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Pharmacologies of Texts and Images

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Pharmacologies of Images and Texts : Prague, June 2013.

To begin with I would like to highlight how the problematic that I am raising here today relates to a set of concerns within which I find myself currently, as the Dean of the Graduate School of Creative Arts and Media, an initiative which brings together four Colleges on the island of Ireland North and South students undertake PhDs in the creative arts and media. The problematic of the relationship between ‘textual representation’ and ‘visual representation’ is omnipresent. At the Graduate School we have brought this under a research cluster that we call Ekphrasis. Within Art Colleges in Europe at the moment a tension between the establishment of practice based research in the creative arts and more traditional humanities based research, this was borne out again recently at the SHARE conference in Brussels in May 2013. At the centre of the debate is the relationship between the construction of knowledge at PhD level through practice and theory. Therefore, the problematic of the relationship between theory and practice, or to oversimplify it for a moment between ‘text’ and ‘image’ is one of my central concerns. I will use the term Ekphrasis to refer to this translation from one medium to another from text to image or image to text. The term Ekphrasis will be used here loosely to encapsulate the relationship between language, text and image. However, what I wish to point to here today is the complexity this relationship and to do so I will turn to my own area of current research which is investigating the work of Bernard Stiegler. This paper, will, rather than give an exhaustive account of Ekphrasis, attempt to mobilise Stiegler’s latest works and some of its key concepts, namely Pharmacology and individuation, in the hope of promoting discussion through a set of questions it raises in relation to the nature of the text and the nature of the image. The concept of Ekphrasis has a specific historical trajectory, from the Greek *ek phrasis*, literally to ‘out’ ‘speak’, to ‘speak out’, to name an object, to more contemporary usages that define Ekphrasis as the ‘verbal representation of visual representation’ (James Heffernan 1991). Plato in *The Phaedrus*, which I will return to at some length later on, alludes

to a comparison between writing and images, whilst the word Ekphrasis is not used directly in the dialogue, writing is compared to painting whose works present themselves ‘as if they are alive’, ‘it continues to signify the same thing forever’. The commonality between texts and images is therefore established early on in the history of philosophy.

The work of Bernard Stiegler and his group Ars Industrialis have recently become more and more prevalent within media studies and contemporary critical theory, critical theory meant in the widest sense from Frankfurt School Critical theory to French philosophy. His development of a particular critique of contemporary uses of technology and new media is finding more and more currency. His recent works on pharmacology are direct developments of previous concerns explored in his first major work *Technics and Time Three Volume* which have now appeared in English, the third volume appeared in 2010. However, for this paper, I would like to focus firstly on the key concept of pharmacology which he been developing since the publication of *De la Pharmacologie : Ce qui fait que la vie vaut la peine d’être vecue* in 2010. In order to give a succinct and clear exposition of the development of what Stiegler terms ‘de la pharmacologie positive’ it is necessary for me to revisit the development of the notion of pharmacology. So What is Pharmacology? The brief response, is the study of the poison as cure or cure the as poison, once could think of the dosages of the pharmacological product. However, this would oversimplify, the philosophical nuances which Stiegler plays through by returning to the analysis of Derrida and Plato of the role of the pharmakon. Coupled with this philosophical trajectory of the analysis of writing as pharmakon Stigler expounds on a concept of technology inspired by the research in anthropology and Le RoiGouhran and the study of the Mode D’Existence des Objets Technique by Simondon. As we shall see shortly, writing is a privileged example of the pharmakon, but in addition, the advent of digital technologies and writing poses specific problematics in relation to reading and writing. This will shall return to

in a moment. Nonetheless, as I stated previously, my concern here will be the focus on the philosophical concept of pharmakon as a means of access to the problematic of Ekphrasis. In order to do so I will begin by exploring the notion of the text, an issue which Stiegler raises in relation to reading in general and one which I have developed elsewhere as digital surface reading. Once we have established the problematic of the pharmacology in reading I would like to attempt to raise the question of the pharmakon in relation to other partner of Ekphrasis the image.

The paper is therefore, broken down into 4 distinct parts, the first part will explore the pharmacology of writing, taking the advent of digital writing as a pharmacological process which has inherent difficulties with it, the second part will outline the philosophical basis of the Pharmakon, the third part will explore the relationship between texts and images and finally I will look into more detail at one Artistic practice which challenges any simple opposition between text and image.

Part I

I would like first to explore how reading and writing are presented as a problematic for Stiegler, his exploration of the problematic of writing starts out by referring to research which has become dominant in the US in relation to reading and hyper attention, reading and distraction. In terms of the pharmacology this could be understood as the 'poisonous' aspect of the pharmakon. The rejection of writing in the Phaedrus by Plato is based upon, according to Derrida, of an understanding of writing as 'poisonous' because writing is a form of automatic memory (Hypomnesis). There is an interesting parallel which Stiegler develops in relation to the rejection of digital reading as a form of surface reading.

Catherine Hayles (2007) in a text entitled *Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive modes* sets out to understand why students in third level education are reading less and less in the humanities. She demonstrates that there is a cognitive divide between generations. *Generation M* are finding it more difficult to read novels because of their inability to attend to the texts for sustained

periods of reading. Hayles (2007) argues that there is an opposition between the types of attention involved in different media, print and digital, and that reading as an activity requires deep attention while the use of digital technologies necessitates hyper-attention. The skipping from screen to screen reflects a more profound problematic of inattention:

Deep attention, the cognitive style traditionally associated with the humanities, is characterized by concentrating on a single object for long periods (say, a novel by Dickens), ignoring outside stimuli while so engaged, preferring a single information stream, and having a high tolerance for long focus times. Hyper-attention is characterized by switching focus rapidly among different tasks, preferring multiple information streams, seeking a high level of stimulation, and having a low tolerance for boredom (Hayles, 2007, p. 187).

The hyper-attention involved in switching rapidly from task to task is, therefore, a form of inattention, leading to the inability to concentrate for sustained periods of time. Hayles (2007) points to the development of a generation in America where deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is on the increase. *Ritalin*, the drug used to treat children with ADHD stimulates the brain so that the activity is increased, the drug acting as cortical stimulant. Hyperactivity is therefore sustained, to avoid boredom setting in. If Carr (2011) *The Shallows : What the Internet is doing to Our Brains* and Bauerlein (2008) *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Stupefies Young People and Jeopardises our Future* highlight hyper-attention or inattention as part of digital reading, Hayles (2007) links it to a wider issue in relation to digital technologies and the development of other forms of inattention. However, Hayles (2007) does not dismiss technologies as the ‘scapegoat’ but attempts to offer examples of how hyper-attention and attention could be developed as specific pedagogical strategies, where e-learning or blended learning could harness the technologies of hyperactivity for positive use. The emergence of serious games, for example, highlights the positive learning opportunities afforded by the use of gaming technologies in education. Positive aspects thus include the ability to handle multiple tasks and to strategise. The positive

therapeutic conditions are possible, therefore, within the *pharmakon* itself. Hyper-attention and attention should not therefore be seen as mutually exclusive; ADHD may be an extreme point on the continuum of inattention, yet hyper-attention linked to digital technologies could be used to engage new generations into more sustained attention. She concludes by stating:

Whether inclined toward deep or hyper-attention, toward one side or another of the generational divide separating print from digital culture, we cannot afford to ignore the frustrating, zesty, and intriguing ways in which the two cognitive modes interact. Our responsibilities as educators, not to mention our position as practitioners of the literary arts, require nothing less (Hayles, 2007, p. 198).

The design of reading activities in higher education must include educational opportunities which enable the two cognitive forms to interact. However, the problematic of reading in the twenty first century is not just about cognition. Reading has also become part of a powerful and commercially successful ‘reading industry’, a term coined by Giffard (2009) to describe an industry which seeks the traces we leave on the web as part of our daily reading activity and offers them as a good to be bought, sold and monetized.

The relationship between *prelectio* and digital reading is that both are based on reading for information and not reading for content. The type of reading offered by early pre-web screen reading is akin to the monastic *prelectio* for word separation. As Giffard (2009) points out:

Before the web, in the practice of reading on a screen, the text is not the objective of the reader. Rather is it a control reading, a certain way to decipher and survey the informations (sic) and operations of the computer. And reading is submitted to another activity that is the real goal. Credit card, word processor, phototypesetting are examples of such a “reading on a screen”. Umberto Eco has said “word processor e una machina molto spirituale” but reading functionalities of word processor are not spirituals at all” (Section “Digital reading is reading”, para. 4).

Reading on screen is akin to the *prelectio*, reading for information, a control reading to ensure that the information being portrayed is correct or incorrect. This functional reading is not a spiritual one of meditation i.e., *lectio*. Giffard (2009) argues that this form of reading for

information is inherent in any screen reading and is now so widespread as to be second nature to our relationship with digital technologies. The affordances of the technologies in place lead to the predominance of a *prelectio*.

Embedded in ‘digital reading’ is a form of hyper-attention because the reader is distracted from the principal task at hand. The model of comprehension of the text is interrupted by the technology itself; there is a distraction built into the very interface of the digital technology being used. The reader is cognitively aware of choices being made or not made at the same time that reading takes place. This leads to what is referred to as cognitive overflow. Reading in itself is a highly challenging cognitive activity – a young child learning to read is the proof of how challenging it can be – and in addition to this complex cognitive activity, digital reading intersperses supplementary cognitive demands such as hyperlinks. Hyperlinks, which may or may not be clicked on, act as a distraction from the principal task at hand. In addition, there is the distraction inherent to the very interface, the technology, the screen renewing, the backlight, the layout of the page on screen and often the use of poor typography. The challenges of reading online lead to distraction:

As opposed to the relative linearity of printed text, the very appearance of digital information at once presents both new richness and new challenges for the online reader. The fluid, multimodal nature of digital information enables online readers to become immersed in a subject, both visually and verbally. Even as this presentation of material in several different modes provides the reader with multiple points of entry into a subject, it also opens the door to great distraction. It further requires that the reader understand how to evaluate visual information and make meaning in and across several different modalities (Wolf & Barzillai, 2009, p. 135).

All of these lead to a distraction within the distraction, a type of hyper-attention which leads to a surface reading of the text, and this constant distraction is an object of criticism, as discussed above. The distraction impinges on the reader’s ability to move from surface to deep reading, a reading that enables reflection and understanding, and which for Saint

Augustine allowed the development of the spirit (Outler, 1955). But Giffard (2011) also posits a positive alternative to this deterministic vision of technology:

Evoquons enfin une autre orientation de Carr et ce qu'il faut bien appeler sa vision déterministe de la technique. L'auteur semble prisonnier de l'hypothèse de McLuhan selon laquelle le medium définit le message. D'autre part, il n'envisage pas la possibilité que le lecteur, par un régime d'exercices appropriés, puisse conquérir son autonomie par rapport au dispositif technique, voire le détourner. Le formatage de la lecture par l'internet est la logique qui s'impose à l'exclusion de toute autre" (Giffard, 2011, section "Une vision déterministe de la technique, para. 1).

Lastly to mention Carr's other orientation and which must be called his determinist vision of technology. The author seems to be a prisoner of McLuhan's hypothesis according to which the medium is the message. In addition, he does not envisage the possibility that through a mechanism of appropriate exercises the reader could attain their autonomy in relation to the technological dispositive, or even overcome it. The formatting of reading by the internet is a logic which imposes itself to the exclusion of any other.

In opposition to the outright rejection of digital reading as a form of surface reading Giffard (2011) is proposing to go beyond Carr's (2011) deterministic view of digital technologies and offers positive alternatives.

To further explore how this positive alternative may develop, it is necessary to place the debate within a philosophical context of the notion of the text: reading and writing as a form of problematic. Whilst this is a well-rehearsed argument within contemporary philosophy it is necessary here to revisit a recent development in the understanding of writing as a pharmakon (Ricoeur, 2004). Stiegler (2010) has developed what he terms a positive pharmacology or therapeutic. In the quotation from Giffard (2011) above we can glimpse how this positive pharmacology could come to fruition in relation to digital reading. The criticism which is made of Carr's (2011) position could be summarised in terms of an over emphasis upon the negative aspect of digital reading

which leads the positing of surface reading, the *prelectio*, as the ultimate end point of all digital reading.

In the background to Stiegler's (2010) analysis of a positive pharmacology is the analysis of writing as a *pharmakon*. Stiegler (2010) retraces the philosophical debate in relation to reading and writing as problematic back through Derrida (1981) to Plato. There is an irony here, as Plato was opposed to writing as a *pharmakon*, something which was not good for the brain and not good for memory. Analyses of digital reading show a similar reticence: digital reading, it is argued, leads to a form of reading which is also bad for the brain because it leads to a form of hyper-attention. Derrida (1981) in his work *Dissemination* wrote a long essay entitled *Plato's Pharmacy*. This text has become a central part of the canon of philosophical texts in relation to the development of Derrida's (1981) shift from *grammatology* to *deconstruction*. In this essay Derrida (1981) gives a sustained micro-reading of Plato's (370 BC/1985) *Phaedrus*, with a critique of Plato's position on writing as a *pharmakon*, that is, a cure and a poison. *Pharmakon* is the etymological root of *pharmacology*, the study of cure as poison and poison as cure. Writing, for Plato, is a poison in the sense that writing divorces speech from meaning. The absence of the interlocutor leads to a position whereby the text could say what the writer did not intend it to say. Writing enables the *misconstruction* of meaning; the absence of the speaker leads to *untruth*. Derrida (1981) describes this as the *phonocentric* position that Plato holds. Writing is also a poison in relation to *memory/reminding*:

The fact is that this invention [writing] will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned it because they will not need to exercise their memories [...], being able to rely on what is written, using the stimulus of external marks that are alien to themselves [...] rather than, from within, their own unaided powers to call things to mind [...]. So it's not a remedy for memory, but for reminding, that you discovered (*oukoun mnēmēs, alla hupomnēseōs, pharmakon hēures*). And as for wisdom [...], you're equipping your pupils with only a semblance [...] of it, not with truth (Plato, 370 BC/1985, 274e-275b, cited in Derrida, 1981, pp. 104- 105, emphasis in original).

The *pharmakon* is here played out in its ambiguity, it is not a cure for memory (mnemes) but for reminding (hypomnesis), this latter refers to the act of technical regurgitation, an artificial memory, a mechanism of reminding. It is therefore to repeat without thought. The distinction which Plato/Socrates makes is between memory and artificial memory. True memory takes the form of the dialectic, *dialogos* through which truth can disclose itself as *alethea*. For Plato writing does not enable anamnesis, true memory, but enables a mechanical repetition which does not lead to the truth. Writing is a form of *hypomnesis*, an artificial holding place of memory, a mechanism for repetition and not thought. This is where the ambiguity of the word *pharmakon* comes to the fore. Derrida's (1981) critique of Plato and by extension of all Western metaphysics is grounded in his criticism of Plato's rejection of writing. However, more recently with the work of Stiegler (2010) this criticism was revisited, and the opposition between anamnesis and *hypomnesis* as outlined by Derrida (1981) now leads to a positive pharmacology, the remedy. Derrida (1981) never envisaged the curative aspect of pharmacology, the positive pharmacology which Stiegler (2010) posits. Stiegler (2010) develops an understanding of the *pharmakon* as cure and poison, building upon Derrida's (1981) identification of the semantics of remedy that are present in Plato's text:

We hope to display in the most striking manner the regular, ordered polysemy that has, through skewing, indetermination, or overdetermination, but without mistranslation, permitted the rendering of the same word by "remedy", "recipe", "poison", "drug", "philter", etc. It will also be seen to what extent the malleable unity of this concept, or rather its rules and the strange logic that links it with its signifier, has been dispersed, masked, obliterated, and rendered almost unreadable not only by the imprudence or empiricism of the translators, but first and foremost by the redoubtable, irreducible difficulty of translation (Derrida, 1981, p. 77).

The *pharmakon* as cure and poison demonstrates the difficulty of language to hold a primacy of meaning, a unity of signification. Indeed the *pharmakon* demonstrates the dispersal of the signifier which is the

very basis of Derrida's (1981) deconstruction. Derrida's (1981) primary challenge is that Plato's critique of writing as used by the Sophists relates to the idea that it is essentially a poison for reminding and not for memory.

For Stiegler (2010), writing is the very condition of thinking itself, a process of meta-categorisation which is essential to a reflective, recursive process:

Le pharmakon, qu'est l'écriture – comme hypomnēsis, hypomnēmaton, c'est-à-dire mémoire artificielle – est ce dont Platon combat les effets empoisonnants et artificieux en y opposant l'anamnēsis : la pensée "par soi-même", c'est-à-dire l'autonomie de la pensée" (p. 13, emphasis in original).

The pharmakon, which is writing – as hypomnesis, hypomnematon, that is to say artificial memory – is that of which Plato fights the noxious and artificial effects by opposing it to anamnesis: thinking for oneself, i.e., the autonomy of thought.

Writing is poisonous because it is a form of artificial memory which leads to forgetfulness, memory is exteriorised in the tekhnē itself as a form of mnemotechnics. The affordances of technology for digital reading lead to a form of forgetfulness, all technology leads to a form of forgetfulness. Digital technologies function as placeholders for memory, in the same way as, for Plato, writing functions as placeholder for speech. For Stiegler (2010), there is an inherent link between the development of technologies and a proletarianisation of knowledge which leads ultimately to a loss of knowledge:

A cet égard, le pharmakon constitue un facteur de prolétarianisation de l'esprit (de perte de savoir) tout comme la machine-outil prolétarianisera les corps des ouvriers producteurs (les privera de leur savoir-faire) (p. 40, emphasis in original).

In this way, the Pharmakon constitutes a factor of proletarianisation of the spirit (loss of knowledge) just as the machine-tool proletarianised the bodies of the manual workers (Which took away their know how).

The consequence of the pharmakon is the loss of knowledge. The concept of forgetfulness which Plato highlights in relation to writing is

developed and expanded by Stiegler (2010) in relation to all forms of technology. For Stiegler (2010) the loss of knowledge leads to the pharmacological situation representative of the contemporary situation in the West: financial, political and social crisis. However, it is necessary to point out that this should not be misconstrued as a rejection of the technology of writing or technology itself.

Stiegler (2010) is mindful of the current of thought which uses technology as the scapegoat, as a *pharmakos*, for all the failures and shortcomings of society, a current of thought which rejects the technologies (of the spirit). This trend does not take into account that the very spirit itself is at the origin and constitutive of the *pharmakon* or the *pharma-logico*:

Rien n'est plus légitime que ces luttes philosophiques contre ce qui, dans la technique ou la technologie, est toxique pour la vie de l'esprit. Mais face à ce qui, dans le *pharmakon*, constitue la possibilité d'un affaiblissement de l'esprit, ces luttes choisissent aussi d'ignorer la constitution originellement *pharma-logique* de l'esprit lui-même. Elles choisissent d'ignorer la pharmacologie de l'esprit en faisant du *pharmakon* en général un *pharmakos* : un bouc émissaire – celui des pratiques sacrificielles en Grèce ancienne polythéiste, que l'on trouve également en Judée, ou ce *pharmakos* est chargé, comme le sera le Christ, de toutes fautes qu'il emmène vers une région inaccessible (Stiegler, 2010, p. 40, emphasis in original).

Nothing is more legitimate than the philosophical disputes against that which, in the technic or the technology, are toxic for the spirit. But against which, in the *pharmakon*, constitutes the possibility of the weakening of the spirit/mind, the disputes choose to ignore the original *pharma-logic* constitution of this spirit itself. They choose to ignore the pharmacology of the spirit by making the *pharmakon* in general a *pharmakos*: a scapegoat, the scapegoat of the polytheist ancient Greece, which is also found in Judea, where the *pharmakos* is charged, as will Christ, with all the faults that he brings him to an inaccessible region.

Stiegler (2010) contends that technology is part and parcel of who we are and writing is a form of technology which enables reflection to develop, that there are elements of technology which are poisonous to the mind, but there is a pharmacology of the spirit. Writing, Painting,

Drawing are all forms of exteriorization which are part of a process of individuation and transindividuation. As he states in 2008

To write a manuscript is to organize thought by consigning it outside in the form of traces, that is, symbols, whereby thought can reflect on itself, *actually* constituting itself, making itself repeatable and transmissible: it becomes knowledge. To sculpt to paint, to draw is to go forth to an encounter with the tangibility of the visible, it is to with one's hands while giving to be seen, that is, to be seen again: it is train the eye of the beholder and, thus, to sculpt, to paint, to draw **this** eye- it is to transform it.

Looking becomes a process of reconstitution and transformation, just like with reading there is a process of reconstitution of writing, to read you have to be able to write, to write you have to be able to read. This is something akin to the informed reader who can reconstitute the writing process through reading, the informed onlooker can also reconstitute the painting. The placeholder for memory of writing is akin to the placeholder for memory in painting. Painting is perhaps an easy point of comparison, the gesture of the painter is held within the strokes and traces on the canvas, the onlooker, informed onlooker can reconstitute the gests. However, this for the painter the relationship is different, the hypomnesis, is contained within the painting itself, the gesture is exteriorized through the painting itself. It acts as a trace of the corporal memory of the painter which is different to the relationship that the onlooker has with the painting. We individuate ourselves according to Stiegler by 'making the passage to the act of a potential that lies within every noetic soul', the onlooker, to keep to the example of painting has a potential that the work releases within the recipient of the work, this potentiality comes into being through the work.

For the artist as a hyper-sensitive spectator (hyper-sensitive in the sense also that one speaks of the photosensitivity of paper covered with silver halides), what a work sets in action is that it affects him

as a recipient in such a way that it engenders another work through which he becomes a sender.

This process of individuating is one which takes place over time, they can take a very long time to develop. The process is also one of co-individuation, one never individuates by oneself. However, there are processes of short-circuiting, whereby the long term development of co-individuation is shorted, for example through processes of inattention referred to earlier in relation to reading where skimming the surface is mistaken for reading, similarly in relation to painting, according to statistics in 2005, the average person spends forty-two seconds in front of each painting, where the images are skimmed and not afforded due attention. Accordingly, the prevalence of images does lead to visual literacy, the informed onlooker needs attention patience or as Lyotard states 'patience'.

The example of painting is itself problematic, when one looks to contemporary artistic practice the wealth of cultural production happens in and across multiple mediums and in and through different corporal experience outside of on-looking and involving participation or dare I say relational experiences. For example, at DOCUMENTA 13 in Kassel last September the majority of works on display would fall outside the neat categories that we have been using so far in relation to a separation between text and image. Hence, it would be worthwhile here for a moment taking an example which is much more complex and perhaps more akin to contemporary artistic practice where there is an inherent relationship between research and practice, theory and praxis.

An example of an Artist and Artistic praxis which unfolds this dichotomy of 'text' and 'image' whose emphasis on the materiality of the object itself or one could add the yet to be realized materiality is the Artist Lawrence Weiner. Weiner's work from the late 1960s onwards has explored the use of language rather than the more conventional idioms of painting or sculpture. His work foregrounds language as a

mode of representation, which as Lynne Cooke points out, eliminates all references to authorial subjectivity- all traces of the artist's hands, his skill, or his taste'. However, one could argue that language itself never enables the complete exclusion of the traces of the enunciator. The process of individuation-transindividuation referred to earlier finds an echo in the way in which Weiner conceives of the 'individual work need never being actually realized', the endless differing or deferral of the work is shifted onto the audience, the onlooker or interlocutor. He states that "each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist, the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of the reception". The realization of the materiality of the work, the presentation and context of the work are only determined if and when a particular work is installed, the choice of the medium- whether, for example, the letters are stenciled, painted, or mounted in relief, and in what typeface, size, proportions, placement, and color – varies with the site; similarly, the context – whether a poster, artist's book, gallery wall, mural, or other public area – necessarily inflects not only the work's form but the its very meaning. To take one example in detail, his work entitled ONE QUART EXTERIOR GREEN INDUSTRIAL ENAMEL THROWN ON A BRICK WALL (1968) is a direct reference to the work of Jackson Pollock whose spontaneous drip paintings were gaining more and more attention at the time. We know that the paints Pollock used have caused some issues in relation to the preservation and are raising questions around the extent to which they should be restored, if at all, to their original state. Weiner points to the very materiality of the painting object itself, however, interestingly for our problematic here, this pointing to the object itself takes place through a linguistic representation of the thing itself. Weiner by removing the conventions of Pollock's work, the rectangular field of painting, the intentional, albeit spontaneous drip painting, invokes the process rather than the product itself. In addition, Weiner has placed his work outside 'aesthetically contracted space', his work is to be found on murals, stairs ways, the work exists in culture at large. In contemporary practice, the conceptual turn, the linguistic turn as still very much

present and the simple division between the process of verbal representation and visual representation needs to be treated with care.

The symbolic misery that Stiegler refers to as part of contemporary condition, where images have become advertising bill boards, and data banks of images to be bought and sold through monetizing networks. The cultural technologies of images, sounds and texts together with the cognitive technologies shape the technologies of the spirit. The pharmacological dimension to these technologies of the spirit causes a struggle between the 'poisonous' and the 'therapeutic' effects, which can according to Stiegler reinforce the situation of symbolic misery where the harnessing of attention leads to a destructive consumerism whose effects have now become evident since the collapse of 2008 or positive pharmacology could appear where there is a renaissance of the symbolic which would be grounded in the reconstruction of the bidirectional social relations, that is, dialogue, or possibly 'interactivity'. The possibility of the positive pharmacology lies within the artistic creation, the ability to move and the open out the potential. I see as I have tried to argue here today, the relationship between the construction of knowledge through the artistic practice as not being dissociated, not a simple dichotomy between words and images, between practice and theory, the praxis itself poses the recipient with the potential of the work and the necessary attending to work which enables the potential. The two key concepts referred to here, pharmacology and individuation, allow the framing of the question in new and productive way.

