

Adrian Mróz: Filtration Failure: On Selection for Societal Sanity

Abstract:

This paper focuses on the question of filtration through the perspective of “too much information”. It concerns Western society within the context of new media and digital culture. The main aim of this paper is to apply a philosophical reading on the video game concept of Selection for Societal Sanity within the problematics of cultural filtration, control of behaviors and desire, and a problematization of trans-individuation that the selected narrative conveys. The idea of Selection for Societal Sanity, which derives from the first postmodern video game *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (2001), is applied into a philosophical framework based on select concepts from Bernard Stiegler’s writing and incorporating them with current events such as post-truth or fake news in order to explore the role of *techne* and filtration within social organizations and individual *psyches*. Alternate forms of behavior, which contest cultural paradigms, are re-problematized as tension between calculability and incalculability, or market value versus social bonding.

Keywords: Information Overload, Metal Gear Solid, Bernard Stiegler, New Media, Post-Truth, Filter Failure, Repetition.

I hear new news every day, and those ordinary rumours of war, plagues, fires, inundations, thefts, murders, massacres, meteors, comets, spectrums, prodigies, apparitions, of towns taken, cities besieged in France, Germany, Turkey, Persia, Poland, &c. daily musters and preparations, and such like, which these tempestuous times afford, battles fought, so many men slain, monomachies, shipwrecks, piracies, and sea-fights, peace, leagues, stratagems, and fresh alarms. A vast confusion of vows, wishes, actions, edicts, petitions, lawsuits, pleas, laws, proclamations, complaints, grievances are daily brought to our ears. New books every day, pamphlets, currantoes, stories, whole catalogues of volumes of all sorts, new paradoxes, opinions, schisms, heresies, controversies in philosophy, religion, &c. Now come tidings of weddings, maskings, mummeries, entertainments, jubilees, embassies, tilts and tournaments, trophies, triumphs, revels, sports, plays: then again, as in a new shifted scene, treasons, cheating tricks, robberies, enormous villanies in all kinds, funerals, burials, deaths of Princes, new discoveries, expeditions; now comical then tragical matters. To-day we hear of new Lords and officers created, to-morrow of some great men deposed, and then again of fresh honours conferred; one is let loose, another imprisoned; one purchaseth, another breaketh: he thrives, his neighbour turns bankrupt; now plenty, then again dearth and famine; one runs, another rides, wrangles, laughs, weeps &c. Thus I daily hear, and such like.¹

Robert Burton (1621)

Introduction

The above quote from Robert Burton (1577-1640) conveys a condition familiar to modern humans. It is that of *information overload*, which Clay Shirky dubbed *filter failure* in 2008². Burton, who had a library of about 1,700 books, complained about the overabundance of literature in a tone that suggests not only awe, but the problem of *time poverty*.³ That is to say that there is too much to read

¹ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith (New York: Tudor, 1927), 14.

² <https://www.cnet.com/g00/news/shirky-problem-is-filter-failure-not-info-overload/?i10c.encReferrer=aHR0cHM6Ly9lbi53aWtpcGVkaWEub3JnLW%3D%3D&i10c.ua=1&i10c.dv=14>.

³ Although this may not affect members of the aristocracy or those, who have lived before the industrial revolution, the feeling of being overwhelmed by an over-abundance of information has been an identifiable complaint of humans in all epochs. Time poverty is an issue Melinda Gates has raised, where an individual suffers from the lack of non-working time. For more information see: <https://verilymag.com/2016/02/melinda-gates-time-poverty-women-in-the-workplace-feminism-2502>.

and too little time to do it. There is a crippling hyper-presence of information, and not enough cognitive resources to mentally manage or process it. In addition, G. W. Leibnitz also expressed a fear of *new barbarianism*⁴: “to which result that horrible mass of books which keeps on growing might contribute very much. For in the end the disorder will become nearly insurmountable.”⁵ These amazements and complaints resound remarkably modern, and could easily describe a Facebook wall or the condition of having continuous access to information coupled with the simultaneous presence of the obsolescent distinction between being *online* and *offline*. Today, most people would agree that there is an oversaturation of information, and with that, a subconscious hindering of choice and a hijacking of desire, which is reduced to simple drives. Too many links to click on, which sometimes leads to the behavior of Wikipedia surfing, drifting from one link to the next without any structure and ended in a feeling of disbelief and discontent, but purely based on impulse or a lack of self-control and the strategies of the owners of websites. The phenomena of buyer’s remorse, miswanting, overchoice, and analysis paralysis, are all tied in one way or another to difficult decisions made in an increasingly saturated information environment and tied to our (lack of) well-being, to marketing strategies, choice architecture, and implementation of behavioral economics.⁶

In addition, the phenomenological consumer experience is accompanied with too many interruptions from notifications, too many opinions to read, an endless stream of comments, as well as irrelevant information such as new pictures of our friends’ weddings, births, information about political scandal, all enmeshed in a web of spam, junk, clickbait, trolling, tweets and retweets,

⁴ Here it seems that Leibnitz is referring to the problem of information overload as a root of disempowering due to a lack of proper filtration or order. The term new barbarianism has been developed by Bernard Stiegler in *Dans la disruption* (2016). He makes reference to the Frankfurt school, especially Theodore Adorno. A new barbarian is someone without the capacity to think or care, and deflects responsibility through scapegoating, a person with an identity overtaken by consumer culture and industry. It is part of the disruptive strategies of Google, Apple, Facebook, and Amazon (GAFA). Also see: <http://barbares.thefamily.co/>.

⁵ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Leibniz Selections*, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Scribner’s, 1951), 29; cf. Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 254.

⁶ The industrial temporal objects replace collective imaginaries and individual stories knotted together in the collective and individual process of individuation with mass standards, which tend to shrink the singularity of individual practices and their exceptional characters. However, the exception is the rule, but a rule that can never be formulated: it only exists in the event of an irregularity. That is, it cannot be formalised or calculated with an instrument of regular description applicable to all cases that are constituted by the different occurrences of this rule by default. http://xenopraxis.net/readings/stiegler_suffocateddesire.pdf

advertisement, entertainment and “fake news”⁷. The amount of *realities* existing seems to be increasing, which include virtual reality, augmented reality, and a plethora of imagined realities⁸ and conspiracy theories. This burden results in an inability to choose, or desire, which leads to a paradox. The more choice given results in an impasse between desire and action. And if a choice is made, regret soon comes rushing in, leaving humanity in a state of ill-being. It seems like a filter is gravely needed.⁹ Such filters do emerge, for instance either as failure to process the information and signaled by tags like *TL;DR* (Too Long, Didn’t Read) or *TMI* (Too Much Information) or as (sub)cultural filters in the form of social media bubbles and the division or polarization of members of society. The arbitrary coherence of social relations create relative filters, which guide the choices and repeated behaviors of its members, from anti-vaxxers to the rise of demagogues. Any alternative behaviors get engulfed into the logic of hyperindustrial consumer society, just as alternative forms of socio-economic organization “fit” into the logic of capitalism, with T-shirts for sale bearing the image of Che Guevara or Karl Marx. It is like Midas’ touch, all is turned into gold, all is commodified, including countercultural and niche trends, values, and moralities¹⁰. Cultural alternatives are appropriated, so cultural struggle is at the same time one of politics, aesthetics, and ethics. Moreover, the distinction between individualism and collectivism is a false dichotomy, which requires deconstruction.

We, as humans, do many things that we take for granted. Such customs, which are familiar to one group of people can be completely alien to others from a different culture, which is frequently grounds for misunderstandings and the dreaded *faux pas*. This is especially true of habits and quantifiable behaviors prone to manipulation or “nudging”. One commonly prized value of Western society is

⁷ Fake news is hardly a new phenomena. The first form of writing was a form of power-struggle on the truth. Ancient pharos and those, who control the scribes, used hieroglyphs and writing in order to communicate myths and state propaganda, which is what we have rebranded today as “fake news”. Fake news is simply re-contextualized information, a tool used by various actors. This implies that advertising itself is “fake” news, where the term “fake” implies that the *truth* of the story has been fabricated, thus it is a work of fiction or a radically weaponized form of literature.

⁸ See Y. N. Harari’s concept of imagined orders or realities mentioned in the book *Sapiens*. They include ideas such as dieties, money, freedom and human rights.
<http://www.ynharari.com/book/sapiens/>

⁹ See “Filter Failure”: <https://www.cnet.com/g00/news/shirky-problem-is-filter-failure-not-info-overload/?i10c.encReferrer=aHR0cHM6Ly9lbi53aWtpcGVkaWEub3JnLw%3D%3D&i10c.ua=1&i10c.dv=14>

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/may/21/prix-pictet-photography-prize-consumption-slavoj-zizek>

that of individual freedom and self-determination, which is exclusive and nonsocial. The more an individual differs from another, the more “unique” they are, the better. In other cultures with a more collective attitude, such values seem to be judged as nonsensical. The opposite would be valued: the more an individual is in “harmony” with the group, the better. So, the value of individuality seems to be conflicted and non-intrinsic, which is to say it is learned. Moreover, if individualism (or collectivism) was innate, we should observe a greater random distribution of individualism (or collectivism) in the world population. Instead, we observe an accumulation of one ideology in one society and the other in another society. To question if an individual is subordinate to a strict culture is one that implies such a dichotomy and in addition, one that ignores trans-individuality and the necessity of culture for individuals¹¹, for without it they become individuals¹². Because of this, the level of society should be scrutinized to the point of questioning if society itself is sane or senseless, and if “moral physicians” can do anything to provide society with therapy. Some philosophers argue for the latter, that the information age has become an epoch of stupidity and mindlessness [fr. *bêtise*]. With this in mind, the problem of freedom and cultural limitation on the cultivation of individual and societal desire is approached, or to put it in other words: the problem of individuation put forth by technological disturbance on society and its members.

First, the idea of Selection for Societal Sanity will be presented within the original context of the postmodern video game *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (2001). Here, the idea of digital society, memes, post-truth, censorship as information overload or *filter failure*, and filtration as a form of creation are explicated. Next, a philosophical interpretation of Selection for Societal Sanity will be presented, and placed into the context of current events. An additional juxtaposition of selected philosophical concepts from the works of Bernard Stiegler and the journalism of Brooke Gladstone will follow. The conclusion set

¹¹ See: <http://www.arsindustrialis.org/desire-and-knowledge-dead-seize-living>

¹² “Fully automated informational systems, fixed capital, moreover, tends to close itself into a closed system: in its struggle against the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, it tends in a structural way to increase the rate of entropy. Self-referential, and turning **the users of the information system into its servants, that is, ‘techno-geographical’ functions of the system, which thereby constitutes an associated milieu, the individuals dissolved into this system thereby become ‘dividuals’** (Deleuze 1995, 177–82; Stiegler 2016a, §14), and repetition (which Derrida also called ‘iteration’) no longer produces either *différance* in Derrida’s sense, or *dif-férence* in Deleuze’s sense. Such is the growth of the desert.” https://www.academia.edu/35403432/Bernard_Stiegler_What_Is_Called_Caring_Beyond_the_Anthropocene_2017 (p. 392).

forth is that absolute freedom, especially within digital society, is a limitation for desire, and its social control is a necessary condition for the mutual existence of desire and freedom.

Selection for Societal Sanity

The video game *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* has been selected, since its postmodern¹³ themes resonate with current affairs, even though it was published during the dominance of the neoliberal paradigm or the widespread belief in Francis Fukuyama's "End of History", which is to say it is an epoch characterized by the inability to imagine another alternative reality, which resulted in dis-belief and shock from the current pervasiveness of "post-truth" and collapse of political correctness. Below is a conversation between three characters (Colonel, Rose, and Raiden/Jack, who the player controls) on a simulation project called S3, which was designed to be able to form individuals themselves as well as manipulate their decisions and behaviors.¹⁴ The main themes explored include genetics, memetics, cognitive dissonance, and the problem of filtering within a society flooded by information:

Colonel: The mapping of the human genome was completed early this century. As a result, the evolutionary log of the human race lay open to us.

Rose: We started with genetic engineering, and in the end, we succeeded in digitizing life itself.

Colonel: But there are things not covered by genetic information.

Raiden: What do you mean?

Colonel: Human memories, ideas. Culture. History.

Rose: Genes don't contain any record of human history.

Colonel: Is it something that should not be passed on? Should that information be left at the mercy of nature?

Rose: We've always kept records of our lives. Through words, pictures, symbols... from tablets to books...

Colonel: But not all the information was inherited by later generations. A small percentage of the whole was selected and processed, then passed on. Not unlike genes, really.

Rose: That's what history is, Jack.

¹³ <https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2015-08-16-metal-gear-solid-2-the-first-postmodern-video-game>

¹⁴ http://metalgear.wikia.com/wiki/S3_Plan

Colonel: But in the current, digitized world, trivial information is accumulating every second, preserved in all its triteness. Never fading, always accessible.

Rose: Rumors about petty issues, misinterpretations, slander...

Colonel: All this junk data preserved in an unfiltered state, growing at an alarming rate.

Rose: It will only slow down social progress, reduce the rate of evolution.

Colonel: Raiden, you seem to think that our plan is one of censorship.

Raiden: Are you telling me it's not!?

Rose: You're being silly! What we propose to do is not to control content, but to create context.

Raiden: Create context?

Colonel: The digital society furthers human flaws and selectively rewards the development of convenient half-truths. Just look at the strange juxtapositions of morality around you.

Rose: Billions spent on new weapons in order to humanely murder other humans.

Colonel: Rights of criminals are given more respect than the privacy of their victims.

Rose: Although there are people suffering in poverty, huge donations are made to protect endangered species. Everyone grows up being told the same thing.

Colonel: "Be nice to other people."

Rose: "But beat out the competition!"

Colonel: "You're special." "Believe in yourself and you will succeed."

Rose: But it's obvious from the start that only a few can succeed...

Colonel: You exercise your right to "freedom" and this is the result. All rhetoric to avoid conflict and protect each other from hurt. The untested truths spun by different interests continue to churn and accumulate in the sandbox of political correctness and value systems.

Rose: Everyone withdraws into their own small gated community, afraid of a larger forum. They stay inside their little ponds, leaking whatever "truth" suits them into the growing cesspool of society at large.

Colonel: The different cardinal truths neither clash nor mesh. No one is invalidated, but nobody is right.

Rose: Not even natural selection can take place here. The world is being engulfed in "truth."

Colonel: And this is the way the world ends. Not with a bang, but a whimper.¹⁵

¹⁵ All sections emphasized in bold by the author (A.M.). Full script: <https://www.ign.com/faqs/2005/metal-gear-solid-2-son-of-liberty-premium-package-game-script-538904>

Setting aside the fictional story, the game applies itself very well as a critique of modern society saturated by algorithms, artificial intelligence, automation, and increasingly disorientating social or imagined realities. This section illustrated the importance of repetition for the survival of culturally produced artifacts. In opposition to the biomass of genetics, the world of memetics also relies upon the generation of organized inorganic matter¹⁶ within which the record of human history resides and for which the process of selection is no longer only the struggle for life itself¹⁷, but an artificial one as well.

The manipulation of genetics is currently one of the main features of various theologies of trans- and post-humanisms, especially within the realm of bio-hacking, gene therapy, or the integration of the human body with machines. The main aim consists in enhancing the living condition of individuals, and even transcending the limitations of human biology, especially death. When Rose refers to “digitizing life itself”¹⁸, it can be interpreted either as the digital imitation of processes such as computer viruses, which mimic or simulate the behavior of organisms and viruses, or as a prelude to memetics, in which the cultural replicators have found haven in digital technology, away from the human mind and “traditional” replicators such as writing or art. The first point made by Rose and Colonel is that the genetic code carries no information on human culture. This has been preserved by the technology that humans have created, from the invention of ancient writing to today’s computer and information technologies. However, much has been lost in history due to different reasons. Because of this loss, cultures have gained a narrative due to selective cultural forces rooted in the replication of memes and their carriers (books, paintings, historical artifacts, and so on). Such a selection empowered by shared beliefs in a common history set the foundation for individuals to act on. This is perhaps why history books are written as if history itself was set and revealing itself to humans, even though the selection forces are blind. A different world is simply inconceivable to the individual’s imagination. More importantly, history itself is a selection, and could be rewritten in an unaccountable number of ways, depending upon selection criteria. If we had access to unlimited information about the past, perhaps many events would require a rewriting. This is a fundamental point made by the characters.

¹⁶ http://www.academia.edu/36553634/Bernard_Stiegler_On_the_Need_for_a_Hyper-Materialist_Epistemology_2018

¹⁷ <https://read.dukeupress.edu/boundary-2/article-abstract/44/1/191/97532/On-the-Origin-of-Aisthesis-by-Means-of-Artificial?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

¹⁸ Also see: <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/ch/pdf/digitalization-in-life-sciences.pdf>

Today's technological sphere has disrupted the selection processes created by society and at the same time has granted the power to have access to an exponentially growing amount of data, which is today sometimes called Big Data and Information Overload. Humans have access to limitless "junk" data, which is simply meaningless information that has the potential to become meaningful under the appropriate conditions. It should be pointed out, that "junk" data is not exclusively cultural. It is informational. It could be also called noise. Moreover, from the biological perspective, DNA itself is not composed of only useful information that has been carefully selected by evolutionary forces, rather most of human DNA does not code protein sequences, which Thierry Bardini describes as "junk DNA" in *Junkware*¹⁹. The same holds true for culture. Most of it is composed of useless, but recyclable information. Both Rose and Colonel believe in the possibility of filtering out the junk and organizing history or information in a way that would be utopic, which is to further stimulate social progress. The unspoken belief concerns the idea that if only the junk was filtered away, then society would have access to what is necessary in order to maximize its efficiency. Modern technological society values speed foremost. The idea of "slowing down" in any form is a boogeyman that brings dismay and despair to those, who most dearly adore Progress with a capital P.

An important point made in the dialogue above is about creating context, instead of controlling or censoring it. This is manifestly indicative of current debates concerning post-truth, social media and information bubbles, and the threat carried by a hindrance to Progress or "natural selection", which is to say that not the fittest replicators are replicated, but rather ones that should have theoretically been eliminated thanks to selection pressures and filtration. A series of conflicting beliefs and behaviors are described by the characters in order to drive home the point that something is deeply disturbing about the modern informationally saturated world. The supposed solution would be to limit the

¹⁹ "Junkware is about our contemporary cyberculture; a specific culture, as in tissue culture and pop culture. I argue, then, that it is essentially a culture of junk (and not of trash, as formerly thought). Strange characters and trivial objects populate the second part, linking humanity and its future, cultish science-fiction authors and lonely terrorists, stylish architects and writers, junkies, avant-garde bioartists and French philosophers with you and me, today's disaffected subjects, the targets of viral marketing, bad eating habits, spam of all kinds, addictions of all types. Junk is the organizing principle of that which cannot be organized, the operating mode of that which has no function (yet). Junk is, and, I claim, junk rules. Welcome to a culture of junk." (Bardini, p. 24).

freedoms that have led to such a disarray, which is blamed as a cause for all the “junk” information around us.

The S3 project is of course a fictional one, where a large scale data management system is implemented, and digital information (news reports, online posts, etc.) is filtered at a global level in such a way that fits the contexts created by those in control. This results in the power to manipulate human will. In other words, it filters out user-generated data in a way that fits any information the program deems irrelevant or relevant to its narrative of “benefiting” humankind. Reshaped information by an automated system significantly impacts the formation of an individual, including their behavior and decision making, which is to say that human will is manipulated. So, the idea of Selection for Societal Sanity is based on the presumption that the information environment is mostly noise, useless, meaningless or “junk” data. Selection is needed in order to preserve social order, since the opposite would only leave humanity with a type of historic chaos, a form of information overload applied to a common history or identity, which would result in a lack of identity or at least a flux of postmodern hyper-identities and simulacra. Subsequently, order and chaos are synonymous to sanity and insanity, it can be established that selection, which is filtration, is a process needed not only for the survival of culture, but also for the preservation of its narrative or imagined reality. It would be done in such a way that is “sane”, which is to say reason-able, calculable, or rooted in order, as opposed to one that is not sane, irrational, unpredictable, and which uproots established power relations²⁰. Any accomplishments or progress is under a constant threat of loss due to entropy, forgetting, or other natural forces (flood, fire, earthquakes, etc.). Consequently, social achievements, inventions, and artifacts need special care, since they cannot reproduce biologically.

The only method of reproduction explored by the game is based on Richard Dawkin’s memetics, where a selection of cultural milestones is “passed down” to later generations, and the noise gets filtered out through a selection or contextualization process. This suggests a certain guardianship and duty, or care, of Philosopher-Kings ensnared by the idea of Progress or a group of AI called by the name The Patriots in the game’s narrative. This may refer to history books, which “filter” all original historical artifacts such as letters, books, pots, weapons, art, and so on. The question of losing such a socio-historic filter is posed. The

²⁰ It is worth noting that Religion is concerned with order and Science is concerned with power.

Internet²¹ allows for the preservation of all generated and uploaded content, and no program of necessary lectures is granted to its users. Any filters are relative and based on each user's personal preferences, history, and situation. This is supposed to "slow down" progress because of a lack of direction or order that would mimic heredity, which is another way of saying that a loss of identity is immanent. Instead of only achievements, milestones, and accomplishments, digital society has unmasked human nature as a hot mess full of gossip, rumors, and irrationality. Given the fact that history itself isn't a perfect preservation of original documents, artifacts, and works, but an interpretation and prepared selection done by an elite (rich and literate men of Western Society), it can be said that history is not necessarily censored, but continuously re-contextualized within the ramifications of whatever contemporary society may value or find interesting. There is no need to censor history if it can be framed in such a way that would render it insignificant, such as all of the events that have been described by Robert Burton at the beginning of this article are insignificant to most people today.

The data management system from the fictional universe of Metal Gear can be interpreted as a metaphor for modern systems implemented by corporations such as Google, Apple, Facebook, and Amazon and other actors of the "Capitalocene".²² The Selection for Societal Sanity is a process currently undergoing, but instead of it being centralized, it is decentralized inasmuch as the criteria for selection radically quantify user experience. Each user is "fit" into the neoliberal capitalist information management system that benefits the owners of technological capital, which includes social media. The user's own data, behavior and preferences, are increasingly quantified, made calculable, and thus profitable, in such a way as to make all information which does not generate profit into noise. So, a selection is made to show the user information the algorithms deem to be the best for maximizing profit, which usually results in polarized content and confirmation of biases built-in *a priori* by the developers and programmers, which has been extensively presented in Cathy O'Neil's *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (2016). The logical consequence of living in a mixed reality – one composed of social relations made intimately at work, school, or community, with another reality composed of a diet

²¹ http://www.e-edukacja.net/trzecia/referaty/30_e-edukacja.pdf
http://www.dbc.wroc.pl/Content/15608/J_Pondel_M_Pondel_Pozyskiwanie_informacji_z_Internetu.pdf

²² "the Capitalocene signifies capitalism as a way of organizing nature—as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology." Jason W. Moore (ed.), *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, PM Press: 2016. p. 6.

of “liked” social media feeds and pages on Facebook, Twitter, or based on search history, geographical location, language, and any other quantifiable data, with which the user is continuously connected to via notifications, alerts, or simple browsing due to boredom or a lack of stimulation. This resulted in a shockwave of techno-reality increasingly influencing non-technological reality, which is to mean the social reality not traditionally mediated by new media²³. This problem exacerbates *new barbarianism*, which is the inability to think and a growing anxiety stemming from xenophobia and remedying itself with scapegoats. It is increasingly self-referential, replicable or memetic, and opportunistically “hacking” human psychology, especially the emotion of fear and at the same time exploiting self-doubt, despair, and low self-esteem. At the core, this is where post-truth, alternative facts, and fake news stem from. Post-truth is simply social truth, a type of truth that makes false statements valid due to emotional and social factors. At the same time such systems can be compromised by malignant actors, such as Governments or States sabotaging other nations with the opportunities presented by GAFA & co.²⁴

Filter failure, or information overload, is problematic at the level of individuation. Humanity needs no censors, since each individual is their own censor. This of course refers not only to taboos or cultural conditioning, but also to technological conditioning and what is made possible by the current dominant ideologies of the Capitalocene. Humans have been engaged in what Bernard Stiegler calls *exosomatization*. The process of natural selection is one that generates more biomass (living things) and necromass (dead things) through hereditary process of reproduction. In addition to this, a process of artificial selection has been generating a necromass made of inorganic organized matter, which is technology and other supplements such as language, hammers, shoes, and “smart” technology. According to Stiegler, this process is about three million

²³ See the Wall Street Journal’s simulation of opposing political beliefs and the Facebook feed content generated: <http://graphics.wsj.com/blue-feed-red-feed/>

²⁴ This currently haunts the Trump presidency, since accusations of Russian interference with the 2016 election is ever-present. It also applies the European Union if we take into consideration the current “information war” between the EU and Russia. Other obvious uses include the use of social media as recruitment hubs for DAESH/ISIS or the spread of viral malignant content. Just as a hand can be made into a fist to inflict damage or it can be used for a handshake as an offer of friendship, so too is it the case with technology, since it is fundamentally utilitarian. However: “Technology is not neutral. We’re inside of what we make, and it’s inside of us. We’re living in a world of connections — and it matters which ones get made and unmade.” Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women : The Reinvention of Nature* (1991), pp.149-181.

years old, and consists as a form of life that “is incomplete in its material form, that is, in its organogenesis” (Stiegler 2018, p. 390).

Exosomatization requires a perpetual production of new artificial organs for survival, which result in an individuation at the level of individual organs such as the eye or ear, the individuation of social organizations such as a tribe, nation, or corporation, and the generation of artificial organs, which are technological. This requires education – to learn how to speak, count, play an instrument, re-tell the oral history of one’s culture, continue traditions, or generate the ability to care and take care. The creation of new organs is a collective activity, where each individual must learn the words of their language and exchange with the tools and symbols of their culture, and this is called a circuit of trans-individuation, which is governed by solidarity or socio-politically within the domain of “magic” or a belief in a supernatural order. Control of the destiny of social groups has been alienated by social media. Individuals are thus losing the capacity to care. It is hence being exteriorized. Accordingly, the “history” of a community is lost, because the know-how of living in a collective has been transferred to data management systems. So, the health of society has been jeopardized by the exteriorization of human skills and abilities, such as filtration. This is culturally encoded. It teaches the individual about the We, including the taboos of the collective.

According to Brook Gladstone, reality is not made up of “facts”, but rather “Reality is what forms after we filter, arrange, and prioritize those facts and marinate them in our values and traditions” (Gladstone, p. 2). The notion of a shared reality is being degraded, which is the one that a lack of belief in causes its disappearance, as opposed to a material reality, which exists regardless of human imagination. It is one that is psychologically organized by stereotypes, which hardwire the neural pathways of the brain, and thus shape the organ of the mind, which exaggerate the exotic and familiar, and have the purpose of filtering the reality of existence into a narrower field of vision, which is to say it forms a gated reality. This imagined reality is fundamental to well-being, and deeply held beliefs are strongly guarded to resist change. The brain itself is a reward mechanism that has developed in order to detect threats and danger and avoid them. Dangers include information that is conflicting with personally held beliefs and narratives. Lying to yourself is a defense mechanism that helps to cope with conflicting beliefs or information, or with cognitive dissonance.

Digital society is composed of not only human agents, but also of AI, twitterbots, and the like. Social media has transformed users into active participants in creating and disseminating information. The gatekeepers of the

past no longer filter information for an audience, and thus there is no selection process that sorts out what is appropriate, reliable, or truthful. Those, who create content also simultaneously filter and interpret it, and what is demanded for is contextualization, even if it is done so with hashtags or crowdsourced trust ratings. Users directly influence social media by constructing, filtering, and responding to its content, which means that it is not an external force, but one that is bluntly within the control of users. To rephrase it, social media is an organization, a social organ, that is mediated through artificial organs (smartphones, tablets, computers, Twitter algorithms, etc.), and with which biological organs are shaped – i.e. the brain. This perspective, which is part of Stiegler’s method of organology, includes the mutual interaction and necessity of each organ because of exosomatization, one cannot function without the other. Thus the question of filtration is fundamentally a question of knowledge, of being able to think and contextualize, within the process of trans-individuation.

Collective organizations help with filtering, prioritizing information, and with setting goals (like learning to play an instrument). A lack of filtration leads to a lack of individuation. With this, absolute freedom, which is understood as freedom from filtration, would bring absolute noise, since it would sabotage the process of trans-individuation. Cultures themselves evolve, or individuate, over time, even though they are fundamentally in opposition to novelty, because of a *care* for tradition. Unconventional beliefs or behavior need to be either reconciled with the core values of a culture or a new collective would need to individuate itself. Each individuation comes with a set of limitations, which are culturally transmitted via the acquisition of language, learning how to write, and participating in social reality (religious rites, traditions such as preparing a certain meal or dish, or behaviors in regards to other members of society, such as kissing the cheek as a greeting or engaging in marriage). Some violations are deemed as a harmless but embarrassing *faux pas*, while others are of the kind that demand the death of the violator (such as homosexuality or blasphemy).

Conclusion

The problem of filtration failure or information overload has been presented in the context of the Selection for Societal Sanity plan that originated in the narrative of the video game *Metal Gear Solid 2*. Cultural filtration of beliefs and formation of behaviors is a recontextualization process that holds the power to shape individuals and influence their decisions and behavior. This occurs in a

context of information overload, which is filtration failure of meaningless data or noise, a lack of disposable time that is an occupation of the *psyche* called time poverty, and a rise of alienation from a collective reality into a state of new barbarianism. Through the process of exosomatization individuation takes place. It is the connecting or sharing of biological organs, artificial organs, and social organs. It is a system open to the unpredictable, the uncountable, and an imagined shared future. The imagined reality is one composed of belief in a supernatural order, such as Human Rights, Freedom, or Money. The lack of a future is one that is at once a form of Symbolic Misery. Trans-individuation circuits have been disrupted by the speed of obsolescence and the individuation process has been exploited by hyperindustrial market drives, and as such the *techne* of the Capitalocene is at once a tool and a weapon that can at once benefit as well as harm society. This results in an alienation from a collective, which is commonly praised as individualism. However, a collective melting into conformity would also be a disruption of individuation, since they would be subservient to their closed system, especially automated informational systems introduced by Big Data, which is not free from bias. It also polarizes its users and exacerbates defense mechanisms protecting cognition from dissonance. All behavior becomes acceptable behavior, because the dominant ideology thoughtlessly utilizes new technology to incentivize profit over accountability. Counterculture is a commodity. What is relevant, true, and reliable is information that has undergone the process of selection through long circuits of trans-individuation, which are productive of knowledge and desire.

The information age, and the digital culture it subsists, reduces or interrupts slow circuits of individuation, which results in an inability to produce knowledge and a prevalence of artificial stupidity, which is to say it is senseless. The values of the market, of profit and financiering, provide short cuts for desire, which is reduced to impulsive drives designed to manipulate the decisions and behaviors of members of society. This results in a lack of a feeling of belonging. The remedy would partly be in reinstating long circuits in opposition to Selection for Societal Sanity, which is mainly concerned with maintaining an increasing “rate of evolution”, which takes Progress as increasing the extension of computing power. The value of freedom becomes an appropriated one, since the freedom of choice in digital social reality is in fact an illusion exploiting the patterns of consumption and the function of desire, which is inherently tied with selection that is part of perception and a question of knowledge. The selection process results in a fractured mosaic of homogenized individual pasts and times of consciousness and

unconsciousness, which results in a collection of Ones submitted to cognitive technology. This recaps how freedom and cultural limitation that cultivates individual desire can be approached as problematic, since trans-individuation situates the question of cultural filters and human desire, including values, objectives, and morality, within the problem of technological disturbance on the organology of society and its members. Some questions concern that of digital society, memes, post-truth, and filter failure as information overload, which is a dataset for selecting and creating new re-contextualizations. Absolute freedom, understood as a lack of accountability, needs to be socially controlled so as to facilitate the long circuits of trans-individuation as well as ensure that desire is not limited to its reduced drive state, and for ensuring a freedom rooted in dialogue and cultural exchange within its symbolic order. This includes the education, the functioning of reason and knowledge, so an alternative reality or future can be imagined, which includes both the I's and We's of culture.

To conclude, Selection for Societal Sanity is a concept drawn from a video game that can be used philosophically in examining the condition of cultural filtration. Metaphorically, it is an implementation of a large scale data management system, which harnesses the condition of filter failure in order to manipulate human behaviors and decisions. This undermines collective formations of identity and alienates individuals as singularities from each other, who fall into a state of ill-being. Automated computational processes quantify human behavior and decisions, while reflecting and reinforcing those patterns, which benefit the dominant ideology of hyperindustrial society, producing any threats to power structures as impotent. The ability to control patterns of consumption, as well as the formation of individual consciousnesses and unconsciousnesses, of memory and the *psyche*, is the condition of *new barbarianism*. To oppose it would be to implement a selection that supports the feeling of familiarity and friendliness into social life, a vigilance for the continuous constant engagement and encouragement of common ground shared by all, even if it is on the mutual suffering experienced by those afflicted by the Capitalocene of Western culture, with the aim to cultivate self-love needed for the functioning of community and civic life. We may need to select for values that breed “a feeling together”, instead of those which would only benefit the doctrine of calculable Progress.

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