

# *Aesthetic Education and the Pharmacology of the State*

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*Our rulers will have to make considerable use of falsehood and deception for the benefit of those they rule. And we said that all such falsehoods are useful as a form of drug [pharmakou].*<sup>1</sup>

Plato, *Republic*

IN A RECENT ARTICLE TITLED “Orange Juice and Agent Orange,” literary critic Bruce Robbins wonders whether “there exists a single system that connects orange juice and Agent Orange at a level beyond our comprehension.”<sup>2</sup> He takes the question from Don DeLillo’s novel *Underworld*. Although Robbins clearly has his doubts about the existence of such a system, he still considers the connection it raises—between orange juice, poured down the throats of children by the representatives of the welfare state, and Agent Orange, the defoliant used by the United States dur-

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1992), 133.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Robbins, “Orange Juice and Agent Orange,” *Occasion 2* (2010): 1.



ing the Vietnam War—“a new and urgent topic”<sup>3</sup> that raises a number of important questions about (one’s relation to) the state, in particular the welfare state. Robbins’s article shows that to consider the connection between orange juice and Agent Orange means to confront the pharmacology (or toxicology, given that Robbins speaks of “toxicity”<sup>4</sup>) of the state: “on the one hand, horrifying military barbarism against enemy civilians and even toward the state’s own veterans (accountability for Agent Orange has by no means been resolved to everyone’s satisfaction); on the other hand, the premise that even in this international context, there was reason to support the state’s agency in sheltering its own citizens and residents from the extreme cruelties of the market—to support, that is, the state’s real or potential benevolence.”<sup>5</sup> The state, Robbins thus points out, can be both poison and cure, Agent Orange and orange juice: from “Plato’s Pharmacy” to the pharmacology of the state. Clearly, “French Theory”—Jacques Derrida’s reading of Plato’s *Phaedrus*—can still provide some assistance when it comes to thinking one’s relation to the state.<sup>6</sup>

In “Plato’s Pharmacy,” Derrida notes that the word Plato uses for “drug”—to *pharmakon*—means both “medicine and/or poison.”<sup>7</sup> The insight complicates matters for Plato’s translator and critic: for if the word truly means both these things at the same time, it becomes impossible to decide at any point in Plato’s text whether the word *pharmakon* means cure or poison. Instead, both these meanings are always simultaneously present, thus destabilizing or deconstructing a unified or coherent meaning of the text.

Taking my cue from Robbins and Derrida’s Plato, I propose to pursue further here the idea of a pharmacology of the state, in particular with reference to French theory, which Robbins does not consider to be very helpful in the situation that he has laid out. I begin by considering Robbins’s criticism of Michel Foucault’s antistatism and show how in a lecture from 1979 on the welfare state, Foucault’s argument is actually largely in line with the one that Robbins puts forward. Considered from the perspective of Foucault’s lecture, it is in fact Robbins rather than Foucault who appears to be more open to thinking the pharmacology of the state—to thinking *both* the (welfare) state’s curative *and* its empoisoning dimensions.

In the second part of the article, I provide a structural argument for the idea of a pharmacology of the state by considering the state, by way of Bernard Stiegler’s work on technics and pharmacology, as a technical—and therefore pharmacological—extension of the human being that, like other such extensions, demands a therapeutics or practice of care. But what could such a care for the *pharmakon* of the state look like? I consider what might at first sight appear to be a peculiar form of care: anger. In Catherine Malabou’s recent work on the brain, which can be read as a manifesto of care, the target of such anger is neoliberalism, which is widely considered to have destroyed the state, and in particular the welfare state. Malabou urges her readers to resist neoliberalism’s culture of docility—but she leaves the (welfare) state entirely out of consideration. When Robbins in a recent text on anger in Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *Never Let Me Go* brings the welfare state back in, he takes up a surprising position: aligning the welfare state with

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>6</sup> For Derrida’s reading of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, see Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 62–171.

<sup>7</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 70.

the culture of docility that Malabou criticizes, he argues that, sometimes, anger against the welfare state can express genuine concern for the people's welfare.

In the final part of the article, I show that in both Malabou and Robbins, the question of anger is closely linked to that of education—or, given that we are speaking about the education of anger, aesthetic education (the education of sensibility). Indeed, knowledge plays a crucial role in Malabou's plea for anger, and her work on the brain can be read within an Enlightenment tradition going back to Immanuel Kant's "Dare to know!" In Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, aesthetic education plays a central role as well. It is perhaps no wonder, then, that one of the sites where the debates about the welfare state are being played out today—in addition to health care, which is evoked by my use of the term "pharmacology"—is education: both in the United States and abroad, education—the care of the mind—has been gravely affected by the deterioration of the welfare state. If health care is the obvious, biopolitical battlefield of state pharmacology today, education has emerged as its psychopolitical battlefield where the relation between orange juice and Agent Orange is being decided.

### FOUCAULT AND THE WELFARE STATE

Early on in his consideration of the possible connections between orange juice and Agent Orange, Robbins mentions two history books that criticize the welfare state by associating it with fascism. Noting that "orange juice literally does mean Agent Orange" in these texts, Robbins goes on to link this vision of "a kind of racist-totalitarian welfare state" to the post-September 11 era and suggests that "it is both strange and not strange at all" that after 9/11, the association of fascism with the welfare state would be "flourishing."<sup>8</sup> Robbins, of course, is highly critical of this and takes on those "American Foucauldians who, along with many ideas of greater value, also took over their master's very French antistatism."<sup>9</sup> Robbins rejects such a position, stating that "the transnational parallel [between France and the United States] was always forced: there was clearly no equivalent on this side of the Atlantic [the United States] to the centralized, panoptical French state to which Foucault's antistatism was a philosophical rejoinder."<sup>10</sup>

Along the way, Robbins also lashes out at the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben—a reader of Foucault—for proposing "the extermination camp as the exemplary institution of the modern state, the deep truth not only of Nazism but of liberal governmentality as well."<sup>11</sup> Like many others, Robbins questions this thesis and the "perversely sympathetic echo" it has found "among many academic humanists."<sup>12</sup> It is as if these theorists were bad readers of DeLillo, taking the novelist's association of orange juice and Agent Orange as gospel truth. From a philosophical perspective, one could object that surely, the two can be related only by virtue of their difference. As Derrida knew well, there can be no pharmacology without difference.

But what is Foucault's position on the welfare state, exactly, and to what extent does it coincide with the representation of it that can be found in Robbins? In a lecture given on March 7, 1979, that was part of Foucault's published lecture course *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault's discussion of the welfare state turns out to be uncannily close to the position Robbins defends in his

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<sup>8</sup> Robbins, "Orange Juice," 4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

article. Although the course was supposed to be about biopolitics, Foucault acknowledges at the beginning of the lecture that “things being what they are, I have ended up talking, maybe for too long, about neo-liberalism”<sup>13</sup>—generally considered responsible for the deterioration of the state, and in particular the welfare state. It does not come as a surprise, then, that in this lecture Foucault would turn his attention to the welfare state.

“What is currently challenged,” Foucault observes, “is almost always the state: the unlimited growth of the state, its omnipotence, its bureaucratic development, the state with the seeds of fascism it contains, the state’s inherent violence beneath its social welfare paternalism”<sup>14</sup>—Agent Orange operating not just in conjunction with but within (“beneath”) orange juice. He goes on to distinguish between “two important elements which are fairly constant in this theme of critique of the state.”<sup>15</sup> The first is the “intrinsic power of the state in relation to its object-target, civil society,”<sup>16</sup> referring to what is perceived to be the state’s hegemonic power to take over entirely its outside, namely civil society. A second element that returns again and again in what Foucault refers to as “state phobia” is “that there is a kinship, a sort of genetic continuity or evolutionary implication between different forms of the state, with the administrative state, the welfare state, the bureaucratic state, the fascist state, and the totalitarian state all being, in no matter which of the various analyses, the successive branches of one and the same great tree of state control in its continuous and unified expansion.”<sup>17</sup> Foucault arguably lays bare in this passage precisely the conflation that Robbins is interested in, between orange juice and Agent Orange, the welfare state and fascism.

Taking one’s cue from Robbins’s article, and from his criticism of French theory and the American Foucauldians, one would perhaps expect Foucault to side with the antistatistism that he is discussing. But that is not what happens. Instead, Foucault goes on to harshly criticize the two elements in state phobia that he has mentioned for putting in circulation “an inflationary critical value.”<sup>18</sup> The criticism is powerful and could be leveled directly against one of the antistatists that Robbins also criticizes, Agamben:

As soon as we accept the existence of this continuity or genetic kinship between different forms of the state, and as soon as we attribute a constant evolutionary dynamism to the state, it then becomes possible not only to use different analyses to support each other, but also to refer them back to each other, and so to deprive them of their specificity. For example, an analysis of social security and the administrative apparatus on which it rests ends up, via some slippages and thanks to some plays on words, referring us to the analysis of the concentration camps. And, in the move from social security to concentration camp the requisite specificity of analysis is diluted.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, ed. Arnold J. Davidson, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 185.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 186–87.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

The proximity of these lines to Robbins's critique of Agamben is uncanny. As Foucault sees it, such inflationary critique "allows one to practice what could be called a general disqualification by the worst."<sup>20</sup>

What bothers Foucault is not only that this constitutes an inflation of the state but that it also amounts to an inflation of critique itself, "for it enables one to avoid paying the price of reality and actuality inasmuch as, in the name of this dynamism of the state, something like a kinship or danger, something like the great fantasy of the paranoiac and devouring state can always be found."<sup>21</sup> In such a fantasy, "there is no longer any need to analyze actuality."<sup>22</sup> This "elision of actuality" troubles Foucault, who insists again and again on the importance of the actual in his late work.<sup>23</sup>

It is when he turns to the origins of this critical inflation of the state in neoliberalist discourse from 1930 until 1950 that Foucault ultimately arrives at his own position. The passage is powerful, and again, surprising:

Well, against this inflationary critique of the state, against this kind of laxness [i.e., confusing fascism with the welfare state, Agent Orange with orange juice], I would like to suggest some theses which have been present, roughly, in what I have already said, but on which I would like to take a bit of a bearing. In the first place is the thesis that the welfare state has neither the same form, of course, nor, it seems to me, the same root or origin as the totalitarian state, as the Nazi, fascist, or Stalinist state. I would also like to suggest that the characteristic feature of the state we call totalitarian is far from being the endogenous intensification and extension of the mechanisms of the state; it is not at all the exaltation but rather a limitation, a reduction, and a subordination of the autonomy of the state, of its specificity and specific functioning. . . . I am saying that we should not delude ourselves by attributing to the state itself a process of becoming fascist which is actually exogenous and due much more to the state's reduction and dislocation.<sup>24</sup>

This passage, and the way in which it is developed in the course, deserves an extended analysis; in the context of this article, however, I want to take from it a simple point: orange juice is not Agent Orange; the welfare state is not fascism. The two have neither the same form nor the same origin. Of course, one can hardly call this a defense of the welfare state; but it certainly does not add up to antistatism either.

Whereas Robbins, after DeLillo, appears at least open to considering the pharmacology of the state—the "and" that might, perhaps, connect orange juice and Agent Orange—Foucault appears to brush the possibility of such an "and" aside in terms of both the form and the history of fascism and the welfare state. For Foucault, there appears to be no pharmacology of the state, or at least not in the way in which Robbins sees it: orange juice, for Foucault, is not Agent Orange. The welfare state is not fascism.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> I have discussed the importance of this notion, and the problems of translation it poses, elsewhere: "The Allegory of the Cage: Foucault, Agamben, and the Enlightenment," *Foucault Studies* 10 (2010): 7–22.

<sup>24</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 192–93.

<sup>25</sup> That does not mean that Foucault is entirely removed from the domain of pharmacology: indeed, pharmacology in Foucault will be located elsewhere, not between orange juice and Agent Orange but within orange juice itself; not so much in the state and in laws but in governmentality and norms—that is what the biopolitical argument amounts to.

## EXPRESS YOUR ANGER

Reading Robbins against Foucault, then—but not in the way Robbins would have imagined me to—I would like to give some more critical substance to what I have been calling the pharmacology of the state. Up until this point, my use of this phrase has been justified by Robbins’s association—after DeLillo—of orange juice and Agent Orange, an association that Robbins himself likens to “paranoia”<sup>26</sup> (the kind of thing that novelists can get away with but that literary critics want to pause over, at least if they do not want to give in completely to the novel’s desire). Yet DeLillo’s suggestion is still powerful enough to make Robbins consider the connection. Indeed, I wonder whether the relation between orange juice and Agent Orange that DeLillo imagines—one that would be “beyond our comprehension,” as he suggests—does not run deeper than a merely conjectural association that defies all understanding.

What if, for example, one were to consider the state in light of Bernard Stiegler’s philosophy of technics, in which pharmacology has come to play a crucial role? Stiegler’s recent book on pharmacology is begging this question when he introduces, in chapter 7, the welfare state as a component in his analysis.<sup>27</sup> The issue for him—and it is an issue to which I will return in the final section of this article—is not so much the welfare state’s biopower as its psychopower (*psychopouvoir*): the ways in which it takes care of people’s minds (*esprits*). No wonder, then, that education is a central concern in Stiegler’s thought.<sup>28</sup>

Let me focus, for the moment, on the first part of this argument: a Stieglerian understanding of the (welfare) state as *pharmakon*. Stiegler’s philosophy of technics, and his related work on pharmacology, is slowly but surely gaining ground in the United States. In projects such as the multivolume *Technics and Time*, Stiegler argues that human beings are essentially beings by default. They are prosthetic beings who project themselves into the world through technical extensions or exteriorizations (supplements, as Derrida would call them) that turn out to be dangerous. Potentially curative, on the one hand, they are, on the other, also potentially empoisoning, and today, in the era of high tech, we live in a time in which this double, pharmacological dimension has reached full swing. As Stiegler points out in *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, many European and American children appear to be incapable of focusing their attention on a specific object for longer than a few seconds. This pathology—attention deficit disorder—is directly due to the empoisoning dimension of humanity’s technical extensions. Stiegler argues that therefore, these pharmacological extensions demand a therapeutics, a practice of care, and it is in this context that he turns to Foucault’s late work on the care of the self.<sup>29</sup>

When Stiegler introduces the welfare state into this argument, he is not merely asking us to consider the ways in which the welfare state’s biopolitics also operates psychopolitically, through the norms that are created, reinforced, and passed on through marketing and advertising, for ex-

<sup>26</sup> Robbins, “Orange Juice,” 1.

<sup>27</sup> See Bernard Stiegler, *Ce qui fait que la vie vaut la peine d’être vécue: De la pharmacologie* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), 177–205.

<sup>28</sup> For the importance of the term “esprit,” see the website of the political collective founded by Stiegler: Ars industrialis: Association internationale pour une nouvelle politique industrielle de l’esprit, <http://arsindustrialis.org/>. Stiegler has founded a school of philosophy in Épineuil-le-Fleuriel. For more information about this project, please consult the school’s website: <http://pharmakon.fr/wordpress/>.

<sup>29</sup> This paragraph summarizes Stiegler’s philosophy of technics as presented in the three published volumes of *Technics and Time* (three more volumes are anticipated) and some of his other works. The question of pharmacology is central to the second half of Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).



ample. He is also asking us to consider the welfare state, and the state at large, as one of those technical extensions or prostheses through which the human being projects itself into the world. Such a prosthetic vision—such a vision of the prosthetic state—opens up a pharmacology of the state, a theory of the state as a *pharmakon* that—like the other *pharmaka* that Stiegler discusses—demands a therapeutics or practice of care.<sup>30</sup> If we were to follow Stiegler's path, we could pursue this suggestion through a discussion of Foucault's work on the government of the self and of others. How to practice the care for the *pharmakon* of the state? This question is more important than ever in a time when the (welfare) state appears to be both extremely powerful and extremely impotent.

In this section, I consider one peculiar form that such a care for the *pharmakon* of the state can take, namely anger. Given the ambiguities of the *pharmakon*—the fact that it can be both poison and cure—it is perhaps to be expected that the care for the state *pharmakon* also takes on an ambiguous form. If we go back to Foucault's investigation of neoliberalism in his lectures on the birth of biopolitics, we will see that one form of such an angry care for the state that should be discussed is anger against neoliberalism, a doctrine generally considered responsible for the deterioration of the state and the welfare state. In this respect, neoliberalism is quite different from classical liberalism à la Adam Smith, which, though it calls for less government interference in the market, also includes a plea for education that would prevent the workers from becoming entirely dehumanized; Stiegler quotes the relevant passage from Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* in his book *La télécratie contre la démocratie*, and I will return to this problematic later.<sup>31</sup>

Consider, for example, Catherine Malabou's book on the brain, which, as I have argued elsewhere, can productively be considered a continuation of Foucault's work on biopolitics.<sup>32</sup> "It is time to remember," Malabou writes in her closing chapter,

that some explosions are not in fact terrorist—explosions of rage, for example. Perhaps we ought to relearn how to enrage ourselves against a certain culture of docility, of amenity, of the effacement of all conflict even as we live in a state of permanent war. It is not because struggle has changed form, it is not because it is no longer really possible to fight a boss, owner, or father, that there is no struggle to wage against exploitation. To ask "What should we do with our brain?" is above all to visualize the possibility of saying no to an afflicting economic, political, and mediatic culture that celebrates not only the triumph of flexibility,

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<sup>30</sup> I borrow the words "prosthetic" and "prosthetic state" (in the French original, *prothétique*) from Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1, ed. Geoffrey Bennington and Peggy Kamuf, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 28.

<sup>31</sup> The passage from Smith that I have in mind is the following: "The man whose life is spent in performing a few simple operations [Smith is referring here to the division of labor, which he praises in the opening sections of his book], of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. The torpor of his mind renders him not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life. . . . His dexterity at his own particular trade seems, in this manner, to be acquired at the expense of his intellectual, social, and martial virtues. But in every improved and civilized society this is the state into which the labouring poor, that is, the great body of the people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes some pains to prevent it" (Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan [New York: Modern Library, 840]). Stiegler quotes this passage in his *La télécratie contre la démocratie* (Paris: Flammarion, 2008), 227.

<sup>32</sup> This article, entitled "Brain Care: Malabou after Foucault," is forthcoming in *Theory@buffalo*'s special issue on Malabou. Some of the discussion of Malabou that follows will reappear there in a different form.

blessing obedient individuals who have no greater merit than that of knowing how to bow their heads with a smile.<sup>33</sup>

Malabou calls for anger in response to a “culture of docility, of amenity, of the effacement of all conflict” that, in the rest of the book, she associates with neoliberalism. Raging against neoliberalism—but leaving the state and the welfare state entirely outside her considerations—Malabou presents a plea for a care that takes the form of anger: a care that is not flexible, obedient, or subservient, but one that rages, struggles, and says no. Indeed, Malabou’s vision of care is *plastic*; in her book, she defends a careful *plasticity* that she *opposes* to neoliberal *flexibility*.<sup>34</sup>

Before I explain further what I mean by this, let me clarify how I can present Malabou’s plea for anger using the language of care. Malabou’s association with care arrives through art, specifically through a work titled *Take Care of Yourself* by the French artist Sophie Calle. This work, which was originally mounted in the French pavilion of the 2007 Venice Biennale but has since been shown in galleries around the world, developed from a simple premise: when Calle received a breakup letter that ended with the sentence “Take care of yourself,” she started wondering what that imperative might mean. And so she decided to ask over a hundred women to interpret the letter according to their professional activities. *Take Care of Yourself* consisted of the many replies that Calle received. One of the women whom Calle wrote to was Malabou, and the philosopher responded with a letter in which she argues—after Søren Kierkegaard’s *Repetition*, also written after a breakup—that Calle’s lover lacks being a somebody and feels he must lose Calle in order to be somebody.<sup>35</sup>

At this point in time, Malabou’s book on the brain had already appeared, and while I am unaware of Calle’s exact reasons for contacting Malabou, it is not difficult to read Malabou’s book as a manifesto of care in a time of the neoliberal disintegration of the (welfare) state. Malabou’s central argument is that we need to become conscious of the brain’s plasticity. For as long as we remember, we have believed in a genetically determined brain. However, such a rigid vision of the brain is only part of the truth. Recent research on the brain has shown that the brain also contradicts rigidity: capable of both giving and receiving form, the brain is in fact plastic. In *The Future of Hegel*, Malabou had already listed the three meanings of plasticity: it names the capacity to give form, to receive form, and to explode it. Plasticity is thus not just “the sensible im-

<sup>33</sup> Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, trans. Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 79.

<sup>34</sup> Two years after the French original of Malabou’s book on the brain was published, the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk published a study titled *Rage and Time* (trans. Mario Wenning [New York: Columbia University Press, 2010]), which develops a discussion of the centrality of anger in Western civilization. Sloterdijk rejects the idea that rage can be a positive political force and reads all expressions of anger as instances of a resentment we ought to move beyond. Incapable of thinking plasticity as anything but terrorist, Sloterdijk would have little sympathy for Malabou’s project. By thinking rage in relation to care, I aim to complicate the reductive theory of anger that Sloterdijk develops. Given my interest (see the last section of this article) in aesthetic education, it is worth noting that in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant mentions anger (*Zorn*, the same word that Sloterdijk uses for anger) as an example of what he calls “aesthetically sublime” (*ästhetisch erhaben*) (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], 154); indeed, Kant concludes this section of the book by noting that “even sorrow” (158) can be sublime—as long as it is the vigorous kind of sorrow and not the mellowing one. A similarly nuanced approach is required with anger, and one would need to consider the different political outcomes of these two kinds of anger. Antonio Negri is arguably on the track of this when, at the very end of his text “Metamorphoses: Art and Immaterial Labor,” in *Art and Multitude*, trans. Ed Emery (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 101–23, he develops a plea for an “aesthetic sublime” (123) that would be articulated in the constitution of the multitudinarian common.

<sup>35</sup> See Sophie Calle, *Take Care of Yourself*, trans. Charles Penwarden et al. (Arles: Actes Sud, 2007).



age of taking form”: it also refers to “the annihilation of all form (explosion).”<sup>36</sup> It is this third, explosive dimension that marks plasticity’s relation to anger. Although it is true that the brain is always in part genetically determined, it is thus not the case that “the brain is already made.”<sup>37</sup> For this reason—and here we come closer to Foucault’s late work on the techniques of the self—Malabou can speak of a “plastic, organic art”<sup>38</sup> of the brain.

According to Malabou, we are thus living “at the hour of neuronal liberation” from neoliberal flexibility, but “we do not know it.”<sup>39</sup> Given the paragraph on rage against neoliberalism’s culture of docility that I quoted above, it is clear that Malabou’s vision of the brain is also a political vision. But what kind of politics is captured here, other than a rage against neoliberalism? The state and the welfare state—perhaps the two most obvious victims of neoliberalism—do not factor into Malabou’s theory; indeed, the book adds up to a largely “negatively” articulated political vision that, although it gestures toward a politics, never quite arrives at actually formulating one. Here, we should no doubt take seriously Isabelle Stengers’s recent warning, in a chapter from her book *Au temps des catastrophes* where she discusses the *pharmakon*, that to call for resistance—a call that is explicitly included in Malabou’s book<sup>40</sup>—is not necessarily the solution and can indeed be part and parcel of pharmacology’s curative/empoisoning dialectic.<sup>41</sup> As will be clear, I am not suggesting we abandon Malabou’s plea for rage altogether. My question is, rather, about the absence of the state and the welfare state in Malabou’s argument. If Malabou is asking us to rage against neoliberalism’s culture of docility, and if neoliberalism is widely considered to be responsible for the destruction of the (welfare) state, is Malabou silently asking us to take up the defense of the welfare state? Is the (welfare) state the silent beneficiary of Malabou’s testament to rage? But how is the relation between rage and the welfare state to be conceived?

In an article on Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *Never Let Me Go*, Bruce Robbins reintroduces the welfare state into Malabou’s plea for rage.<sup>42</sup> In the article, Robbins too develops a plea for anger; what is surprising, however, is the way in which this anger relates to the welfare state. Robbins shows how Ishiguro’s novel aligns the welfare state with the culture of docility, amenity, and the effacement of all conflict that Malabou characterizes as neoliberal. The welfare state is cast in the novel, Robbins argues, as “the institution that bribes us with minor restitutions and supplements so as to divert us from deep and systematic injustice, which is to say from our legitimate causes for anger.”<sup>43</sup> However, within this general framework the novel draws attention to the character of Tommy, who suffers from violent fits of rage. Although Tommy himself is not quite willing to see things in this way, Kathy, the narrator of the novel, considers these fits of anger to be related to a kind of knowledge: to the fact that somehow, Tommy always knew that he and his fellow students—all of them clones, bred to donate their organs to nonclones—are being exploited by

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<sup>36</sup> Malabou, *What Should We Do?*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>40</sup> See *ibid.*, 68.

<sup>41</sup> See Isabelle Stengers, *Au temps des catastrophes: Résister à la barbarie qui vient* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009), 129–30.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce Robbins, “Cruelty Is Bad: Banality and Proximity in *Never Let Me Go*,” *Novel* 40, no. 3 (2007): 297. The extended version of this article was published in Bruce Robbins, *Upward Mobility and the Common Good* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>43</sup> Robbins, “Cruelty Is Bad,” 297.

a society that claims to care for them and has moreover institutionalized care as part and parcel of this practice of exploitation. It is a grim vision of the welfare state indeed.

By having the reader sympathize with Tommy, Robbins argues, the novel appears to be making the case “for the expressing of anger—which is to say, a case in favor of the cruelty that the free expression of anger can cause.”<sup>44</sup> Of course, cruelty is bad, Robbins concludes his article. “All things considered, ‘civility’ would be preferable. But here [i.e., in the novel] at least cruelty and incivility also seem to be a part of a more expansive and counter-intuitive political vision, one that allows us to consider caring here as possibly conflicting with caring there, that allows us to consider the welfare state as a distanced, anger-bearing project in which anger is a necessary part of a genuine concern for people’s welfare.”<sup>45</sup> To a certain extent, the passage makes one reconsider the argument presented in “Orange Juice and Agent Orange.” Whereas Robbins, in that article, appears to argue *for* the welfare state *against* the welfare state’s association with fascism, in the article on Ishiguro it becomes clear that his defense of the welfare state does not add up to some kind of blind embrace of its administrations: instead, Robbins tries to safeguard a political culture of conflict from what one could call the ideology of care—from the kind of care that risks becoming complicit with exploitation (as Ishiguro’s novel shows).

If the state is thus, as I have argued, a *pharmakon*, it appears that this pharmacological essence of the state is intensified with the appearance of the welfare state. As a bio- and psychopolitical entity that explicitly aims to govern our welfare, the welfare state risks complicity with neoliberalism’s culture of complicity: a culture that in fact contributes to the destruction of the welfare state, and of the politics of conflict altogether.

## AESTHETIC EDUCATION

With these reflections on anger—on anger against neoliberalism and the welfare state’s cultures of docility; on a caring anger that would be genuinely concerned with people’s welfare—and on anger’s complicated politics, we have entered into the realm of aesthetics, understood as the realm of sensibility. In both Malabou’s book and Ishiguro’s novel, it is indeed the education of this sensibility that takes up a central position.

In this context, it is worth noting how in the aftermath of the recent riots in London and other cities in the United Kingdom, much of the discussion came to center around the question of anger and how it should be “educated.”<sup>46</sup> Rather than considering the riots as an economic issue that is caused by inequality—unemployment and the widening gap between the poor and the rich—those in power chose to consider it a cultural clash that had nothing to do with the economy. The issue is not inequality; it is that the rioters need to be taught a lesson, need to be taught the ethic of neoliberalism so that they will no longer destroy but respect the economic culture that surrounds them.<sup>47</sup> It is time for them to learn to bow their heads with a smile, to recall Malabou’s words. Rather than seizing the riots as a call for the abolishment of deep and sys-

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>46</sup> In a recent article titled “Democratic Dreams Rage in Athens,” Stathis Gourgouris provides further context for this issue with reference to recent political developments in Europe and the Arab world. The article is available at <http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/opinion/2011/07/201171985335665864.html>.

<sup>47</sup> For just one of many articles that have addressed this issue, see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/aug/10/riots-reflect-society-run-greed-looting> (accessed October 25, 2011).

tematic injustice, as Robbins puts it, they were seized as an opportunity to call for a reeducation of youth: its motto could be that we need a new a Protestant ethic to reinforce the spirit of capitalism.

One of the things that the discussion in the aftermath of the riots made clear is that education is at the center of our contemporary relation to neoliberalism and the (welfare) state. In a way, Malabou already revealed this when she stated, “Perhaps we ought to *relearn* how to enrage ourselves” (emphasis mine): there is a process of learning that is crucial here, a process of aesthetic education. If power, in the aftermath of the riots, becomes interested in such aesthetic education as a way to transform young people’s anger into complicity with neoliberalism and the welfare state’s culture of docility—into what could also be called consensus politics—it is important to note that both Malabou and Robbins appear to call for another kind of aesthetic education in which anger becomes part of a politics of dissensus (to recall the work of Jacques Rancière) that would genuinely care about people’s welfare.

With reference to Bernard Stiegler’s discussion of “nuclear criticism” in his book on pharmacology, one could note that Robbins’s work shows that such a politics is not a nuclear politics that would blow the welfare state to pieces.<sup>48</sup> Instead, “Orange Juice and Agent Orange” reveals a strong attachment to the welfare state. I have argued, in fact, that Robbins as well as some of the other theorists discussed here urge one to adopt a pharmacological attitude toward the (welfare) state, an attitude that would enable one to consider not only the state’s different guises but also the different affective responses that such a multifaced state may necessitate (“caring here as possibly conflicting with caring there,” as Robbins puts it).<sup>49</sup>

Education—and education in pharmacology, perhaps philosophy’s oldest project, if we consider Plato’s dialogues—is crucial for this process and leads one back most immediately to the heritage of the Enlightenment. Indeed, Malabou’s book and the work on the brain it proposes can be read in light of this particular history. The book’s leitmotif, which is adapted from Karl Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*—a book on revolution that is highly relevant for our time—calls for a kind of brainwork, a careful work of the brain: “The brain is a work,” Malabou’s book begins, “and we do not know it.”<sup>50</sup> The first task of her book is to awaken what she calls a consciousness of the brain, more precisely a consciousness of how the brain, which is always in part genetically determined, is always also a work in progress. As such, Malabou’s book implicates anyone who has a brain (some may want to ask here about the place of nonhuman beings with brains in Malabou’s philosophy). It aims to make people responsible for their brains in the sense that Marx wrote, at the beginning of *Eighteenth Brumaire*: “Humans make their own history, but they do not know that they make it.”<sup>51</sup>

That is the sentence that Malabou supposedly borrows from Marx (though she does not give a reference) in the opening paragraph of her book. It is worth noting, however, that Marx’s sentence reads differently: “Men make their own history,” he writes, “but they do not make it just as they please. They do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the

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<sup>48</sup> See Stiegler, *Ce qui fait*, 67–96.

<sup>49</sup> Robbins, “Cruelty Is Bad,” 301.

<sup>50</sup> Malabou, *What Should We Do?*, 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.”<sup>52</sup> One can see why, given Marx’s reference to the brain, Malabou would have been interested in this passage. In her adaptation of Marx’s sentence, Malabou replaces Marx’s “history” by “brain”; “they do not *make* history just as they please” becomes “they do not *know* that the brain is a work.” These differences are illuminating and draw out Malabou’s relation to the Enlightenment: unlike Marx, she appears to be more focused on knowing than on doing, on interpretation rather than transformation. Or more precisely, whereas doing precedes knowing in Malabou, another kind of doing can only become possible after a new knowledge, a new consciousness, has been acquired. It is after one has dared to know that new conditions of doing (that do not exclude, in the case of the brain, genetic determination) can be established.

These rationales—making history, but not just as they please; making the brain, but not knowing it—echo the two-sided motto by which Kant summarizes the Enlightenment: “argue all you please, but obey!”<sup>53</sup> It may indeed be that with this double motto, which arguably extends between the curative dimension of argument and the empoisoning dimension of obedience, Kant was already writing a chapter in the history of the pharmacology of the (welfare) state—a pharmacology that, with the Enlightenment, comes to involve the intellectual (including the angry intellectual, as I have shown) to an unprecedented extent. Although Kant’s text has its problems (as Foucault has argued, it is ultimately a highly conservative text that shies away from the possibility of transgression), it nevertheless opens up the possibility of the politics I have sketched out here, a politics that would be attentive to *both* the curative *and* the empoisoning dimensions of the welfare state.

Although anger can, as I have suggested, play an important role in this, Malabou’s insistence on learning how to enrage oneself reveals the importance of some degree of educational guidance in such an anger-politics. This would entail reconsidering not only the political possibilities of anger but also the politics of education. In *Never Let Me Go*, the problem with Tommy’s anger is that it is blind: when Kathy suggests to Tommy at the end of the novel that his fits of rage might be due to the fact that “at some level, [Tommy] always *knew*” that they were being exploited, Tommy replies that he does not think so. “No, it was always just me. Me being an idiot. That’s all it ever was.”<sup>54</sup> That is, of course, what a culture of docility would want people to think. It is Kathy’s account that puts one on the track of a possible other significance of Tommy’s anger—but neither Tommy nor Kathy ever quite rise up to its challenges. The aesthetic education that the characters in the novel receive, and the aesthetics of the self that Kathy’s narration in *Never Let Me Go* practices, ultimately add up to a culture of docility that is entirely complicit with the caring administrations of an exploitative welfare state.

As a novel, however, *Never Let Me Go* arguably accomplishes something quite different: through its representation of Tommy’s anger, and through the fact that it also includes Kathy’s illuminating explanation of this anger, the novel is able to rise above both Tommy’s blindness and Kathy’s passivity toward something like the transgression that Foucault desires but that neither Tommy nor Kathy alone achieves. All this takes place within the enabling, potentially curative structure of a text that is otherwise quite poisonous (many critics have been frustrated by the lack of resistance in the novel). It is thus through this *other* kind of aesthetic education, one that contrasts starkly with the aesthetic education that the characters in the novel receive, that

<sup>52</sup> Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1963; New York: International Publishers, 1998), 15.

<sup>53</sup> Kant’s text “Was ist Aufklärung?” is reprinted in Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, trans. Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007), 29–37.

<sup>54</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 275.

(to borrow from Franco “Bifo” Berardi’s work on semiocapitalism) our field of cognitive action is reorganized,<sup>55</sup> and a wholly different relation to the (welfare) state, and ultimately a relation to a wholly different (welfare) state, begin to become possible. A

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<sup>55</sup> Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-alpha Generation*, ed. Erik Empson and Stephen Shukaitis, trans. Arianna Bove, Erik Empson, Michael Goddard, et al. (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2009).