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Revisiting Plato's Pharmacy: Derrida, Stiegler, and Malabou

Revisitando a farmácia de Platão: Derrida, Stiegler e Malabou

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Abstract

In this text, I propose to revisit Jacques Derrida “Plato's Pharmacy” in its main arguments and provide an analysis based on two important receptions and developments of Derridean thought – by Bernard Stiegler and Catherine Malabou. Firstly, I divide the text into four scenes to demonstrate its logical ordering and rigorous nature of its argument: (1) accepting assumptions of Plato's text; (2) assuming hierarchy following the argument; (3) reversing hierarchy with contradictions and contaminations; (4) dissolving the opposition with a transversal concept (*pharmakon*). Afterward, I mention the theoretical proposal of Bernard Stiegler, presenting his reception of “Plato's Pharmacy” and pointing problems of such reception since – after integrating technique/writing into philosophy – gradually, as the work progresses, Stiegler leans towards a Eurocentric *Nous*. Finally, I present Catherine Malabou thought as another post-deconstructive path that develops at the level of form, placing the brain as an axis of problematization that allows dualisms to be overcome, Eurocentrism reinvigorated with the restoration of *Nous*, and exploring new paths.

Keywords

Plato. Derrida. Stiegler. Malabou. Pharmakon.

Resumo

Neste texto, proponho visitar a “Farmácia de Platão” de Jacques Derrida em seus principais argumentos e fornecer uma análise baseada em duas importantes recepções e desenvolvimentos do pensamento derridiano – de Bernard Stiegler e Catherine Malabou. Primeiramente, divido o texto em quatro cenas para demonstrar a ordenação lógica e a natureza rigorosa de seu argumento: (1) aceitar os pressupostos do texto de Platão; (2) assumir hierarquia seguindo o argumento; (3) reverter hierarquia com contradições e contaminações; (4) dissolver a oposição com um conceito transversal (*pharmakon*). Em seguida, menciono a proposta teórica de Bernard Stiegler, apresentando sua recepção da “Farmácia de Platão” e trazendo os problemas de tal recepção, pois – após integrar a técnica/escrita à filosofia – gradativamente, à medida que o trabalho avança, Stiegler se inclina para um *Nous* eurocêntrico. Por fim, apresento o pensamento de Catherine Malabou como outro caminho pós-desconstrutivo que se desenvolve ao nível da forma, colocando o cérebro como eixo de problematização que permite superar dualismos, revigorar o eurocentrismo com a restauração do *Nous*, e explorar novos caminhos.

Palavras-chave

Platão. Derrida. Stiegler. Malabou. Pharmakon.

1. Introduction: Tracing the Route

56 years ago, in the emblematic year of 1968, philosopher Jacques Derrida published the text “Plato's Pharmacy” in the magazine *Tel Quel*. Written shortly after the seminal trilogy comprising *L'écriture et la différence*, *De la grammatologie*, and *La voix et le phénomène*, *La pharmacie de Platon* ended up composing the important book *La dissémination*, published by Éditions du Seuil in the collection dedicated to *Tel Quel* in 1972. His central argument (the role of writing in Plato's *Phaedrus*) had been briefly mentioned *en passant* in “Of Grammatology” and supports the argument of the complementary nature between phonocentrism and logocentrism. As Stiegler's work will later demonstrate, it is an essential text for the history of philosophy of technology and for all currents of thought that involve notion of hybridity and human/machine problem. In this text, I propose to revisit its main arguments and provide an analysis based on two important receptions and developments of Derridean thought – by Bernard Stiegler and Catherine Malabou.

Initially, it is necessary to note that “Plato's Pharmacy” is probably one of the most polished versions of the deconstruction exercise, serving as a textual paradigm for the strategic movement that it carried out throughout Derrida's more than forty years of activity. In it, the strategy of encroaching on the opponent's domain, affirming hierarchical opposition, inversion, and dissolution appear with unique clarity. To show this, I first list the main points of the text in series, dividing the text into four scenes to demonstrate its logical ordering and rigorous nature of its argument.

Afterward, I mention the theoretical proposal of Bernard Stiegler, who sought to build a cross-disciplinary project in the philosophy of technology, social criticism, and philosophical anthropology, presenting his reception of “Plato's Pharmacy”. Furthermore, I present the problems of such reception since – after integrating technique/writing into philosophy – gradually, as the work progresses, Stiegler leans towards a Eurocentric *Nous*. It is no coincidence that many of his works coincide with a search for the rebirth of Europe in the style of Husserl and Heidegger.

Finally, although Catherine Malabou did not directly address this specific text, I seek to present her thought as another post-deconstructive path that is been developed at the level of form (MALABOU, 2005), placing the brain as an axis of problematization that allows dualisms to be overcome, Eurocentrism reinvigorated with the restoration of *Nous*, and exploring new paths.

2. "Plato's Pharmacy" in Four Acts

Therefore, we must proceed using a double gesture, according to a unity that is both systematic and in and of itself divided, a double writing, that is, a writing that it in and of itself multiple, what I called, in "La double seance," a double science. On the one hand, we must traverse a phase of overturning. To do justice to this necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a vis-a-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy. at a given moment. To overlook this phase of overturning is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition. (...). That being said- and on the other hand- to remain in this phase is still to operate on the terrain of and from within the deconstructed system. By means of this double, and precisely stratified, dislodged and dislodging, writing, we must also mark the interval between inversion, which brings low what was high, and the irruptive emergence of a new "concept," a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime. (Derrida, "Positions").

Plato's Pharmacy is a text that had already been "rehearsed" in *Of Grammatology* (DERRIDA, 1967, pp. 26-27). After a few times later, it has been materialized. Derrida puts the *pharmakon* as an example of this "new concept" that is close to the undecidable, that is, certain *portmanteaus* that cannot be understood by the oppositional economy, appearing as a third term that disorganizes all opposition (as he himself says, terms such as *différance*, *hymen*, *parasite*, *gram*, *reserve*, *incision*, *trace*, *spacing*, *blank-sens blanc*, *sang blanc*, *sans blanc*, *cent blancs*, *semblantS-supplement*, *pharmakon*, *margin-mark-march* etc.) (DERRIDA, 1981). To this end, he constructs a true *mise-en-scène*, in which the argument unfolds in several acts,

producing the desired effect in relation to deconstruction. Let's see how "Plato's Pharmacy" follows this script, dividing the scenes into acts.

Act 1 – First step: Assuming the Assumptions of the Text

- (a) From the legend of Theuth, Socrates identifies writing as a *pharmakon*, that is, something artificial, external, which only has value if the King (place of *logos*) authorizes it. The scripture is a supplement. Its function is hypomnetic, that is, supplementary in relation to living memory (*mneme*) (DERRIDA, 1972, p. 83);
- (b) The god of writing is a subordinate, an engineer who presents the King/Father with a technique and a *pharmakon* (DERRIDA, 1972, pp. 85-86, 91-93);
- (c) Logos is the living, belonging to *physis*, fully present while writing represents death, absence (DERRIDA, 1972, pp. 87-90);
- (d) The god of writing is the god of the *pharmakon*: the drug (which can mean poison or medicine), the external, the accessory, the supplementary. The King (Father, Sun, Capital) refuses writing because, despite what Theuth maintained, it would actually denature living memory (*mneme*) (DERRIDA, 1972, pp. 95-107).

Act 2 – Rigorous Exposition of the Argument: Assuming Hierarchy

- (a) Suspicion of *pharmakon* (writing) in general because it is artificial, external, and the body must follow its natural course, including in relation to disease (DERRIDA, 1972, p. 117) [in *Timaeus*, disease is compared to a living organism that is necessary to let develop according to its rules. Writing displaces and even irritates evil (under the pretext of memory, writing makes us forget even more. It does not consolidate *mneme*, only *hypomnesis*). She acts like every *pharmakon*];
- (b) It affirms the inferiority of writing due to the danger of duplication: supplement of the supplement, signifier of a signifier. The signifier of the phonic signifier which was in the animated proximity, in the living presence of the *psyche* or *mneme*. The graphic signifier distances itself to a degree, it moves away from life. Two harms of *pharmakon*: it dulls memory, and if it helps, it is not for *mneme*, but for *hypomnesis*. It hypnotizes the "inside" of memory. The exterior of writing affects or infects the inside. The *pharmakon* is that dangerous supplement that breaks into exactly what you would like not to need, and that at the same time allows itself to be broken, violated, filled, and replaced, completed by its own trace that in the present increases itself and then disappears (DERRIDA, 1972, pp. 120, 124-127).

Act 3 – Contradictions and Contaminations: Reversing the Opposition

- (a) Socrates is also a kind of *pharmakeus* (and has this face in several Platonic dialogues, e.g., in the *Symposium*). Socratic irony does not consist in the undoing of a (sophistic)

- spell based on a transparent and innocent *logos*, but in the precipitation of one *pharmakon* against another (DERRIDA, 1972, pp. 131, 136);
- (b) The episteme is also a kind of antidote, that is, a *pharmakon* that acts against another “malefic” one (DERRIDA, 1972, pp. 138, 160);
 - (c) Socrates characterizes the *logos* as an inscription in the soul using metaphors of a graphic nature for what precisely he would like to exclude this character (DERRIDA, 1972, pp. 172, 189-190);
 - (d) Plato himself recognizes when placing writing as a “bastard” daughter that it is the sister of the “legitimate,” that is, it is after all a dispute between two types of writing (DERRIDA, 1972, pp. 168-172);
 - (e) The *Phaedrus*, instead of condemning writing, prefers one over the other from a fertile trail to a sterile trail, seeking to contain the risk of dissemination (DERRIDA, 1972, p. 176).

Act 4 – We have never been pure: Dissolving the Opposition

Throughout the dialogue, the opposition between the living *logos*, present to oneself, close to the Father on one hand, and the dead, supplementary, and dangerous writing on the other, gradually, as the need to clarify the argument increases, passes to the opposition between two scriptures, showing how Plato needs to make use of what he would like to repress in a hybrid political, legal, moral, epistemological, and ontological discourse about the pure and the impure, citizen and foreigner, speech and writing, living and dead, father and mother. The conclusion already defined based on the rearticulating quadrants of the opposition that Derrida draws is therefore stated that:

- (a) *Pharmakon* is the place of passage between opposites, that is, it is a certain economy (detention) that produces the oppositions;
- (b) *Pharmakon*, while ambivalent, is older than the opposition between speech and writing. It has no substance, it is aneidetic, neither simple nor compound, but that which makes the opposition itself viable;
- (c) The phenomenon of contamination of *logos* by parasites – its poisoning by the space of difference – is just an illusion from the point of view of *logos* (“of the Sun”) (DERRIDA, 1972, p. 111). In reality, the difference comes first. The idea of “contamination” or “corruption” is part of “Platonism” which we could define as the philosophical and epistemic order of *logos* (and dialectics) as an antidote, as a force inscribed in the general economy of the *pharmakon* (DERRIDA, 1972, p. 172);
- (d) The episteme is just a form of arresting the game that constitutes it.

3. Permanence in Deconstruction: Reopening Texts

Despite deconstruction's indisputable importance, often rejected even by those who produce criticism based on the space it opens, Derrida seems to have never extended his interest beyond this dimension's aspect that energizes the text that supposedly sought to close at some point. As much as Derrida always sought to find the cracks and remains left by attempts at totalization, his interest seems inversely proportional when it comes to the concrete ways these finite operations are carried out.

The image in his study of Bataille's (DERRIDA, 1967b) distinction between restricted economics and general economics illustrates this point. Using the difference between an economy without borders as pure expenditure and a restricted economy closed in its circularity, Derrida often demonstrated that difference is irreducible in any of its individuated forms (both identity and difference are cases of difference), but it never presents itself except under individuated form. There is therefore an economy of difference identifying the virtualities that may or may not be updated and never forever. At the same time that we only experience individuated forms, they themselves are the effect of a productive differentiability. Deconstruction is a displacement of economies in which the restricted economy returns to the general economy, having even renamed the latter as aneconomy to highlight the complete detachment from any pre-existing or saturated meaning (DERRIDA, 1981, pp. 39-47). Nothing that exists has an identity given once and for all, but neither can indeterminacy subsist as life. It is necessary to economize – to register in an organized way in reality – to exist.

There is a kind of paradoxical structure that results from Derridean philosophy. Derrida recognizes that every individuated form is a condensation of differential forces, but the forces themselves cannot manifest except in an individuated form. Despite all law search for justice, it never achieves it, but at the same time all justice must appear in the form of law – under risk of being an even more terrible evil than the fallible legal structure. Difference never looks us in the face; it never manifests itself directly. Like looking at us with a visor that blocks direct gaze or an eardrum that diverts sound, it appears only obliquely (DERRIDA, 1993). The paradox lies in the fact that at the same time Derrida is interested in demonstrating the insufficiency of

present through differential infinity, his statement that this infinity can only manifest through finite forms has never been complemented by an examination *within the horizon of a finite perspective* – by fallible ways in which the phenomenon manifests itself. Instead, Derrida always continues in the same exercise of deconstructing texts, showing their uncontrollable openings and unsuccessful closings, taking a long journey through philosophy's history, literature, and other humanities.

Therefore, if writing is arche-original in relation to speech, and if all memorization has a support on which it is inscribed, it is relevant to understand what are supports and how they work. In other words, as the question of absolute purity disappears, thinking from the *perspective of impurity* involves evaluating the wanderings that present themselves on the margin of the fallible. Thus, if on one hand Derrida opens up in *Plato's Pharmacy* the possibility of thinking about technology as an inherent condition of culture, understanding speech as a variation of writing or the grapheme as a correlate of spirit/breath (*phone/pneuma*), he seems to have shown little interest in analyzing how these technologies effectively correlate. If technology has always been there, it is necessary to observe the modalities it presents – since there is no supersensible idea that can be resorted to.

However, Derrida always seems hesitant in this direction – apparently preferring to maintain the structure of “messianic without messianism” in which a spectral injunction (justice, gift, forgiveness, testimony, democracy) remains “to come,” promised (like the promise recognized by him as indeconstructible). Consequently, the finite forms in which these spectra are formalized are analyzed only by what they fail to produce and not by what they actually produce.

4. Bernard Stiegler's Pharmacology: In Search of the Lost Spirit

It is in this space that Bernard Stiegler's work seems to circulate, advancing on the pharmacological materialization that organizes societies in a new critique of political economy. Seriously considering the postulate that there is no culture without technology – derived from the process of memorization which, as Derrida demonstrated, never occurs without

inscriptions – Stiegler develops an analysis of the artefactuality inherent in industrial societies' spirit.

Stiegler develops – based on Leroi-Gourhan, Simondon, Heidegger, and Husserl – a new philosophical anthropology in which the drift of hominization occurs through inscriptions on technical supports. The process is called epiphylogenesis, understood as a reflexivity called “instrumental maieutics” (STIEGLER, 1998, pp. 158). Maieutics occurs in the relationship between cortex and flint (tools) that produces from outside to inside transversal arrangements that organize society. Every economy, every culture, and every policy are therefore connected to supports in which they are inscribed, and in this process of individuation, whose results are unpredictable a priori, they produce individuals and collectives. Political economy thus becomes pharmacology, and the central process of our societies is industrialization of memory.

Stiegler's weak point appears to be his telos of liberation of “spirit” in relation to the toxic economy of consumer capitalism, which destroys long-range circuits of libidinal investment by substituting deindividualizing short circuits. All criticism works by reaffirming in part what Stiegler himself criticized (the spirit precisely) but in a restored form in which the *Nous* becomes collective and prosthetic while still maintaining the same classical basis that inspired Plato, Aristotle, and classic philosophy itself. The effect of detoxification from “symbolic misery” or “spiritual misery” (STIEGLER, 2006, pp. 14-15, 107-111) leads to the release of *Nous* or spirit thought since the Greeks¹. Perhaps the slightly tautological formula that summarizes this is: “the political soul is noetic and it is defined as such – that is, it is defined as logic” (STIEGLER, 2006, p. 109). The conquered materiality is lost in the return to spirit (*Nous, logos*) that was abandoned at the beginning of the investigation.

One way of perceiving this suspension of materiality to restore old idealism is that on one hand, Stiegler is absolutely right to criticize reductionist perspectives on the brain, thinking of it as coupled in transindividual flows and technical artifacts that connect with the brain itself.

¹ “Mais il faut comprendre aussi que la *puissance* sensitive de l'acte noétique peut également être, à sa limite, l'*impuissance* même du noétique : telle est la loi de la régression, ou de la déraison, inscrite dans ces âmes que *no sont que... par intermittences*, et toutes tendent à déchoir sur le mode de leur puissance impuissante, c'est-à-dire de leur puissance *incapable de passer à l'acte*” (STIEGLER, 2006, p. 182).

On the other, it's curious his lack of interest in the opposite path, that is, when culture returns to the brain and encounters resistance from the biological apparatus itself which, from a deconstructed perspective of nature, is itself a "technical" artifact. For example, read in "Technics and Time":

Everything is differentiated in one coup, together. It is the inorganic organization of memory that constitutes the essential element, the first coup, engendering all the others and being transformed in transforming all the others in its wake. In this complex, the brain has in fact only a secondary role, in no case a preponderant one. It is one of the instances involved in the total transformation of the landscape in which the organization of the inorganic consists. It is that transformation's organic consequence. But not its cause. Furthermore, the issue is one not of a cause but of a coup, whose dynamic development is marked simultaneously on tools, on the cortex, on the group, and on the territories that it impregnates, occupies, or cuts across (STIEGLER, 1998, p. 174).

And the theme returns in "What Makes Life Worth Living: on Pharmacology":

The brain is a plastic space of reticulated inscriptions organized by the internalization and, if you will, the retro-projection of relations linked with and through the supports of epiphylogenetic projection -- through which nervous memory both exteriorizes and internalizes itself, that is, weaves itself passing through its outside, by making a detour through a pharmacological milieu -- and such that synaptic short-circuits are possible (STIEGLER, 2013).

But despite the transitional space that the brain occupies in this description, it appears only as a surface with no influence, as a smooth plane that reflects what occurs outside: "As noesis is predominantly an 'externalization,' it is not possible to oppose the inside to the outside and that is why it is necessary to put quotation marks" (STIEGLER, 2004, p. 181). What is at stake is always a pharmacology of the soul, which returns after the extensive deconstruction that took place in *Technique and Time* and other works: "The pharmacology of the spirit is a pharmacology of symbolic relations, but within which objects are the primary instances, and where the Greeks called the symbolon is an object," he states (STIEGLER, 2013).

Even externalized and collectivized, *Nous* floats in the parallel place occupied by *res cogitans*, Christian soul, or European spirit (STIEGLER, 2004, pp. 176, 181), remaining in the eternal dualistic parallelism with the physical brain and its electrical circuits, synaptic neural networks, and neurotransmitter substances (*res extensae*, nature, matter). This other detoxified state is thus thought of as purified, because the investigation into its sociotechnical

configurations does not simply replace the neuropharmacological ones. In other words, after the extensive journey that we are invited to walk to review the socio-technical outline of human cultures, capitalism is presented as a destructive corner from which it is necessary to retreat to regain the noetic space that the Greeks (Europe or the West) cultivated. The pharmacologized *Nous* is despite everything desired in the purest and most original form.

Therefore, apparently there still remains a residual humanism to be deconstructed in Stiegler himself: by treating the brain as something passive and inert, he reaffirms the difference between nature and technique/culture and places them in parallel fields (or in composition to use his words). Even if it has incorporated neuronal plasticity, the brain's own biological materiality in relation to *Nous* remains in a state of suspension, or simply: spirit runs in parallel. The very lack of interest in artificially "altered" states of consciousness, which would be a practical pharmacology that contrasts different coupling states in induced stimuli capable of producing new configurations, reveals a hope for the spiritual purification that separates [*Nous* + socio-technical constitution] from material given cerebrality. Although Stiegler (2008) intends to escape humanism, eliminating the weightlessness of "freedom" separated from its technical artifacts, he ends up returning axiologically to Eurocentrism of the Spirit (STIEGLER, 2005). At the same time that memory is industrialized and therefore tries to remove Frankfurtian resonances from the criticism of the cultural industry (STIEGLER, 2001 and 2006b), he himself does not fail to share the same diagnosis of the decline of the Spirit in the face of capitalistic devices in which we got stuck.

It is true that Stiegler will indeed propose, not a critique – in this sense the separation between Spirit and its reifications and fetishisms (DERRIDA, 1993) – but a new economy (STIEGLER, 2010) in which sociotechnical compositions would allow spiritual flourishing, an economy of care. But, from a cosmopolitical point of view (STENGERS, 2009), Stiegler seems necessarily tied to the Eurocentric humanist paradigm. Even now, entangled in technical individuation, it is still the Spirit – that is, freedom – that continues as *telos*. In fact, the more his work develops, the closer it seems to the classical conception of Spirit taken by *Nous*, despite all the Simondonian precautions of individuation being a collective and material process. Even

his late proximity to Popper with a world of “pure ideas” (STIEGLER, 2022) seems to destroy all previous materialism by reintroducing the most platonic concept whose deconstruction we can reference not only to Derrida, but to Nietzsche and his attack on platonic-Christian transcendence. Therefore, I affirm that Stiegler ironically makes a *360-degree* turn: after inverting all humanist rhetoric to place technique as a constitutive element of humans, he recovers from a cosmopolitical point of view the gap between nature and culture, leaning towards the overlap between culture and artifice. If we had – as Viveiros de Castro (2024) thought in a recent short text – a triangle between three intelligences (animal/natural, human/cultural, machine/artificial), Stiegler seems to move towards the cultural/artificial side, restoring Kantian gap between human and nature under new guises.

This leaves a restorative conservatism contrasting with the development of epiphylogenetic anthropology that Bernard Stiegler himself struggles to build. If we compare its politics with, for example, that of the movements of the 60s, we realize that it is a kind of puritan neo-sobriety that ends up appearing as a way out compared to the free experimentation of states of consciousness. Although the criticism of Derrida's indeterminacy regarding the concrete ways in which pharmacology operates is fair, Stiegler goes backwards, returning to the Platonic moralism that Derrida explored in *Plato's Pharmacy*.

5. The neurophilosophy of Catherine Malabou

“Neuropsychiatry is without question one of the most promising disciplines today, and I avidly follow the molecular adventure of psychopharmaceuticals. It is therefore not a question of pitting the nobility of “classical” psychoanalysis against the baseness of psychiatry, but of seeing how a certain conception of flexibility - paradoxically driven by the scientific analysis of neuronal plasticity - models suffering and allows the identification of psychical illness and social illness.”
 (Catherine Malabou)

Catherine Malabou's work is no less ambitious than Bernard Stiegler's. Following a different path, her philosophy intersperses neurocognitive, technological, and political dimensions, still approaching anarchism today. This work-in-progress seems less directed toward certain neoclassical tendencies quickly adopted by Stiegler and perhaps even by

Derrida himself. Malabou seems open to the impact of the new without the usual resistance in the area (MALABOU, 2015). Her neurophilosophical exploration, directed by the motor scheme of plasticity, seems like embarking on a new adventure whose destination we do not yet know, while the journey Stiegler invites us on always seems to end back in Ithaca.

In Malabou's work, there is an insistence against the philosophical tendency to oppose the symbolic to the organic (corporeal or material), finding a transcendence that would allow us to overcome the biological. The tendency in her work, on the contrary, is to reunite what has been separated: "the death of the symbolic is precisely what invites us to think of plasticity as the impossibility of dividing biological life and spiritual life. There is only one life." It is not therefore a question of desiring transcendence, another messianic world, but of understanding biological subjectivity and "acting on connections, modifying synaptic effectiveness, making energy circulate in a different way, changing power relations" (MALABOU, 2011, p. 33; also 2015).

This direct correlation between "spiritual" phenomenological states with synaptic connections finally allows us to think of materialism without concessions. That is, any political or cultural figuration will necessarily have to go through a corporeal neuroconfiguration (MALABOU, 2011, pp. 184-185). At the same time, it is not about naturalistic reductionism in the style of eliminativism but rather special attention to the mediations at play (MALABOU, 2011, p. 162). Instead of continuing to bet on an abstract transitional space that couples inside and outside – the symbolic, the spirit, the soul – Malabou explores the concrete corporeal conditions in which social flows act and interact without reducing them to an epiphenomenon. This is not obviously any resumption of the "myth of interiority" (STIEGLER, 2008, pp. 152-153) for two basic reasons.

First, it is not about "interiority" in the romantic sense that structuralists and post-structuralists helped to deconstruct. There is no closed package of beliefs in an internal homunculus or anything like that. The brain is constituted in its relationship with the environment and is also biotechnological. The brain is built and constructed in the epigenetic process. Neither Kant's transcendental a priori nor the naturalistic reductionism of Churchland

or Dennett. Nor is it just a neutral surface as Stiegler seems to put it, but itself a propeller of states through interaction with the environment. Nothing is built despite or against the brain: all relationships are given *with* neuroplasticity – which is not simply an undetermined force of transformation. It is no coincidence that Malabou's work in this case, in strong contrast to Derrida, is especially dedicated to the question of form (MALABOU, 2005): even though all individuation is the effect of difference, becoming is not simply formless but is shaped in the immanence of the body itself that transforms.

Secondly, it is about building an interdisciplinary alliance to induce the formation of a “critical neurosciences” field in which brain science does not just work to reaffirm the new flexible spirit of capitalism. In other words, the explanation of normative assumptions presented in neurosciences does not oppose brain and consciousness but seeks to work together to compose a neural circuit capable of synchronizing with another social reality or at least with the attitude of resistance. In “What should we do with our Brain?”, Malabou explores, for example, the explosive dimension of brain transitions, highlighting the inadequacy of the “neuronal ideology” of flexibility and polymorphism as avatars of cognitive capitalism (MALABOU, 2011, p. 167). It is not opposing a symbolic transcendence (spirit, *Nous* or *psyché*) to the brain but it is in the immanence of the brain itself that the opposition must appear.

I will examine here two variants of the application of the plasticity motor scheme in order to present how the overcoming of dualisms and the propulsion of the post-deconstructive form are carried out.

In *Les nouveaux blessés*, Malabou creates a productive dialogue between psychoanalysis and neurosciences based on the new traumatic phenomena that afflict the contemporary world. This is not a pure and simple defense of psychoanalysis in the face of attacks from the new brain sciences, nor the reverse, but a review of its foundations based on these discoveries. Malabou seeks to associate those who suffer from a brain injury with the war ethos that we currently experience, using the analogy to perceive a kind of “new family” of psychopathologies distinct from that which classical psychoanalysis was used to be facing. Thus, based on the categories of causality, war, and with trauma as the heart of the debate, we would see a change in the

psychopathological framework and in the very constitution of what trauma is. Malabou exemplifies this transition from the "traumatic neurosis" of psychoanalysis to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which would go beyond the clinical-therapeutic and conceptual framework of psychoanalysis (MALABOU, 2007, p. 18). Patients with brain injuries behave as if they were suffering a war trauma: both patients and former combatants returning from war would show the same affective coldness, the same desertion, the same indifference associated with a total metamorphosis of identity. The new wounded would therefore include those who have experienced extreme relational violence (which Malabou calls "socio-political trauma" corresponding to wars, sexual abuse, captivity, etc.) whose behavioral similarity with those affected by brain damage makes the border between organic and socio-political trauma extremely porous, both subject to the same economy of the accident (MALABOU, 2007, pp. 36-38, 256-260).

Reconsidering the regime of "eventfulness" of trauma, Malabou opposes "sexuality" as a primordial connection with the psyche, as the dominant regime of the Freudian text, to "cerebrality" as the primordial paradigm of contemporary traumas. Just as sexuality is not to be confused with sex, constituting instead the concept that determines the meaning of the event in psychic life, cerebrality is not to be confused with the brain, being instead a causal value to designate the damage generated in brain functions. Its place would be exactly the point at which the cerebral event coincides with the psychic event, therefore generating a cerebral etiology of psychic disorders and usurping the privileged place of sexuality in the psychopathological discourse (MALABOU, 2007, pp. 23-24). In the accident economy, the exogenous directly crosses the endogenous without the mediation of sexuality. According to Malabou, psychoanalysis is based on the "indestructibility" of the primordial psyche, on survival as plasticity, with Freud always referring to the creative and formative meaning of this word (MALABOU, 2007, p. 223). Plasticity is the mutant survival of the "primitive" indestructible in us, which therefore would never be completely erased. However, in contrast to this and based on the effects of brain injuries recently described by neuroscience, Malabou proposes to think of trauma as causing a true metamorphosis in what survives it, corresponding to a kind of

"death in life" in which the survivor becomes totally different in relation to the previous identity. For Freud, the disappearance of this "primitive," since it was impossible, could only be thought of as death itself; today, however, psychopathology demonstrates that this supposed death is a form of life (MALABOU, 2007, pp. 14-15). In these cases, there is a point of "no return," as the center of psychic life is simply destroyed, leading to an "exhausted" state, a kind of new configuration in which the model is the annihilated form itself (MALABOU, 2007, pp. 112-113).

Psychoanalysis, according to Paul Ricoeur, would be in the intersection between the "energetic" and the "hermeneutic," in the connection between meaning and lack of meaning (MALABOU, 2007, p. 29). Sexuality, says Malabou, is the "hermeneutic adventure of psychic energy," the internal transition from the external event to meaning (MALABOU, 2007, p. 75). However, brain injury makes us reintroduce into this economy a total absence of meaning: as a sign of contingency and randomness, a pure accident, there is nothing to extract from it as meaning (MALABOU, 2007, p. 34). The accident is purely occasional, like the iron bar that pierces Phineas Gage, the paradigmatic case of brain injury that Antonio Damasio mentions to demonstrate how the damage affects the individual's "emotional brain," making him, according to Malabou, another person, a kind of survivor of himself, incapable of affection, cold, totally indifferent to everything. "We know that it doesn't take much – a few vascular ruptures minimal in terms of their size and purpose – to alter identity sometimes irreversibly" (MALABOU, 2007, p. 35, my translation).

This is where the material field comes in, which is truly transformative for philosophy (MALABOU, 2007, pp. 234-235). Even under immense destructive pressure, the brain still reacts by forming a form, even if this form is a kind of "living death." Destructive plasticity is the dimension that produces disaffected subjects, inaugurating a metamorphosis in which their previous self is destroyed in favor of a new form that does not contain any remains of the old one. We have reasons to witness the suffering involved in this new state – which includes post-traumatic stress patients, war victims, Alzheimer's patients, among others – and therefore our access is negative, that is, we can only access "cerebrality" when somatic markers are deactivated in accidents that destroy an identity. Despite this, it is no longer possible to

construct any positive theory without going through the existence of these elements that only appear negatively. In other words: any theory that wants to go through the toxicity of technique or what Bernard Stiegler and Byung-Chul Han call “psychopolitics” will necessarily no longer be able to place “phenomenological quotes” on the neuronal constitution discussed.

This leads us to a third form of plasticity, not to be confused with either giving or receiving form, and related to this zone of the Material as an external shock that is absorbed without symbolic mediation: destructive plasticity, which means the form of explosion or annihilation. This creation does not configure a new form but a kind of destroyed form as an adventure of the form established by suffering itself.

The other variant is found in *Morphing Intelligence*. The concept of intelligence would be a recent invention dating back to the attempt to measure cognition. Initially developed by Binet-Simon, it ended up being appropriated by North American and British experimental psychology to arrive at the famous “IQ tests” in which measurement was obtained from the tests (MALABOU, 2017, p. 15). For classical philosophy, on the contrary, “intelligence” was never spoken of. What was present since Greek philosophy, for example Aristotle's *Nous*, was a kind of qualitative parallel in relation to any metric possibility. Place therefore of a dualism in which ideas like the soul, intellectus, spirit (*esprit*, *Geist*), mind will appear. Malabou cites as an example of philosophical dissent in relation to intelligence the thought of Henri Bergson who, confronting the psychology of the time, involved intuition as a fundamental disposition irreducible to any metric (MALABOU, 2017, pp. 17-21, 59-63). But what Malabou wants is not the opposite either, that is, the naturalistic and psychometric reduction of the transcendental. It is once again about finding a passage through different mediations.

It is in the thoughts of Piaget and Dewey that Malabou finds a way out of the dualist dilemma, allowing herself to understand intelligence as an epigenetic and collective process. With Piaget, intelligence ceases to be a psychometric condition and becomes epigenetic and plastic in nature, becoming a point of arrival, not a starting point (MALABOU, 2017, pp. 24-25, 91-106). With Dewey, it becomes collective and democratic. Aligned with his pragmatism, Dewey defines “method” as a dynamic that guides the passage from past experience to the

making of future experience, placing itself between habit (past) and intelligence (to come). Intelligence is not deductive, being context-dependent and unfolding in the sphere of action. Thus, its elementary constitution would be based on the “resolution of problems” whose past solutions are no longer adequate, requiring the formation of new perspectives. Ultimately, the construction of intelligence demands a participatory and experimental task in which education – and with it, school – occupies a fundamental space (MALABOU, 2017, pp. 126-142).

“Morphing” is, according to the author herself, a kind of “self-criticism” of “What should we with our brain?”, in which she thought of the brain as something irreducible to cybernetic model of the machine (MALABOU, 2017, p. 11). Now, with the possibilities opened up by artificial intelligence developed from models that mimic the brain, the scenario has changed. Plasticity affects both directions: introducing fallibility and therefore intelligence into the machine; and “mechanizing” brain plasticity, paradoxically increasing its indeterminacy (MALABOU, 2017, pp. 142-143). It is about expanding the alliance, encompassing not only neurosciences, psychoanalysis, and philosophy but also including cybernetics – the artificial. Thus, their “blue brain” will involve perceiving new artificial intelligences as beings that integrate a participatory process in a continuum that deepens and expands “ours” that made up the brain thought in “What should we do”. This means politically reclaiming the construction of artificial intelligence from the monopoly currently exercised by Big Techs, allowing a collective elaboration of this new dimension (MALABOU, 2017, p. 159).

Once again remembering the argument of *Plato's Pharmacy*, it is no longer about purifying a “mind” (like the philosophy of mind) or a “spirit” (in the humanist tradition) but integrating technology, providing conditions for a new education and with it an expansion of the democratic participatory process (MALABOU, 2017, pp. 159-161) or more than that, anarchist (MALABOU, 2022).

6. Conclusion: A Research Program

Starting from Derrida's magnificent deconstruction of the opposition between speech and writing in Plato and going through the phenomenology of technique that Bernard Stiegler

presents to us, opening up the possibility of connecting Derrida's question with social philosophy, we finally end up in Malabou's neurophilosophy to think that there is no longer a way to think about a "mind," "spirit," "Nous," or even the "symbolic" alien to the materially placed brain. The new materialism proposed by Malabou, while incorporating the bifid relationship between brain and technology, even calling it a third phase of intelligence theories (the "blue brain"), does not leave technology hovering in the abstract air of the spirit.

The lesson of *Plato's Pharmacy*, in which writing does not appear as a supplementary technology to speech but speech and writing are modulations of the same pharmakon in different doses, implies thinking that the fundamental differentiability of any economy between brain and technology or memory and writing goes through a pharmacological analysis that takes both poles as materials, taking advantage of what technology and neuroscience present to develop a philosophical model.

More than 50 years after its publication and considering the enormous contemporary interest in "ecologies of attention," a research program will necessarily have to go through the following points: a) a neurobiology of attention in which the synaptic connections and configurations that place the brain as an active organ, and not just a passive receptor, are investigated in the construction of the problem; b) a general pharmacology in which not only the human/technology interface comes into question as Stiegler and others do (for example cognitive theories such as extended mind and embedded cognition) but also the dimensions related to drugs in the strictest sense, substances that can produce distinct phenomenological states and all related experimentation; c) a decolonization of the idea of spirit, soul, Nous, or consciousness in which conceptions contrasting with the Platonic-Christian dualism can even transform the very idea of what an "altered state" of consciousness is, expanding the scale – in the wake of deconstruction – of what can be considered relevant experience; and finally d) an ecology of attention in which the libidinal economy itself is thought of in terms of a "general economy" in the sense of Bataille, going beyond the human dimension to be placed in planetary terms, continuing the effort developed by Gregory Bateson and Félix Guattari to think about mental, social, and environmental ecologies in an intertwined and connected way.

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