



ON THE QUEST FOR A NEW CONCEPTION OF WORK. REREADING HEGEL.

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a claim made by Bernard Stiegler, in *Automatic Society (Vol. 1). The Future of Work*, that we must *rethink* and find *a new conception of work*. Stiegler states that this new conception “must be based on a new status of knowledge and of its elaboration, transmission and the way it is implemented in economic life”. While in ongoing debates the notion of work is often linked to employment or wage labour, and its crises are primarily discussed in the context of job creation, distribution and retribution, Bernard Stiegler sees in the increasing *automatization* — according to him, one of the main challenges of our society — the risk of a movement towards the end of work and therefore the end of knowledge. This tendency is in fact a global issue, which needs to be explored and discussed within a universal context. To understand it better, we will turn to Hegel and explore the notion of work within his system, where it has a central role for both the system of *Sittlichkeit* and for the process of (collective) *Bildung*.

Keywords: Hegel; Stiegler; Work; Knowledge; Bildung.

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In the first Volume of his work “*Automatic Society*”, which carries the title “The Future of Work”, Bernard Stiegler claims that “we *must rethink work*” (Stiegler 2016, 155). This stance emerges from his outspoken preoccupation that our understanding of the concept of *work* has been over-determined by our understanding of *employment*, “by submitting it to the 'dogmas' of twentieth-century capitalism” (Stiegler 2016, 155). The consequence of this development, according to Stiegler, is that what once may have been conceived as a participation in what he calls “collective individuation,”² has become a question of “*pure force of labour*” (Stiegler 2016, 215). The question of right and duty to work in the twentieth century, he states, has become a question of “employment, wages and the constitution of purchasing power guaranteeing the sustainability of a system of production”.

Contemporary conceptions of work, throughout different disciplines and in the everyday public dialogue in Europe, appear to be rather diverse, and in many cases “work” seemingly has indeed become a synonym of “employment”.

Work appears to be both conceived as what deprives us from finding meaning in life, and what helps us find it; as something we have both too much and too less of; as something that appears to be slowly disappearing – due to the increase of automation – but appears to dominate us more than ever. According to the *Krisis* group and their “Manifesto against Labour”, work is already dead, an irrational and obsolete end in itself, yet has become a totalitarian power “which does not tolerate any other God” (Gruppe Krisis 1999, 1). In the Manifesto we read about *work fanaticism*, which is described as a result of a long history of industrialization, and of the identification of work with the purpose and value of the citizen. The latter, according to Krisis, has led to a situation, in which workers operate “empty treadmills” (Gruppe Krisis 1999, 4), hence where the meaningfulness of work has become and illusion.

From the analysis of work the Krisis group suggests, emerges the question of usefulness or, on the contrary, “pointlessness” (Beckett 2018), which many associate with the notion of work today. As Andy Beckett states in his 2018 article “*Post-Work*”, while work was once connected to the idea of wealth and status, today it “has become less important financially than inheriting money or owning a home” (Becket 2018). Noam Chomsky affirms that it is no longer the productive sector to run the economy, but financial speculation (Chomsky 2017, 42). It

² Stiegler inherits this concept from G. Simondon.

thus appears that the role of work is rather minor in and for our economy, yet we appear to still idealize it as the main “motor that keeps society moving forward” (Beckett 2018). In the political public dialogue, a just distribution of work as connected to a just distribution of wealth, still appears to be the major social goal to achieve. A higher employment rate is often connected to social justice; even on a global scale (where “eight men own the same wealth as the poorest half of the world”, as the Oxfam Report from January 2017 shows [Oxfam, 2017], which is demonstrative for a wealth distribution that is obviously not analogue to the distribution of work among countries and citizens), “giving everyone a decent job” sometimes emerges as a solution and first step towards a more inclusive and sustainable economy.³ The (worldwide) problem of unjust distribution of wealth is thus still, at least partially, connected to the idea that there is *too less work*.⁴

On the other side, there appears to be furthermore the conception of *too much work*, when considering the claim that, in Europe, personal lives are “built around their work schedules” (Beckett 2018), which often appears to be the cause for stress and bad health, and deprive people of having time for *themselves*. Work is here perceived as something negative, regrettable and something to better avoid in order to pursue happiness, as shown e.g. by a book by Bronnie Ware, a nurse who had interviewed her patients during the last days of their lives and claimed that what they had expressed as one of their biggest regrets in life was to have “worked so hard” (Steiner 2012).

Stiegler might be right to urge us to “*rethink work*” (Stiegler 2016, 155), if we thus accept his claim that it is still conceived in terms of an obsolete conception of *employment*, while social structures and work organization have been changing, as new tendencies of increasing precarious work, rising self-employment, and the persistent, constant threat of automation exemplify. Stiegler, in fact, states that *work* must be distinguished from *employment*, when we discuss the right and duty to access it (Stiegler 2016, 166). This stance emerges from a larger discussion on the challenges of automation – or rather *automatization* (“*automatisation*”) as he calls it, supposedly to emphasize the notion of *automaton* connected to the term – which, according to him, has been a primary challenge for the transformation of work and social arrangements for over a century, and has now reached a point, where it not only regards the consideration of the physical and mechanical working force, but also the intellectual capacities of human beings, or the *νοῦς*. Stiegler foresees the “end of work” as a possible consequence of the constant augmentation of automatization, yet his assessment of this trend

³ This suggestion was provided by Winnie Byanyima in 2017, during the debate “Whose Prosperity?”, hosted by *Intelligence squared* in Berlin.

⁴ This problem certainly evokes also the question of *right retribution* of work, among classes, countries, genders and different categories of work, an issue we will not be discussing in this paper, for we will not concentrate on work as a generator of economic wealth, but rather, as we will see, on work as *Bildung*.

is twofold. On the one hand, he raises the concern that an increased automatization will deprive us of our capacities, which are both mechanical and intellectual. So he states, “if it is true that we develop ourselves through our practices, and if it is true that automation takes all kinds of practices out of our hands, then automatization is in the course of profoundly stultifying us: making us rough, uncouth and coarse, brutish and, as one use to say, *ill mannered, ill educated [malappris⁵]*” (Stiegler 2016, 122). On the other hand, according to him, it is automatization itself that can help us save time and invest it in new capacities und hence “reinvent work” (Stiegler 2016, 7).

Automatization hence must not be conceived as the end of work, which would mean that there will be nothing left for us to do, which would be the end of our culture and *Bildung*, and would further mean that our *destiny* is out of our control (*chaos*). Automatization must rather enforce a new conception of work, which constitutes a new kind of knowledge that can help us find new solutions to contemporary problems. We must thus overcome the old conception and the vocabulary with which we describe work. We must imagine and consequently *invent* a new conception of work – as something that, instead of creating employment, is primarily creating knowledge.

It is indeed clear that even knowledge is the 'only new sector emerging' it is not going to 'create jobs'. But this is the wrong question. It is instead a question of knowing knowledge – including work-knowledge and life-knowledge, which a hydrogen economy, for example, might reconstitute outside of activity founded on employment – will recreate wealth, and sustainable wealth, by replacing wage labour, alienated through the knowledge materialized in machines [...] and by profoundly transforming knowledge in its totality (Stiegler 2016, 186).

Stiegler generally advocates a re-reading of Hegel's dialectics after the impact of poststructuralism, and advises to “take them seriously” (Stiegler 2015, 105). “We must re-read those speculative propositions [...], an idealist attempt to think the subject afresh, on the basis of the process and not the individual” (Stiegler 2015, 102). However, while in many moments of his writings on automatization, work and knowledge, his choice of vocabulary and his proximity to the idea of human flourishing and knowledge connected to work, suggest a Hegelianism, Stiegler does not explicitly recommend to consult Hegel in order to be better equipped for a reconsideration of the concept of work. His statement, “the work of noesis as faculty of thinking passing into actuality through work [...]”, both suggests and exemplifies the importance of a rereading of Hegel to better understand the notion of work in a contemporary reconsideration, but it does not further explore the complexity of Hegel's conception of it.

⁵“*Malappris*” in fact corresponds to “*ungebildet*”.

Here we will take Stiegler's advice to reread Hegel very seriously, and we will thus concentrate on Hegel's conceptions of work and automation, and their significance for our *Bildung*, collective development, and knowledge. In this re-reading we will of course consider, what Stiegler generally believes to be particularly important in Hegel's philosophy, i.e. the status *desire* has within his thought (Stiegler 2015, 105). As Stiegler elaborates, Hegel thinks the life of the spirit as dialectic, on the basis of the Aristotelian conception of $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$, as (auto-) movement induced by an object of desire, which is a process of exteriorization and thus the becoming-subject in itself and for itself of a subject that *thinks* (Stiegler 2015, 106). We will see shortly, how this process of exteriorization and the notion of desire are connected to Hegel's conception of *work*, and why Hegel would probably share Stiegler's concern regarding the automatisisation of work and society.

As Hegel himself teaches us with his philosophy of *Bildung*, no existing concept is static and absolutely valid, but rather is defined and redefined throughout history and cultures. In the same way, the concept of work has changed along social reorganization and changes of habits throughout history, just as some work has disappeared over the years, and other work has been created: from the aristocratic ancient Greece, where through the absence of machines, the (rather painful) work was outsourced to slaves, to the modern times, where work became the task of one specific social class, until the post-war era, when, as Stiegler describes it, the bourgeoisie disappeared, capitalism and control society arose, human time and activity were reorganized and “psychic individuals [were integrated] into standardized and grammaticized routines” (Stiegler 2016, 67-8), until today when, as stated before, the automatization of our working force is no longer exclusively mechanic, but concerns also the calculative, the logical and therefore the decision-making.

I suggest to review Hegel's conception of work, by distinguishing two contexts from which it emerges: (1) the status work has within the ethical world, the *Sittlichkeit*, and thus its place in the social context, where individuals depend on each other and where work regards primarily the fulfilment of individual and social needs and desires, and (2) the importance work has for the *Bildung* (formation, education, shaping) of the spirit, and thus for the development of its intellect and its knowledge.

In the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (*EPR*; *PR*), the concept of work is elaborated within the “System of needs” (“*System der Bedürfnisse*”), as part of the “Civil society” (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), which lies between the Family and the State, in the context of the Ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). The civil society is sustained: (1) by the “mediation of the need and its fulfilment by the individual, through its work, and through the work and the fulfilment of needs by everyone” (*PR*, §188, 193, *m.t.*); (2) by the preservation of the universal freedom through

the latter, the protection of property through law; (3) by the pursuit of a common interest through cooperation. The realization of the single person herein depends on and from the social and universal context. Hegel here distinguishes between “universality” (*Allgemeinheit*) and “particularity” (*Besonderheit*), where the latter is determined by the power of the former and by a constant external casualty. In this sense also the fulfilment of both necessary and accidental needs (that arise in the private person due to both nature and casual influence of others) is accidental (*PR*, §185, 189). Due to the conflicts of needs and subjective freedom concerning the individuals within the civil society, the latter is full of conflicts. Through the means of cooperation however, it seeks harmony and positivity, which yet can never be reached during an ongoing process of development.

But in the very act of developing itself independently [*für sich*] to totality, the principle of particularity passes over into universality [...] This unity is not that of ethical identity, because at this level of division, the two principles are self-sufficient; and for the same reason, it is present not as *freedom*, but as the *necessity* whereby the *particular* must rise to the *form of universality* and seek and find its subsistence in this form (*EPR*, §186, 223-4; *PR*, §186, 190).

The fulfilment of the need occurs through a medium (*Mittel*), which can be the external thing (*Ding*), which the individual consumes, or through the active work (*Arbeit*), which mediates both sides, the internal and the external, and is therefore not simply a consumption of the thing and thus a negation of it and of the need itself, but leads to a formation of the object and of the worker.

Work, within the social sphere, leads to a reconciliation of the conflicting particular needs. The individual, who depends from the social and universal sphere, learns that its work is also a work for the others, and that, at the same time, it depends on the work of the others. A reciprocal relationship is therefore determined (*PR*, §192, 196), wherein the individuals seek equality, imitate the others and at the same time try to manifest their individual particularity and find their place in society, “*sich durch eine Auszeichnung geltend machen*” (*PR*, §193, 196). It is this very system that leads to the multiplication of needs, desires and mediums to fulfil them, a multiplication that has no limits (*PR*, §195, 197), and in which lies the essence of freedom, as it emerges from the reflection of the spirit.

The mediation whereby appropriate and *particularized* means are acquired and prepared for similarly *particularized* needs is work. By the most diverse processes [and with the] material which is immediately provided by nature. This process of formation gives the means their value and appropriateness, so that man [*der Mensch*], as a consumer, is chiefly

concerned with human products, and it is human effort which he consumes (*EPR*, §196, 231-2; *PR*, §196, 197-8).

Work is herein firstly the medium to fulfil personal needs, and secondly the means (of cooperation and collaboration) to fulfil common and objective needs that arise within the social context, where individuals are dependent from each other. It is in this very context of dependency and reciprocity, where the universal and persisting resources (*Vermögen*) emerge (*PR*, §199, 199). The individuals of the society participate at the formation of those resources through their own formation and education (*Bildung*) and through their skills and knowledge. Even though this participation is limited — as every participant has limited skills and different possibilities to shape him or herself — in the social and civil context, according to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, this participation becomes the duty (*Pflicht*) of the individual (*PR*, § 207, 205). The individual in fact co-determines, by means of its contributive work, the *resources* (*Vermögen*) of the society and therefore also the *potential* (*Vermögen*) of it. This contributory, social system allows that the work to be done in a society can be shared among the different participants, according to their potential, skills and the actual and formal needs. Through the fulfilment of those needs, new needs and means to fulfil them emerge, and new skills and knowledges are formed, which contributes to the general formation of the society and the spirit. In this way, some work, when it becomes *mechanical*, can be *outsourced to machines* (*PR*, §198, §199), so that the human beings can dedicate themselves to new and higher tasks.

As we can see, work has, according to Hegel, an essential importance for the human *Bildung*, which in the *Philosophy of Right*, he divides into “theoretical *Bildung*” (the multiplication of thoughts and knowledge, the development of the promptitude of those thoughts, the understanding of universal relations, the formation of the intellect and of language etc.) and “practical *Bildung*” which is the practice of work, the habit of activity, the discipline that leads to what we could call τέχνη and to universal skills.

[*Bildung*] ... is the absolute transition to the infinitely subjective substantiality of ethical life, which is no longer immediate and natural, but spiritual and at the same time raised to the shape of universality. Within the subject, this liberation is the *hard work* of opposing mere subjectivity of conduct, of opposing the immediacy of desire as well as the subjective vanity of feeling [*Empfindung*] and the arbitrariness of caprice. The fact that it is such hard work accounts for some of the disfavours which it incurs. But it is through this work of [*Bildung*] that the subjective will attains *objectivity* even within itself, that objectivity in which alone it is for its part worthy and capable of being the actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] of the idea. (*EPR*, §187, 124-5; *PR*, §187, 192).

What Hegel tells us is not only that work — through its practice and development of skills, thoughts and relations - forms (*bildet*), but that the *Bildung* itself is in fact work: hard, unpleasant work and the experience of the negative, which is however necessary to reconcile the subjective desire and need within an objective context and to lead the spirit towards (theoretical, technical, ethical and self-reflecting) knowledge.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit (PhG)*, which represents the formation (*Bildung*) of the spirit towards the absolute knowledge, and thus its movement towards philosophy, science and the spirit's absolute knowledge of itself, or the “*becoming of knowledge*” (*PhG*, 21, *m.t.*), Hegel describes already in the *Vorrede* the essence of work, which is connected to this formation, as the latter is the work of taking a distance from the immediate and a working towards knowledge and truth:

The beginning of *Bildung* and thus of the work to emerge [*heraus-arbeiten*] from the immediacy of the substantial life [...], is to work up toward [*herauf zu arbeiten*] a general conception [*Gedanke*] of the real issue, [...] to participate in the work [*mit-zu-arbeiten*] to help bring Philosophy closer to the form of science [...] (*PhG*: 5-6; *m.t.*).

In this short excerpt we can see the extent of the essence and practice of work that regards *Bildung* towards knowledge: it is a working *away* from the immediate, a working *towards* the formation of thought, reflection and knowledge, and a *collaboration* in order to reach objective and universal knowledge. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, *Bildung* thus leads to the knowledge of the self, and thus to (knowledge of) freedom, which in Hegel is conceivable only in the social context.

Work is here also the “work of the negative” in “times of transitions and change”.⁶ It is the work of negating a previous moment, in order to create something new; once again a movement that is painful and exhausting but needed, in order to proceed towards a higher human knowledge and successful transformation of social, cultural and historical conditions. In order to be able to undertake this work of reformation — *Umgestaltung* (*PhG*: 10) — the human spirit has to confront itself authentically and profoundly with the current situation. This process of *Bildung* requires patience and the *desire* to live, learn and move forward.

For the world spirit had the patience to go through all these forms throughout an extended period of time, and to take on itself the immense work of world history [...] hence the individual cannot comprehend its substance with less effort (*PhG*, 23-4; *m.t.*).

⁶Hegel describes the times he lives in as such.

Hegel shows, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, how the individual forms the world through its work, as there is a relation with an external object, a process of *individuation*,⁷ reflection and modification or reformation. During this process of work, the spirit forms itself, because it understands and identifies itself as the working force, as different from the other and therefore particular and *for-itself*. This regards both physical and intellectual work.

Work is hence moreover a means to *understand* one's own potential and power to form and contribute to the world. This understanding emerges particularly in the famous figure of the master-servant (*Herr und Knecht*) dialectic.⁸ While at a first sight, the servant seems to consist in a passive entity in the hands of the authoritarian master, whose desires the former has to fulfil, we shortly find out, that this authoritarian relationship is reversible and will actually be reversed during the process of fulfilment of the needs of the master. While the master simply consumes the external thing to fulfil his (natural and accidental) needs, the servant is in a direct relationship with the object of desire, therefore reflects and transforms it, and due to this work of (trans)formation he forms himself. “Through work [the servant] comes to himself [...]. Work ... is inhibited desire, delayed disappearance, or it forms and cultivates [*bildet*]” (*PhG*, 135; *m.t.*). It is the relation of the two figures, the master and the servant, an alternating relationship of power that forms the spirit. It is the working consciousness, which obtains new knowledge for itself and for society, and learns about his power to form the world, about his freedom, and therefore generates new needs and means to fulfil them.

Besides the act of working, also the concept of the *persisting work* (*Werk*) — when *ἐνέργεια* becomes *ἐντελέχεια*, or, as Stiegler puts it, “the leap towards *entelekheia*, that is towards the end (*telos*) of that of which *energeia* is the passage to actuality” (Stiegler, 2016, 193) — has a central role for *Bildung* towards knowledge in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Not incidentally the German word for “actuality”, in Hegel, is *Wirklichkeit*, a term connected to the word *Werk* (oeuvre, persisting work), *werken* (operate) and *wirken* (work, appear, having an impact): it is the human work and actions that form and transform the actuality. The persisting work (*Werk*), furthermore, is the expression (the exteriorization) of the essence of the spirit, and therefore of both the individual that creates and a society that creates. At the same time, the individual (or the society) becomes itself, through this exteriorization and formation; or as Jean Hyppolite puts it: “work [*Werk*] is the authentic expression of the real individuality in itself and for itself [...]. I am who I am only after I have acted [...]. We know who we are, only

⁷I here borrow the term from Stiegler and thus Simondon, and allow myself to associate it to Hegel's conception of the spirit's relation to the world.

⁸While this Hegelian figure is often translated with “master-slave dialectic”, Stiegler correctly points out that the latter is in fact not a slave, but a *servant* (Stiegler 2016, 162).

because we have done it, and, by means of our work, what we have done becomes a being for-others. Through working [*werken*], which is negativity as movement and becoming, our original nature is expressed and becomes visible” (Hyppolite 1972, 368-9, *m.t.*). It is through its own work, that the individual (as well as the society) *individuates and understands itself*, because *its essence is reflected in the work it has done*.

For [the individual] comprehends its original essence, which must be its end, only through his actions [...] (*PhG*, 264; *m.t.*).

Work [*Werk*] is the reality, which the consciousness gives to itself; it is what makes the individual be for itself what it is in itself [...] (*PhG*, 266-7, *m.t.*).

Work, in Hegel's system, has thus a central status, mainly for it is a constitutive moment of the actuality and of the *Bildung* of the spirit. The centrality of work, as we have seen, in Hegel, though emerges on several levels, which I conclusively suggest to divide in four different aspects: work is (1) a mediation to fulfil the needs of oneself and the others; a process of creating new needs and means to fulfil them, where machines can replace the worker in work that has become mechanical, in order to give the self-conscious, “psychic and collective” individuals the possibility to dedicate their forces to the fulfilment of a higher (newer) need; (2) a direct confrontation with an object, a mediation between the other (external) and the self (internal), where the object (of knowledge) is formed and transformed, and therefore not only serves as a fulfilment of a certain need, but contributes to the formation (*Bildung*) of the worker, regarding his (technical) skills, his knowledge of the world and of himself; (3) an actual formation of the world — the formation of actuality — and therefore the formation of the absolute; the knowledge of one's own freedom to form it and therefore a control over it; (4) a form of *Bildung*, and what leads to *Bildung* — a *Bildung* that is both individual and collective, follows desires, forms values, leads to (theoretical, practical, ethical and self-regarding) knowledge and freedom, and thus shapes the individual and the society.

Stiegler's analysis of the trend of automatization in contemporary society, foresees, as I have argued before, the disappearance of work as one of its greatest risks, since, according to Stiegler, this also means a regression (and finally annihilation) of knowledge. According to his analysis, the tendency towards annihilation is the trend of our contemporary ages of self-regulation, where reason “seems to decompose into rationalization” (Stiegler 2015, 17), and where all forms of knowledge have been weakened (Stiegler 2015, 20). Stiegler talks in fact about the rise of an “automatic society”, which is determined by an “algorithmic governmentality” that has emerged from a 24/7 capitalism, where the impact on the psychic (and collective) individuals is regulated by a computational

calculus, which influences and controls the decision-making of the people as well as their view on the world, and where not only machines substitutes the human beings in the mechanical work, but where automats slowly replace them in their intellectual work.

In a world that tends towards automatization, the capacity of “psychic and collective individuation” and, as a consequence, the possibility of “transindividuation” (a sort of co-individuation among the psychic and the collective individual, that is thus fundamental for social transformation) are hence at stake. In other words: A world that tends towards complete automatization — yet another possible form of the “absolute” — where everything is self-regulated, where immense data is permanently captured (a “new regime of truth”, Stiegler 2016, 103), while the noetic capacities are slowly decreasing, where there is no more “work to be done”, this highly “entropic” world will eventually reach a point where all energy has been relieved, and where there is no way of going back to a world of a transformative process induced by the human spirit.

Yet automatization, if we follow Stiegler’s work, despite its risk of being increasingly entropic, is not to be taken as a certain end of human culture and society. As I have claimed before, Stiegler identifies the latter with an absolute automatization. As mentioned, he describes this state by referring it to the concept of entropy, as in that case, human beings will no longer have control over their destiny. A fight against entropy, i.e. a fight against our loss of control is thus a fight against death: a fight for human culture’s and society’s possibility to persist. On the other hand, Stiegler sees as one of the biggest challenges of our times the need to exit the current period of the *Anthropocene*, a necessary act Stiegler calls *Neganthropocene*. The Neganthropocene is necessary due to a “geological” or environmental factor (Stiegler 2016, 6). So even though the interference of human action in the world might have seemed to promise a reduction of entropy, today we have understood that the current state of organization and interference will bring us closer to that “certain end”, as humanity is part of the world, whose entropic status is actually growing, due to it, by the means of an automatization, which was supposed to bring order instead of disorder.

Stiegler’s solution appears to be thus not to condemn automatization as such, but use the free time it provides us by liberating us from work, to develop “*capacities for dis-automatization*, that is, for the *production of negentropy*” (Stiegler 2016, 7). We are hence talking about a “*culture of dis-automatization, made possible by automatization*” i.e., I believe, not an absolute status of automatisms in our work organizations, but a constant procedure of putting our *energies* at the service of constantly finding new solutions, acquire new knowledges to deal with new social and environmental situations, and thus to invent and pursue new *work*, that can produce such knowledge.

We can conclude from these arguments, that automatization (or automation) could provide human beings time and energy to find new solutions to current challenges. The challenge for contemporary societies, that are subject to what Stiegler called a “24/7 capitalism”, hence lies in overcoming the current situation in which people are still bound to arguably “empty jobs”, which provoke a stagnation of citizens and do not contribute to the Neganthropocene Stiegler calls for. The challenge consists in a major transformation of our social order, a new labour-independent distribution of wealth and a new distribution of work.⁹ In order to pursue this goal, the concept of work needs indeed to be rethought as medium of participation, transformation and production of knowledge, the latter being, according to Stiegler, negentropic (Stiegler 2016, 15).

While ascribing particular importance to finding solutions for a new social order through new work (and on the contrary finding new works through a social transformation), Stiegler does not underestimate the importance of work to understand oneself better and finding personal value and purpose. While being conceptually very close to Hegel, he claims that, whether the work is manual or intellectual, the worker transforms his or her milieu by dialogically exploring it and noetizing it. This involves an object of *desire* that “moves and stirs” the soul (Stiegler 2016, 203) during the process of transformation.

True work is a *poiesis* that responds to 'the need the individual feels to appropriate the surrounding world, to impress his or her stamp upon it and, by the objective transformation he or she effects upon it, to acquire a sense of him- or herself as an autonomous subject possessing practical freedom. (Stiegler 2016, 2015)

Stiegler's position here defends Hegel's conception by claiming that through our work we make sense of both the world and of ourselves.

In times of computational capitalism, Stiegler claims on the one hand, our relation to the objects change, when they become fully calculable and therefore, in the context of work, futile (Stiegler 2016, 23). On the other hand, he claims that the prevention of the worker to “work” on the object, is not only an ethical dilemma in terms of distribution of property and wealth, but above all gives rise to the regression of reasoning, learning and therefore knowledge, as we have seen before, since the “work of noesis as *faculty of thinking* passes into actuality through work” (Stiegler 2016, 199).

⁹ According to Stiegler, the reinvention of the definition and the theoretical question of work must be at the heart of the reconstitution of the state of law (Stiegler 2016, 186). Given the risks the decrease of work would bring with itself, the state (and the globe) need to rethink the model of retribution for subsistence and invent a distributional system that first of all concerns the distribution of knowledge and, according to Stiegler, also time, that is thinking time (Stiegler 2016, 73).

Stiegler talks about a new form of *proletarianization*, which in Hegel was not present yet, because in his system the actuality was rational in its totality, "dissolved in absolute knowledge as *ab-solution*" (Stiegler 2016, 198). This proletarianization Stiegler talks about, is not a deprivation of produced material, but of the produced knowledge, which regards both "psychic individuals [and] collective individuals (including the state itself)" (Stiegler 2016, 124), and concerns all forms of knowledge, and anyone from the worker to the scientist.

As we have seen, the substitution of the worker by the machine was already a minor topic in Hegel, but within his system of absolute knowledge, the element of the machinery was in favour of the development of the human mind, since it took over what had become mechanical, in order to leave time and space to the human spirit to work and form new needs and objects of desires, and move forward and progress. In our times, where computational power "captures the working knowledge not only of the hand, but also of the brain" (Stiegler 2016, 199), the question is: where is the line? Up to what point is it possible to let automats do our (technical and intellectual) work, before individual and collectives reason start to decrease or disappear.

Also in view of the goal of self-knowledge, automatization should help us gain "time of knowledge" (Stiegler 2016, 85); in Stiegler's works the term *otium* emerges several times, when he claims that we must gain time, dream, conceive, reflect and realize.

We must [...] give control of decision-making back to psychic and collective individuals insofar as they are noetic. This concerns not only the work of the scholar or the manager but indeed that of all noetic individuals insofar as they have a right and a duty to *access not employment*, which is clearly in decline, *but work*, as what develops outside employment, and as the power of *dis-automatization*, that is, as constituting the neganthropic future of a new industrial age of life on earth.

We must ground ... [a] new conception of work [...] (Stiegler 2016, 166).

The conception of work Stiegler tends to, the "true work", has thus three dimensions: subsistence, existence and consistence.

We must rethink work as what, with the end of employment [...] again becomes the primary question. *Employment has disintegrated work*, just as fully computational governmentality is now disintegrating collective individuation. Work is not employment. It is possible to confound them only if work is understood in terms of the constraint of subsisting — if we think it only on the plane of subsistence. Work, however, is constitutive, both on the plane of existence and on the plane of consistence (Stiegler 2016, 155).

If we furthermore take Hegel's claims regarding work within the *Sittlichkeit* seriously, we can moreover once again recognize the importance of work as a medium of creation of individual and social identity, as well as of collaboration and a contribution to collective energy, which according to Stiegler, we need to consider *ενέργεια* rather than *δύναμις*. In this sense, work can be understood as something that is fulfilling, and not in opposition to what makes life desirable: not a duty to build one's life around, not a simple way of subsistence, and not as something that leads to stress and illness, but as a possibility to grow, learn and become oneself.

Hegel described the fatigues of this becoming oneself – of this *Bildung*, inasmuch as it *is* in fact work. Yet it is the very same fatigue of moving forward, which at last gives us *consistence*. For work should not be conceived as what deprives us from searching for our meaning (cf. Stiegler 2016, 219), but rather as what helps us find it.

ABBREVIATIONS

m.t. = my translation (B. W.)

m.i. = my italic (B. W.)

EPR = Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, A. W. Wood (ed.), tr. en. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

PhG = Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1988)

PR = Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2017)

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