems, habitats, relationships, and connections that sustain the web of life" have "become collateral casualties" in a forward march of consumption that disguises "monstrous cruelty and massive wastage within organised invisibility" (Rose, 2011:28).

This brutality, alongside our cultivated indifference, helplessness, and insulation to it raises uncomfortable questions that demand responses that are at once ontological, epistemological, ethical and political. While what we are witnessing is a dramatisation of "the material and immaterial logics of capitalist space-time" (Gray, 2020:20), what we are also directly experiencing is a crisis of forgetfulness, a dearth of imagination "marked less by our fragmented vision of ourselves" than by the existential solitude that accompanies the "actual loss of co-evolved life" that is taking place because of this fragmentation (Rose, 2011:10). In the wake of multiple ongoing ecological ruptures, when countless of our non-human messmates are "departing, never to return," when we "face a diminishing and impoverished world" and "agonisingly lonely questions about the meaning of our existence" (Rose, 2011: 10), we have little choice but to seize upon whatever potentials for thought and action this situation might present.

As burgeoning electronic networks seep into our bodies and environments, and increasingly 'intelligent' algorithms actively engage our senses, we find ourselves inhabiting a zone of intensity – a world of radically transgressed boundaries in which we must forge "a mutant creationism … an open redefinition of the body" (Guattari, 1996:116-117). As educators we also have a duty of care, namely, to find ways of producing critical citizens who can navigate their way through the complex but fragmenting and collapsing world that is now being brought into being. We need to urgently find ways of extending our teaching practices – no matter what we are teaching – across Guattari's three ecological registers: the mental, the social and the environmental. There is, after all, no field of human knowledge production that is not caught up in the ecological crisis that we now face.

It is precisely because information technology has made us so fragmented, insular and individual that we earnestly need to find ways of bringing the bigger picture into our teaching and learning practices, which means directly addressing the larger problems of living in an interconnected world. We need also to help students grasp the long history of how we got here and possible ways out getting of the mess; a problem that will involve tackling the cultural ways of thinking that led us here and which are preventing us from solving this mess. More attention will need to be paid to addressing the perils of 'capitalist realism' – the mental, social and environmental illnesses and damages that accompany IWC (see Fisher, 2009). But none of this can happen unless we find ways of merging social justice and environmental justice concerns in our teaching and learning practices.

Quickfire Provocations: Humans, Technologies and Environments in Academia (and Academia Otherwise)

> *DC: Chantelle, you mentioned addiction and 'madness' as related to death, and although you made the link between addiction and madness explicit, especially in terms of their instantiations in our algorithmic ecologies, you did not really relay this back to death. Could you perhaps do that now?*

I would say that madness – or unreason, to be more precise – and addiction are refrains of death, because each of these circles a kind of death, whether it is physical death or psychic and emotional death, the latter two implying a kind of 'living' death which often leads to the feeling that life is not worth living. The point is that addictions incite an impoverishment of 'spirit', to borrow a very Stieglerian phrasing. This can, of course, feel like a kind of madness. The reason I see addictions as *refrains* is because addicts typically move between cycles, often starting out by experimenting with a

new substance (though this can also be a style of life, for example), which can then move to semi-regular use – still not really a problem at this point, though it can become so when this passages to more regular or high-risk use. Typically, even when addicted, addicts often try to assuage their guilt or reconcile their addictive behaviours with recourse to strategies such as compartmentalisation, short periods of cessation or minimised use, activities such as going to church, and so on. So we see that there is a kind of 'returning to' that takes place – a returning to death, or at least to the death drive, and then returning to life again. Similarly, in music, the ritornello signals a 'returning to', but it also indicates a contrasting passage or movement. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari transform the ritornello into a proper philosophical concept, as I have mentioned before, because this allows them to address the problem of consistency or, more accurately, how to strike a balance between territorialisation – the carving out of consistency, or what is sometimes thought of as normativity – and careful experimentation or deterritorialisation. They achieve this by connecting the notion of the ritornello to three aspects: chaos, territory and cosmos. Commonly, 'chaos' is brought about by transitional events – such as starting a new job, the death of a loved one, or a new stage of techno-logical development – all of which trigger a misalignment: either an internal one, such as what is known as depersonalisation and derealisation in psychology; or between a technical (or other) system and society at a larger scale. According to Stiegler, a stage of care is needed for readjustment. In Deleuze and Guattari's vernacular we could say that this is the period during which a level of consistency is reached – so it is a movement of territorialisation, of adjusting and reaching some consistency, or creating a 'safe space' to use contemporary parlance. But – and here I perhaps depart from the idea of a safe space – this is not the final aspect of this balancing act. To develop and mature, one needs to use the consistency achieved by movements of territorialisation to experiment once again, so that one "opens the circle a crack, opens it all the way, lets someone in, calls someone, or else goes out oneself, launches forth" so as to "join with the forces of the future, cosmic forces" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:311). Joining with the cosmic forces is, precisely, when *my life* becomes *a life*. As Deleuze puts it:

> The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens... It is a haecceity no longer of individuation but of singularization: a life of pure immanence, neutral, beyond good and evil, for it was only the subject that incarnated it in the midst of things that made it good or bad. The life of such individuality fades away in favor of the singular life immanent to a man [*sic*] who no longer has a name, though he can be mistaken for no other. A singular essence, a life... (Deleuze, 2001:28-29).

The connection between the life of an individual and *a* life is also a reference to the relationship between the actual or extensive and the virtual, which is *not* to be confused with virtual reality. The

virtual is, rather, a preindividual field of undifferentiated 'funds' or distributed intensities for the unfolding of being. Think of H2O which has the virtual capacity to be actualised as either water (a liquid), ice (its crystalline form) or steam (its gaseous state), depending on the distribution of intensities. Although the virtual, also referred to by Deleuze and Guattari as the plane of consistency, is undifferentiated, it does, just like the virtual state of H2O, have intensities circulating on it. The aim of prefigurative and careful experimentation is precisely the production and circulation of intensities. Deleuze and Guattari give the example of a drug addict who creates intensities, but "these intensities tend to circulate in on themselves, which is not to say that they do not or are incapable of affirming our joyous capacities – they certainly do and can – but they may not be the best kinds of intensities for thinking about how to deal with climate change, for example" (Gray, 2022:110-111), or how to adjust to our new digital ecologies, even though they may, at times, give us insight into our psyches. The point is to create intensities, but also periods for adjusting to the new experiences *with care*, so tending to *life*.

> *CG: Now I want to provoke you too, Delphi, by asking you about the Body without Organs (BwO) which has been a recurring theme in your own research and relates not only to addiction but the capacity for actualisation.*

As part of their project of re-conceiving philosophy as a spiritual ordeal, Deleuze and Guattari reconceptualise the French playwright Antonin Artaud's concept of the BwO – a figuration that this "metaphysician of the theatre" intended as a vehicle for "breaking through" the constrictive patterning instincts of human culture and resisting the Oedipalisations of language in order to "touch life" (Goffman, 2005:209). Artaud wanted "to be done with the judgement of God" by returning the material body to its substratum, a virtual plane of immanence and experimentation populated only by intensities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:150). As you pointed out, the virtual is a preindividual field of distributed intensities. The BwO, which represents the means whereby we access all this potential, is similarly preexistent. We create a BwO and plunge into the plane of immanence *whenever we experience desire*; "it is an inevitable exercise," but it can be "terrifying" (as anyone who has experienced mental illness can attest) because "you can botch it" (as many an addict knows), which can "lead you to your death" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:149), be that physical or psychical.

Claiming the desiring BwO as an exploratory vehicle of resistance therefore seems unnecessarily risky and dangerous, but it is nevertheless a completely necessary undertaking if we want to break

the insidious modelling systems and patterning instincts that are continually overcoding our desires and botching our BwO's for us. Building a successful BwO means knowing the dangers, not being on automatic pilot and not letting the overcoding desires of IWC get the better of us. "There are several ways of botching the BwO", warn Deleuze and Guattari (1987:160), giving examples of drug addictions, mental addictions, masochisms and self-delusions. Ensnared by internalised Oedipal demons and other destructive patterning instincts (the aforesaid infernal desiring machines of IWC), failures are all too evident in the world around us – as our examples of dopamine-fuelled online addictions, or the costs of letting capitalist desiring machines run rampant all over the planetary ecology attest.

Innumerable "cancerous BwOs" are liable to flourish unless we properly take charge of our irrational needs and desires, "assuring their continuous connections and transversal tie-ins" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:166). Freeing oneself from enslaving hierarchical ontologies and epistemologies necessitates a radical process of experiential rupture – a dangerous and difficult passage – that needs to be carefully undertaken. For thought to become immanent with the material and reflect on the actual being of the world, "the unconceivable" must first be "conceived" and encounters forged "with imperceptible forces in sensations, affectations, and conceptions" (Ramey, 2012:2). To desire differently, we must first learn to dream differently.

> *DC: Chantelle, I wonder if you can say more about dreaming. You say that Stiegler remarks on the dreamlessness of younger generations, which as I've noted above, is a problem when it comes to desire (and how we actualise our desires). But I wonder if a different kind of dreaming – a kind of nihilistic dreaming – hasn't been taking its place? And how is this manifesting in academia? Moreover, how can we do academia differently to deal with the questions of life and death that we have raised in this paper?*

The question of doing academia differently in the face of ecological collapse and digital addiction is a hugely important one for both of us, isn't it? Yet, there is no easy or single answer – though the notion of dreaming is very much tied to it for me. Part of the problem is, as you know, academia itself – not only for learners, but also for academics. Because of the pressure – and here I return to the issue of dopamine – the use of various prescription (and non-prescription) drugs, especially what is known as 'smart drugs', has become pervasive in higher education contexts. Methylphenidate (sold as Ritalin) is a prime example of these drugs, and it is strongly linked to our dopaminergic

systems. In fact, its "primary mechanism of action is the interaction with the presynaptic dopamine transporter" (Wagner, Robinson & Wiebking, 2015:4). Basically, it suppresses "dopamine reuptake into the presynaptic cell, thus affecting plasticity and neuronal transmission" (Gray, 2020:120), which is great for focus, though it does raise questions about our relationship to competitiveness and the entanglement between workplace ethics, neoliberalism and medicine. This kind of hyper-individualism actually disrupts the production of consistency because creating a feeling that life is worth living – and living in such a way that we can dream, both individually and collectively – is partly achieved through knowledge that is passed on across generations. When learners are having their dopamine levels regulated by their phones, or academics are using prescription drugs to cope with more and more inconsequential administrative tasks so that someone somewhere can tick a box, our capacities to produce joyous affects are disrupted, and so we begin to produce deliriums of all kinds. For Stiegler, this actually means that reason – and our means for making that which is mad reasonable again – is "systemically short-circuited" and the "reality of" such "disruption is the loss of reason", the "perfect completion of nihilism" (2019:38), giving rise to a form of interiority that is always-already "dreaming the next stage of its self-exosomatization" (2019:110).

So to answer your question, yes, there is a nihilistic dreaming confronting us and doing academia differently must face up to the proliferation of inconsequential tasks and inhumane demands on academics and learners. It must, also, address the question of death, in all its guises, because only in so doing can we, once again, learn how to dream the future. And this, as Stiegler tells us, entails a process of care so that we can readjust to the "real trauma that afflicts our epoch, and that provokes all the others" (Stiegler, 2020:9). In other words, we need to respond to the pervasive disaffection we have all seen in our students – and I think that we sometimes, or perhaps even often, find in ourselves. Underlying this disaffection is really a feeling that life is not worth living, that there is nothing to hope for, nothing to dream for. This, for me, is at the core of the problematic of doing academia differently: how to initiate practices of care inside and outside our classrooms that can help us transvaluate what is 'ill' in our societies so that we can produce healthier intensities, thereby provoking new dreams and reasons for living in this world, in the here and now, but always-already fabulating the future.

> *CG: Delphi, how do you think we can avoid the traps and pitfalls that lie along the paths of desire, thereby facilitating the production of healthier intensities or BwO's?*

For thought to become immanent to the real, we need to watch our desires and the dark places that the modelling systems of IWC direct them towards. There are indeed numerous traps that lie on the paths our desires take. Driven by the pollutive desiring machines of IWC, our conflicted psyches become populated by 'refrigerator' and pain waves from an all-too-human world figured by consumerism's empty addictions, reductive fantasies of individuality, cruel separations and apocalyptic imaginings. Any desires formed under such deadening circumstances can easily be frozen into stasis or sent into a spiral of self-destruction. This, after all, is why revolutions frequently fail. Filled with unformed and unstructured flows, the BwO is a virtual body of energetic materials that has the potential to give rise to a variety of material organisations. Yet, self-destructive tendencies easily trap such potentials and turn them cancerous. IWC lulls us into distraction by conjuring virtual worlds in which we are made to spin round and round and round, driven by empty desires, never going anywhere. Letting go of the internalised psychic illnesses of our milieu will require unlearning a slew of bad patterning instincts. A pedagogy focused on helping learners to build BwO's populated by healthier desires will need to look toward more fluid methodologies, connective signs, energy flows, and onto-ethical knowledge-making practices. It will also have to deal with the refrains of death we have been discussing here.

Despite the aforesaid dangers of botching the job, we have no choice but to experiment wisely in building better dreams for our future. Here speculative and queer science fictions, sonic fictions (experimental music), performances and other art-making practices might assist us greatly. Used well, they could serve as protocols for pedagogical experiments in exploring an array of relational virtual minoritarian becomings – from animal, vegetable and mineral becomings to becomings molecular and imperceptible. Inspired by an immanent ontoethics, we could help learners forge affective, exploratory, and communicative techniques from which they can produce a "matrix of intensity" and remain receptive to "waves and vibrations, thresholds and gradients" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:154). To make better maps of the present, we need to build more successful BwO's that are able to traverse these complex and frightening territories. This does not mean abandoning individual or social identities; rather, it means learning how to re-align these subjectivities so that we can forge desires that are orientated toward collaborative survival; desires that operate "in the domain of symbiosis" by bringing into play perspectives, affects and rhythms from "totally different scales and kingdoms" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 238-239).

Dreaming Together in Algorithmic Ecologies: Taking Care of Humans, Technologies and Environments in the Digital Age

We started this paper by invoking death and its attendant refrains alongside the examples of Heracles, Socrates and Deleuze. Responses to the intensities of life and death in our examples ranged from the ascetic subordination of the body enacted by Heracles to Deleuze's affirmation of the pre-personal asubjective intensity of *a* life. These two polar responses to intensity suggest different ways from which to think with digital-environmental assemblages. While retreat into the allure of digital technologies seems natural when our personal, social and environmental spaces are collapsing, it is our argument that we need to face even these dire realities in order to transvaluate what is ill in our societies – and this includes addressing these issues pedagogically.

To dream better dreams together in the algorithmic ecologies of the digital age, we need to be attentive to what is emerging from the pervasive network of financial, institutional, discursive and technological infrastructures and practices that surround us. At the same time, we need to move beyond embedded negative systems of modelling that prevent us from noticing the world and navigating its intensities. Doing so, will involve "echewing *potestas* (power and knowledge) for *potentia* (the desire to enter into relation with difference)" (Carstens, 2022:117). However, this will involve confronting our own desires – including our desires to be lulled by technology. What we need to take stock of are the ways in which technological rhythms further accelerate, randomise and desequence time and space, so upsetting not only the biological rhythms of life, but also the imaginative and affective ones. Knowledge itself is implicated in these disturbances; after all, we have been trained into wanting knowledge "in the same way [we] want a hamburger," failing to grasp how "the logic of the consumer system encourages this misapprehension – that the indigestibility, the difficulty is" knowledge (Fisher, 2009:24). To find ways of imagining differently together, we need to mobilise different approaches to the intangible and subterranean sets of poisoned affective disorders that govern our enslavement. Algorithms are not themselves to blame for this situation. Rather, the blame lies with the negative systems of modelling that we have embedded in the digital and that reflect the world back to us in a certain light. We need to "shift the affordances of machine-vision in the direction of ecosophy" and mobilise it to "map the transversal connections between all the subjectivities and nodes of relation in the web of entanglement that comprises the more-than-human swirl" (Carstens, 2022:118).

In figuring new stories of more-than-human collaborative survival beyond Anthropogenic landscapes of death and extinction and its imbrication with technoscientific hubris, we need to remain cognisant of the criteria for building better BwO's or experiments in desiring/becoming; "keeping an eye out" for the rigid, the idealist, the fascist, the suicidal and the demented, "even inside us" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:165). Fabulating more hopeful futures means reading ourselves into stories of biocultural and technocultural possibilities in ways that forge concrete alliances between divergent social, environmental and technological worlds. And this requires *care*. For it is careful *attentiveness* to our current situation, alongside the shedding of "our mechanist visions of the machine" (Guattari, 1995:107) to form a sense of "machinic becoming" that "promotes a conception which encompasses all of the aspects [of the machine]: technological, biological, informatic, social, theoretical, and aesthetic" (Guattari, 1995:107). As pedagogues, our task is to follow this line of flight; neither fearing nor hoping, but always being on the lookout for new conceptual weapons, tools and figurations. Depending on how we choose to look, we might either abdicate to capitalist realism and surrender ourselves to an apocalyptic and terminal impasse, or choose instead to figure ourselves, our environments and technologies differently by embracing the cultivation of asubjective states of intensity in order that we may resist the "fatalistic passivity" and "infantalisation of opinion" brought on by the sedative "fix of television" and the smug self-assurance of "techno-scientific power" (Guattari, 2000:27).

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