

**Stiegler's University**

**Dr Mark Featherstone**

**Sociology**

**Keele University**

**Keele**

**Staffordshire**

**ST55BG**

**UK**

**[m.a.featherstone@keele.ac.uk](mailto:m.a.featherstone@keele.ac.uk)**

**August, 2014**

## Stiegler's University

### I

## Stiegler's Politics of Knowledge

In this paper I propose to explore Bernard's Stiegler's work through the lens of a politics of education and in particular the idea of the university which becomes a pharmacological space of on the one hand utopian possibility and on the other hand dystopian limitation, destruction, and death (1) in his recent *States of Shock* (2015). In developing this thesis, I begin with a discussion of Stiegler's (2011b, 2012, 2014b) volumes on disbelief and discredit, before moving on to explore his theory of youth, attention capture, and the struggle between stupidity and intelligence (2010, 2015). Finally, I reflect upon his work on the significance of life, *What Makes Life Worth Living* (2013), and emphasise the import of knowledge, culture, and education in his thought. Centrally, my examination of Stiegler's work focuses on his use of psychoanalysis and in particular his debt to object relations theory and the ideas of Melanie Klein and D. W. Winnicott which becomes explicit in *What Makes Life Worth Living* (2013). In working on Stiegler's use of object relations theory, I want to argue that he takes knowledge to represent a privileged, creative, and imaginative, mode of being in and relating to the world that establishes what Winnicott (2005) talks about in terms of a creative, transitional, space where human development can take place. While Winnicott primarily spoke about this idea in terms of childhood development, he also recognised that it anticipated the idea of culture more generally, where people learn about and work upon their environment in order to create both

themselves and the world, where world refers to human built space. Centrally, however, both Klein (1997), and later Winnicott (2005), understood that this utopian situation, which makes creativity, imagination, and development possible, relies upon the establishment of secure space, where play, which relies on experimentation, risk, and taking a chance, can take place without danger of reprimand, sanction, or violence.

It is this state of security which Stiegler (2011b, 2012) believes has disappeared in contemporary capital culture organised around neo-liberal principles where creativity, imagination, and experimentation are made absolutely subordinate to a kind of nihilism of the bottom line where value equates to financial return. In Stiegler's view there can be no true security under these conditions primarily because neo-liberal capitalism narrows the limits of possibility of the world by making everything about profitability. This focus on profitability fatally undermines security, and indeed creates conditions of radical insecurity, through the elevation of the idea of competition to the status of a core philosophical principle. This focus on competition in turn fractures social relations, transforms the other into a stranger and potential enemy, and plunges the individual, who becomes what Stiegler calls a dis-individual, into a state of fearful precariousness. The implications of this cultural condition for education are profound. The neo-liberal colonization of every aspect of life means that the nursery, the school, and the university become battlegrounds - primary sites of struggle between the kind of careful socialisation which Klein (1997), Winnicott (2005), and following in their footsteps, Stiegler (2010, 2015), suggests opens paths into the future for the trans-individual, or the socially confident person who creates themselves through their relation to others and world, and the mode of neo-liberal

subjectivization which reduces the trans-individual to the status of a lonely dis-individual who develops into a machine, or a component in a vast technological system, organised for the singular purpose of the production of financial profit. In the second section of the article I develop a discussion of this model of mis-education, which essentially takes the child through nursery, school, and university and moulds them into a nihilistic capitalist subject, through reference to Henry Giroux's (2014a) work on neo-liberalism and dystopian education. Akin to Stiegler, Giroux despairs of the direction of education, and especially higher education, under conditions of neo-liberalism, and suggests that the transformation of the university into a feeder for the informationalised knowledge economy will ultimately result in the destruction of politics, democracy, and essentially freedom itself.

However, Giroux (2010a, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2016) is clear that this process does not take place without enormous violence, and he talks about the neo-liberal culture of cruelty which evolves from an ideology that foregrounds the principle of competition and makes financial success, or 'making it', the core value in society. In educational spaces, where individuals should occupy secure spaces where creativity, experimentation, and essentially failure must be possible, the effect of the imposition of this neo-liberal value system has been the destruction of youthful subjects and the emergence, in America at least, of an educational system haunted by the spectres of despair, mental collapse, rage, and suicidal violence. This is, of course, the result of the violent imposition of ideology, and ideological education, upon children and young people in the process of developing selves, who do not have the psychological resources or, to use Boris Cyrulnik's (2009) term, 'resilience' to survive the neo-liberal culture of social Darwinism, failure, precariousness, and

disposability (Giroux and Evans, 2015). While media theorist and educationalist Doug Kellner (2008) links the imposition of the culture of violence, what Giroux (2012) calls a culture of cruelty, to the American phenomenon of the school shooting, Stiegler (2012) explains the same event through the idea of negative sublimation, where the destroyed dis-individual reacts to their hopeless situation with pointless, meaningless, suicidal violence, designed to paradoxically assert their position in a world that seems completely indifferent to their existence and at the same time destroy themselves and everybody else in a violent rejection of reality itself. In the face of this situation, and the ever present threat of explosions of meaningless violence, the university campus, which might once have been organised around the utopian idea of a secure space for creativity, imagination, and experimentation, is transformed into a fearful dystopia, a militarised camp, constructed in terms that recall Oscar Newman's (1973) idea of defensible space. Here, the campus, or camp, becomes about ideological discipline, the reduction of the nascent trans-individual into a capitalist dis-individual, and the control of the possible rage which may result from this violent process of subjectivization.

While the neo-liberal educational space is, therefore, comparable to Foucault's (1977, 2006) asylum or prison, which sought to re-engineer deviant subjects, and rehabilitate and train them for reinsertion into the modern state machine through the imposition of bio-political techniques, it also attempts to work on the psychology of its inhabitants through the psycho-political management of desire and control of object-choice. In other words, if Foucault's (1977) principle example of biopolitical training, the military drill, reflected the modification of behaviour through control of the body, Stiegler's (2010) concept of psycho-power refers to the control of psychological

structure through the modification of the operation of the Lacanian categories of the imaginary and the symbolic order which become absolutely identified with capitalism under conditions of neo-liberalism where money is everything. In Stiegler's (2015) university, this is precisely the purpose the neo-liberal form of education serves by transforming embodied knowledge into estranged information, and making the creative process of learning subordinate to results-led forms of Darwinian competition designed to position the lonely dis-individual in the economy. However, Stiegler (2010) makes the point that the problem here is not discipline itself, because discipline is necessary for serious engagement with the world and mastery of knowledge, but rather the way the contemporary education system disciplines in the name of neo-liberalism and capitalist productivity. Departing from Foucault (1977), then, who Stiegler suggests took a more one-sided view of the meaning of discipline (2), it may be the case that his work contains a theory of resistance organised around the concept of discipline, or what we might call, serious immersion in play, capable of the transcendence of the banal principles of neo-liberalism where life is about making profit. In this way, we might argue that Stiegler's (2015) pharmacological university, which potentially contains both the utopian principle of creative development and the dystopian conditions of neo-liberal subjectivization around the profit motive, also reflects a story of dialectical evolution. Here (a) the original utopian principle of individualisation through education more or less gives way to (b) the neo-liberal model where productivity and profit is what counts, which paradoxically contains the seeds of its own destruction in (c) the disciplinary or what we might call revolutionary form of education capable of serious play and transcendence of the narrow structures of the capitalist model where knowledge is simply estranged, alienated information to be bought and sold. It is this potential

dialectical shift to a third, utopian, form of revolutionary education, which I suggest connects Stiegler's thought to the philosophy of Socrates and Plato (Badiou, 2012), and the revolutionary educational theory of Freire (1996), which I propose to explore in the conclusion of this piece.

In what follows in the rest of this article, I propose to extend my discussion of Stiegler's work in terms of the pharmacological battlefield of educational space, where the struggle is between the form of playful education Stiegler (2010, 2012, 2013) develops from Klein and Winnicott's object relations theory and the monstrous neo-liberal form which evacuates human significance for the sake of profitability and surplus value which I would suggest he takes from Heidegger's (1977) work on technology. In the next section of the article I discuss Stiegler's work on first, the decadent society through an exploration of his work on disbelief and discredit (2011b, 2012), before turning to his work on the alienation of youth in the neo-liberal form (2010). In concluding this section of the article, I draw out Stiegler's debt to Klein and Winnicott through a discussion of his *What Makes Life Worth Living* (2013). Following this section, I shift towards an exploration of Stiegler's (2015) idea of the university as perhaps the principle site of educational struggle, which draws upon his (2013) use of object relations theory, suggest how the educational institution might come to represent ideal utopian form of transitional creative space, and conclude through reference to the comparison between Giroux's (2014a) theory of dystopian education under conditions of neo-liberal capitalism and Stiegler's (2012) work on negative sublimation played out in other educational spaces, such as Columbine and Sandy Hook. In order to conclude this section of the article, I explore the psychoanalysis of negative sublimation and rage in educational space through a

discussion of Lionel Shriver's (2003) novel and Lynne Ramsay's (2011) subsequent film, *We Need to Talk About Kevin*. My approach here is to use *We Need to Talk about Kevin* as a particular case or example to illustrate a universal trend in neo-liberal society – that is the destruction of creative, transitional, space and the transformation of educational institutions into places of violence. Finally, and in order to conclude the article, I pick out the fragments of utopian hope from Shriver's novel, and link them to Stiegler's (2010, 2015) pharmacological vision of disciplined learning in order to suggest that this view represents a theory of educational resistance which is comparable to the utopian philosophy of Socrates, Plato, and Freire. Thus I conclude with the suggestion that we should read Stiegler in terms of a theorist of the utopian and dystopian possibilities of knowledge and education and that the idea of the university is in many respects the primary site of his pharmacological politics, simply by virtue of the ways in which it contains and reflects the struggle between what we might broadly call the Socratic and neo-liberal models of education.



## II

### Stiegler's Vision of the Decadent Society

In his recent works, and particularly his *Disbelief and Discredit* (2011b, 2012, 2014b) trilogy, Stiegler argues that we inhabit what he calls a hyper-industrial society driven forward by a computational system of production and consumption, which colonises the entirety of life. In the first volume of the trilogy, *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies* (2011b), he explains that this system is organised around a principle of endless innovation and development that absolutely relies on investment in research, knowledge, and information. In Stiegler's earlier works, including his *Technics and Time* (1998, 2009, 2011a) trilogy, this mode of development through innovation defines humanity itself in the sense that the human is essentially a technical animal. That is to say that whereas Marx sought to explain human technology through the myth of Prometheus, where people make machines on the basis of their desire to become Gods, in Stiegler's work, the key mythological figure becomes Epimetheus, brother of Prometheus, who forgot to give humanity the tools to survive when the animals, including man, were being moulded by the Gods. Since man was thus always defined by deficit, which meant that he was going to have a hard time surviving, Epimetheus' blunder forced Prometheus' hand and pushed him into criminal activity. As a result, Stiegler (1998) explains that the human is an animal man plus technical skill which we acquired through a combination of Epimetheus' forgetfulness and Prometheus' subsequent criminal activity. So far so good. The story now is about the way humanity makes itself through its machine. However, Stiegler (2009) explains that the co-production of humanity and machine

starts to break down when the machine begins to out-pace humanity which falls into a state of disorientation. Here, reason turns upon itself in the emergence of instrumental rationality and the state of individual maturity that enables true individualism founded in deep cultural knowledge collapses into estranged stupidity. Following the work of Simondon, Stiegler calls this process proletarianisation. Beyond Simondon, the key figures for Stiegler here are Heidegger who wrote about the alien quality of modern technology is his *The Question Concerning Technology* (1977) and Weber (2002) who saw that the instrumental rationality of modern capitalism would quickly transform society into an inhuman, disenchanted, place. This is where Stiegler (2011b, 2012, 2014b) picks up the story in his works on disbelief and discredit, where he explains that the problem of the society of constant innovation is that it has lost its ability to bind individuals to its cause because it is no longer capable of the construction of a human rationale. There is nothing beyond the nihilistic pursuit of profitability. In other words, the hyper-industrial society is meaningless, insignificant, pointless, and spiritless and the university that would have once provided the space to transmit cultural inheritance and civilizational norms becomes a blind factory for the production of estranged information. At this point education becomes part of the problem of the alienated, automatic, society ruled by stupidity, rather than intelligence.

The key point of Stiegler's work on disbelief and discredit is, therefore, that every society relies on libidinal investment and identification in order to sustain itself. This is more or less the same point that Weber (2002) made, of course, about early capitalism in his work on the spirit of capitalism, where he was able to show that even the most rational social system originates in belief, faith, and investment in

cultural inheritance. While Weber saw the problem of disenchantment coming, Stiegler finds the realisation of the technological nightmare of the iron cage in contemporary neo-liberal society which subordinates every aspect of life to profit. Under these conditions money is everything, but the spiritual economy collapses, and the symbolic order, which absolutely relies on fundamental principles around human significance, no longer works. Essentially, this is how Stiegler conceptualises neo-liberal society, which has progressively transformed the trans-individual into a lonely calculator of costs and benefits, and made every other symbolic system subordinate to assessments around competitive advantage. All that matters under these conditions is that I come out on top over the other and achieve my goals which in neo-liberal economic logic are orientated around profit and consumption. On top of this Stiegler (2011b, 2012, 2014b) explains that neo-liberalism deliberately undermines the symbolic order, which is premised on the understanding of delay, because it tells the consumer that they should have what they want now, rather than having to wait until sometime in the future. Since delay, and deferral of gratification, is an effect of oedipal discipline, structures desire, and the duration of human life itself, Stiegler's (2012) view is that the neo-liberal turn to immediate gratification plunges humans into a society of drive. Under conditions of drive there is absolutely no time to wait, or learn anything, and the newly emancipated subject, or dis-individual must violently take what they want. Thus primitive libidinal states come to the surface of the neo-liberal person who lacks self-discipline.

Of course, neo-liberal society responds to this primitivism in two ways. First, the command to have to what you want now is backed by the principle of easy credit and debt designed to bind the post-modern primitive to the new society into the future

(Lazzarato, 2012). However, this strategy must be in doubt in today, since the idea of repayment of debt relies on a symbolic order to authorise the relation between creditor and debtor. Does the post-modern primitive recognise this relation? More likely they fall back into a refusal to repay or even recognise their debt based in an unconscious response to the destroyed symbolic order. Although Stiegler never really explores this point, it is important to note how the idea of the default returns in his theory, specifically around this issue of debt and repayment, because this conditions the second response of neo-liberal society to the rise of post-modern primitivism, which is state violence, and the kind of police power which Ranciere (2003) explores in his theses on the contemporary post-political scene. In other words, neo-liberal society turns towards police violence, because it can no longer rely on identification, and becomes a strange social, or asocial, form organised around lawlessness, drive, punishment, and aggressive discipline. However, Stiegler (2012) is clear that this turn to police power cannot prevent the rise of what he calls drive based dis-orders, which revolve very precisely around the failure of the social symbolic order, and include depression, anxiety, and the destruction of attention. In this situation where everything is short term there is no time for deep learning, or in fact immersion in history, and the neo-liberal dis-individual becomes wild. The Weberian irony of this situation is, therefore, that it is precisely when absolutely everything is calculated and neo-liberal practice ensures that absolutely everything has some market value that the previously identified subject becomes a primitive dis-individual who has no social investment whatsoever.

At this point the education system, which was once concerned with enabling the civilization of individuals through teaching cultural inheritance, ends up advancing

the problem of proletarianisation through the way it estranges youth in abstract information that is entirely meaningless. In this way Stiegler (2011b, 2012) theorises the rise of the nihilistic society devoid of significance or spirit that relies on the presence of the incalculable. This principle of the incalculable, which recalls the original philosophical notion of truth which always escapes the philosopher, is essentially the idea that animates the educational ideal, and the notion of Socratic ignorance (Nehamas, 2000), where one must always learn. Here, life itself is learning and education is never a commodity to be bought, sold, and consumed, but rather a practice and discipline that one engages in the name of reason, civilization, and being human. It is this idea, the idea of a future of education, thought, and civilization itself which is, in Stiegler's (2015) view, under attack in neo-liberal society. This is the case because this social system, which is organised around the principle of instrumental rationality, recognises calculation, where particular forms of information produce maximum value, and cannot understand the value of human significance. What is more is that the memory of this idea, which stretches back to Socrates and characterises the history of western thought, is in the process of being more or less wiped out by high speed communications. While Socrates continues to exist in information, knowledge of him vanishes, because, in Stiegler's (2010) view, knowledge takes time. By contrast information is subject to rules of process, transfer, and financial calculation. Information is speed and for this reason perhaps the neo-liberal commodity par excellence.

Of course, the problem with the example of Socrates, and his transformation into information which we might find through Google or on Wikipedia, is that it suggests elitism. However, this is not really Stiegler's point. Although I think it is possible to

critique Stiegler for his failure to explain class stratification or racial division, essentially his analysis of the destroyed decadent society rises above the level of intra-social inequality to explore the impact of the loss of social memory, which enables the critical mapping of inequality and division in the first place. On this basis it is not that it would be better if we lived in a society where we learned the classics, because this is what elites should do, but rather that the erasure of the archive, or memory bank of history, in neo-liberal speed wipes out ability to remember the past, which impacts upon our sense of the present, and perhaps most importantly our potential to imagine and change the future. Stiegler (1998, 2011b, 2012) makes this point throughout his work through reference to the work of Husserl and explains that without retention, protention or the ability to think in terms of the future is impossible. Thus Stiegler (2012) thinks that neo-liberal society is a hopeless place and education that should open up possibility for the future has become part of the problem of the dystopic, nihilistic, social form because of the way it has been transformed into a factory for the production and circulation of estranged information. The paradox of this hopeless system is, therefore, that information is everywhere and knowledge is nowhere. Google means that we live in a blizzard on facts, figures, and opinions, but also that we have regressed to a state of systemic stupidity, a form of technological idiocy premised on our inability to process, identify with, or know anything.

Perhaps worse, there is little sense that we really recognise the horror of this situation, primarily because, in a classic reversal that recalls Marx's (1988) theory of alienation, intelligence is in the machine, and one can think of the internet here, while the human has become stupid, unable to think for themselves, or even recognise their fate. It is in the face of this situation that Stiegler (2010) suggests that humanity

has been proletarianised and the social system that supports the technological machine has lost its sense of authority simply because it no longer sustains a properly human world. On the contrary, Stiegler (2011b, 2012, 2014b) argues that disbelief, discredit, and nihilism are the result of the emergence of a post-modern un-world which has led humanity back towards a bestial state characterised by the condition of drive, which Freud (2001) thought would eventually destroy the human species. For Stiegler (2012), neo-liberal society is thus a society on the edge, where we sustain ourselves in addictogenic states defined by the attempt to resolve alienation in highly repetitive behaviours. Unfortunately, the attempt to solve wider systemic problems through addiction is fatally flawed and Freud (2001) knew that this thanatological strategy could only end one way – self destruction. Insofar as these behaviours never really work, or resolve the original trauma which produces them, Stiegler (2012) explains that we now inhabit a thanatological, suicidal society, where becoming furious is the primitive response to the horror of the hopeless dystopic un-world. Against this horror, Stiegler (2013) suggests that we must find ways to oppose our own decay. In other words, we must rebel, and fight our own bestiality, and somehow civilize ourselves.

While neo-liberal society seeks to crack down on the primitive through police violence, Stiegler (2010, 2013) suggests a return to Socratic principles around thought, culture, cultivation, and education in order to save humanity from thanatological self-destruction. Of course, this is easier said than done, because neo-liberalism seeks to plug the dis-individual into its circuits through new media, and in particular the hand held mobile media gadget, and undermine deep immersion in cultural history because this is entirely unproductive, where productivity

is understood in terms of economic value. In this respect the Apple gadget, and especially the iPhone, become auto-erotic objects, which connect the lost, lonely dis-individual back to neo-liberal mother in the Kleinian sense, and make up for their alienation from others who are always competitors and their estrangement from their social and cultural inheritance which has dissolved into a psychotic blizzard of signs, symbols, and infotainment that means nothing. However, regardless of Apple's symbolic capital, which suggests that its gadgets connect people and somehow produce creative individuals, Stiegler's (2010) view is that there is little potential for creativity and imagination in estranged information. On the contrary, he argues that information, and particularly the kind of information overload that characterises contemporary online culture, creates a state of symbolic and spiritual misery. This is essentially his position in the second volume of *Disbelief and Discredit, Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals* (2012), and the first volume of *The Hyperindustrial Epoch, Symbolic Misery* (2014a), where he explains how excessive information undermines thought, reason, and knowledge and plunges the individual into a state of psychological shock that renders them stupid. On the basis of this state of symbolic and spiritual misery he argues that the future collapses towards a hopeless, dystopian, apocalyptic anti-social form. Contemporary youth, who have grown up under conditions of neo-liberalism and have no lived memory bank to fall back on, are thus Stiegler's (2012) deprived generation, or what he calls de-generation, a group devoid of identity, hope, and future.

In order to try to capture the horror of the neo-liberal de-generation, Stiegler turns to education, and the collapse of the Socratic education ideal under conditions of contemporary capitalism, and suggests that we can find examples of the blind rage



of youth in cases such as Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Sandy Hook, where young men play out their hopelessness in mindless acts of destruction and self-destruction. For Stiegler (2012), the significance of these violent acts resides in the way they represent a form of negative sublimation, an attempt to leave their trace on history, and oppose a culture organised around waste and disposability. In other words, the killers seek to leave their mark on the world or, in Stiegler's work, un-world through acts paradoxically designed to annihilate both themselves and the very world they seek to influence. Although Stiegler does not reflect upon the particular significance of these attacks on places of education (the nursery, the school, the university), I think that it is implicit in his choice of these examples. That is to say that Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Sandy Hook are instances where young men sought to act out their despair, hopelessness, and blind rage in precisely the places where youth should find confidence, hope, the faith in the future, but instead experience the horror of the nihilistic neo-liberal machine that teaches little more than competition, struggle, and inhumanity. In this respect Stiegler's (2012) violent dis-individuals represent the youthful death drive and its violent rejection of the neo-liberal disorder he talks about in terms of the concept of the human wasteland. Under these conditions the education system is less a solution to the problem of violence and more a cause of barbarism and the tendency towards thanatological self-destruction.

While Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Sandy Hook symbolise the alienation and rage of youth in the very educational settings which should provide security, possibility, and hope, Stiegler (2010, 2015) argues that opposition to the neo-liberal dystopia must also come through education which has the potential to create realisable fictions for the future which can reconstruct the thick symbolic order neo-liberalism

seeks to deconstruct in the name of the profit motive. The precise value of education here is that it has the potential to construct the world in more positive terms, and in short build what Klein (1997) would call a good object, in order to transform youth's perception of the future. However, this is absolutely reliant on the construction of positive, secure, educational space, which is not determined and organised around the kind of objective cruelty and violence that marks neo-liberal society. While the good nursery, school, and university has the potential to imagine the world in positive terms, and suggest that change is possible, bad educational space sets kids up for a life of despair, hopelessness, failure, and barely contained rage. In this respect Stiegler's (2014c) utopian project, *Ars Industrialis*, is, I think essentially reliant on cultural transformation, which includes educational transformation, and the socialisation of kids into a world of possibility through immersion in transitional spaces defined by security, care, attention, and hope for the future. Stiegler sets out this argument in *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* (2010) and *States of Shock* (2015) where he explains the education must be about social competency and the socialisation of mature individuals, rather than the creation of little capitalists who understand the world through the lens of social Darwinism.

Equally problematic for Stiegler (2010), however, is the impact of the media, and particularly new media, upon youth. In his view re-enchantment of the world, and the reconstruction of a durable symbolic order, relies on discipline, cultural work, and what he calls *otium*, or studious leisure. However, the space and time for this form of serious play is screened out of life under conditions of neo-liberal capitalism by the culture industry which employs strategies of attention capture to create little consumers who then project consumerism into education where they behave like

customers buying information. Under the influence of the consumer culture industry kids suffer attention deficit disorder and what Hayles (2007) calls hyper-attention which makes immersion in culture practically impossible. The task of education thus becomes to escape circuits of late capitalism where everything is measured in terms of its profitability, oppose this degenerative effects of systemic stupidity, and resist neo-liberal principles of competition and consumption for the sake of a more human future. This human future relies on the creation of good objects and Stiegler makes this clear in his *What Makes Life Worth Living* (2013). Whereas neo-liberalism plunges people, and especially kids who cannot fall back on a lived memory bank of history to find some sense of significance in life, into a state of nature where everything is more or less meaningless, Stiegler (2013) turns to object relations theory, and specifically D. W. Winnicott's *Playing and Reality* (2005), to suggest that good objects are necessary in order to create a positive orientation towards the world. While the consumer object is entirely disposable, disappears very quickly, and creates a vision of a world defined by disposability, Stiegler (2013) seeks out Winnicott's good object, which is reliable, dependable, durable, and takes time. According to Stiegler the good object, which is itself a symbol of what Klein (1997) calls the good mother who cares for the child and keeps them safe, provides a positive vision of the world, and thus offers a sense of security, hope, and possibility. In Klein's work the mother envelops the child in safe space and the transitional object captures this in order to allow confident exploration of the world.

Later, when the child moves into education it is important that they continue to feel secure, and find similarly durable objects, including frames of knowledge, through which to explore their environment and provide them with some sense of

significance. This is *not* what happens in the neo-liberal education system where kids are met with a blizzard of estranged information, a hyper-competitive do or die environment, and a sense of human insignificance that throws them into a state of despair and it is this that Stiegler opposes throughout his work. The provision of liveable culture space is precisely what Lacan means by the symbolic order and exactly why the neo-liberal focus on information is problematic in its failure to recognise the importance of immersion and identification in the idea of knowledge. While information suggests alienation and estrangement, knowledge implies immersion, identification, internalisation, and it is this that leads Stiegler to call for a contemporary neo-politics or politics of knowledge in *What Makes Life Worth Living* (2013). Against the current fetish for information, and technical mastery orientated exclusively towards production, Stiegler suggests that what is required in the contemporary nihilistic society is a more human knowledge comparable to the philosophy of the good practiced by Socrates and Plato, which can answer fundamental question around the significance of life and provide a sense of direction for the future. While Socrates sought to achieve this through the practice of critique, dialogue, and dialectic, Plato's innovation was, of course, to seek to institutionalise the Socratic idea in the form of a city (Badiou, 2012). Although there is endless debate about the seriousness of Plato's utopia, what is undeniable, I think, is his imagination of the future, and desire to set out how people should live.

Perhaps most importantly, however, thought, the idea of learning, and the principle of education, were central to both thinkers, even though Plato's faith was probably shaken by his teacher's execution, which led him down the path of authoritarian systematisation that has eventually resulted in the horror show we confront today. I

have little doubt that Stiegler would recognise Plato's error, which is what he captures through the idea of the pharmakon that similarly cures and poisons, but what we find in his work is an understanding of the value of the Socratic-Platonic philosophical project, where knowledge, thought, and critique of the conditions of the present work in the service of the future in the name of youth and generations to come. In this respect Stiegler (2010) sees that the struggle for the future, what he calls the battle for intelligence, relies on the past, the accumulation of knowledge neo-liberalism seeks to eradicate, and in this way education becomes essential by virtue of its civilizational role. For Stiegler it is this education into cultural heritage and the future it ensures that we must save for generations to come in order to resist the horror of the drive based society. This is precisely why the university becomes a key site of struggle in his thought because it is here more than any other educational institution that the struggle between knowledge, information, intelligence, and stupidity will be fought and the way we think about education itself will be decided.

### III

#### **Stiegler's University in the Battle for Intelligence**

In support of Stiegler's thesis, Henry Giroux (2010a, 2012, 2014a, 2015, 2016) paints a nightmarish picture of what he calls dystopian education in a range of works. In his view neo-liberal political economy destroys education, or at least the kind of critical education which both Giroux and Stiegler think is essential to human life, simply because truly human education wastes time on thought, which is unnecessary in the technological society where computation determines everything. In light of this condition, in Giroux's (2014a,b) work on American education the educational institution serves a very particular purpose, which is to destroy the student's sense of self, and transform them into the kind of zombie Stiegler (2012) talks about through the idea of the dis-individual. Like the zombie, who is a key figure in a number of Giroux's (2010b) works, Stiegler's dis-individual cannot think, but rather reacts, and responds to instinctual impulses concerned with consumption, and essentially survival in a violent un-world. In this system of control, what Giroux (2007) calls the military-industrial-academic complex, the role of the teacher is to destroy the student and ensure their identification with the neo-liberal system, which becomes a kind of perverse super-ego. This strategy involves what Freire (1996) talks about in terms of authoritarian education, or the banking model of education, where the teacher simply drills the student who unthinkingly internalises particular ideas. Under these conditions what the student thinks is wrong, and must be abandoned, in favour of what the teacher instructs and tells them is correct. This is, of course, exactly what Stiegler (2010) means when he writes of neo-liberal psycho-

power understood through the lens of education, and shows why the teacher has such an important role to play in the contemporary battle for intelligence. While Giroux's (2015) neo-liberal education system is a space of violence, which institutionalises the destruction of subjectivity in an obsessive objectivism that defends disposability and celebrates output, Stiegler's (2010) battle of intelligence requires that the teacher opposes this machine through an attempt to save the student's imagination and creativity through the construction of a secure space, a kind of utopian classroom, where beleaguered youth can express themselves without fear of reprimand or failure. This is, of course, a challenge in itself, because in Giroux's (2014a,b) neo-liberal educational space people are things and there is no real autonomy. This is essentially why the neo-liberal culture of cruelty has such appeal. On the one hand the normalisation and celebration of violence represents deep socialisation into the capitalist spirit of competition, but on the other hand it is also a reflection of the way in which violence destroys people, transforms them into dis-individuals, and causes them to become sadists who imagine that personal salvation resides in the destruction of the other.

This is essentially how we should understand Stiegler's (2012) example of Columbine, but Virginia Tech, and Sandy Hook would have similar psychological causes, which Doug Kellner (2008) explains through a crisis of masculinity. In Kellner's work young American men are under enormous pressure to live up to the Sly Stallone, John Wayne, fantasy of hyper-masculinity Herbert Hoover captured in the 1930s through his idea of the rugged individual, which coincidentally may have also propelled Donald Trump to power. When they are unable to achieve this ideal they feel worthless and destroyed by a world that regards them as failures. The

result of this sense of failure is, in Kellner's view, macho over-compensation, the creation of a kind of fantastical military subjectivity, and violent attacks on the world. Thus in much the same way that Klaus Theweleit (1987, 1989) sought to locate the sadism of Nazi society in a history of destroyed children, Kellner argues that the same is true of the ur-space of neo-liberal capitalism, America, which has become, in Giroux's terms, a society addicted to violence, terror, and torture. As Stiegler (2012) explains, in the neo-liberal universe of absolute disposability, the young, who are the process of developing their identity, are easily destroyed with the result that they seek to annihilate both themselves and the world which causes their pain. However, even under these conditions, the killers seek to resist disposability, and somehow leave their mark on society through what Stiegler calls negative sublimation. Consider a classic example of this phenomenon, Lionel Shriver's (2003) post-Columbine novel, *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, which later became the film of the same name. The story starts out by setting up Stiegler's (2012) condition of dis-individuation. From the very start Kevin's mother is unsure about her son's place in her world and feels ambivalent about family life. Her original distance from her son, which shows how Mom can easily become a bad object for her little one, is symbolic of the failure of the process of trans-individuation, where individuals develop together in tandem. At this point we see that Kevin has no good object in his life and watch his violent attempts to respond to what he considers to be his mother's indifference and emotional distance. Essentially, he seeks to impose himself upon the world he resents through ever increasingly negativity.

Although it would be easy to interpret Kevin's nihilism solely in terms of his mother's behaviour my view would be that this thesis misses the ways in which the family is



part of wider social circuits impacted by neo-liberal economy which makes care, attention, and positive socialisation increasingly difficult. There is no transitional space in Kevin's family because the neo-liberal anxiety of the other is everywhere in the home. In short, love is screened out of the picture by fear and suspicion of the other who is always an obstacle to success in the neo-liberal un-world. In this respect Kevin's mother is a symbol of the loneliness of capitalism and the lack of care that he continues to experience throughout his life under the sign of the Kleinian (1997) bad object. The result of Kevin's early mis-education in loneliness is his final attack on his father, sister, teachers, and school mates through which he acts out his despair and resentment about his world. Centrally, however, Shriver's (2003) book, and the subsequent film of the book (Ramsay, 2011), pull back from the moment of suicidal self-destruction, and instead conclude with a strange sense of hope in the uncomfortable reconciliation of Kevin and his mother. While the core debate of the story is undoubtedly the origin of Kevin's personality – whether he is inherently bad or somehow a product of family socialisation – I think that the final pages of the novel provide an interesting commentary on the situation of the neo-liberal dystopia of education, which is that change is always possible and that there is always hope even in the most desperate situations. The final message of the novel is, therefore, central to what I want to say about Stiegler's work in conclusion. In my view education is central to Stiegler's theory of potential resistance to the neo-liberal technological system, but this is education understood in its broadest sense which incorporates the earliest forms of socialisation through to the final stages of higher education and beyond into a life of learning and potential change.

It is this vision of education understood in its broadest sense which I seek to capture through the idea of the university in this piece. Against this model of *human* development neo-liberalism champions of post-human mode of authoritarian correct training, which starts with early childhood and the lesson that meaningless labour is more important than learning together, and continues through a life of competition, fear, and violence in a range of institutions that are indifferent to human pain, despair, and misery. While the post-structuralism of his teacher, Derrida, is often understood in terms of a form of anti-humanism inherited from his master, Heidegger, who bemoaned the alienation of the human from being, Stiegler turns to a notion of trans-humanism, or a kind of ecological humanism in sympathy with self and world, in order to resist the post-human horror of neo-liberal capitalism. On the basis of this view of neo-liberal culture, we must, therefore, conclude that Stiegler's university is not simply about the bricks and mortar of the university or any other education setting itself, even though what takes place in these buildings is important for thinking through the significance of human life, but rather the generalisation of the Socratic approach to life, learning, and dialogue to every site of human education and neo-liberal mis-education, including the family, the nursery, the school, the university, and the workplace. The next question is, of course, whether this shift from neo-liberal post-humanism towards a more trans-human approach to life is possible.

While the final moment of reconciliation between mother and son in *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003) suggests that the possibility of change and the gravity of human togetherness are likely to survive even the most catastrophic events, I think that this moment also speaks to the possible spur for potential change - the explosive, destructive, situation which opens up new possibilities, or what Walter Benjamin

(1996) once thought about in terms of hopeless hope. Another way of thinking about the idea of hopeless hope is the concept of critical consciousness, which is born under conditions of dystopian despair and conjures ideas of utopian alternatives, and that we find in Stiegler's (2010, 2011b, 2012, 2013) dark vision of the neo-liberal machine and insistence of the need to fight for the future of human thought. Against the culture industry and its strategies of attention capture, Stiegler's university relies on discipline and intellectual martial arts able to support serious play and the creation of a new way of thinking about human life and what it means to live. In this turn towards utopia, or what Giroux (2016) calls educated hope, Stiegler's work thus advances a kind of revolutionary criticism, which we similarly find in Socrates, Marx, and Freire, and a mode of positive utopianism, comparable to Plato's imaginary city building, in order to create a vision of a liveable future for people who essentially focus on the horizon of the future. This critical utopianism is, in Stiegler's (2013) view, what makes humans human and separates us from animals that have no distance from their environment and live in necessity. It is this human, the creative, imaginative trans-individual self-possessed by an originary lack or default, that neo-liberalism wants to abolish in the name of the nihilism of technological perfection, and Stiegler's university seeks to oppose through its focus on knowledge, thought, and care.

### Endnotes

- (1) My use of the concepts of utopia and dystopia is designed to map onto Stiegler's concept of the pharmakon, which he takes from Derrida, who took the concept from Plato. The concept of the pharmakon, which refers to a

substances which is simultaneously a cure and poison, forms the basis of Stiegler's critical pharmacological approach to technology and knowledge. Extending his use of this approach I employ the concepts of utopia and dystopia to show educational space contains the possibility of human growth and development *and* destruction and dis-individuation. Although I am aware that this is a philosophical schema, and does not map onto really-existing conditions perfectly, my use of this construct is designed to shed light on tendencies within education and development that may be otherwise lost in the messy reality of practice and create a space for critical engagement.

(2) Stiegler explains his separation with Foucault over the concept of discipline in his book on youth. In Stiegler's (2010) view Foucault takes a one-sided view of discipline because he fails to recognise the importance of discipline in subject construction. Although Foucault made this point in his later works on self-making, the point remains that he tended to contrast the individual to a social system concerned with control. By contrast, Stiegler's concept of discipline is directly concerned with the co-creation of self and the social which he captures in his idea of trans-individuation.

## Bibliography

Badiou, A. (2012) *Plato's Republic*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Benjamin, W. 'Goethe's Elective Affinities' in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings: Volume 1: 1913-1926*. Edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (1996). Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Cyrułnik, B. (2009) *Resilience: How Your Inner Strength Can Set You Free From The Past*. London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (2006) *History of Madness*. London: Routledge.

Freire, P. (1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin.

Freud, S. 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *The Complete Psychological Works Of Sigmund Freud: Volume 18: Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works* (2001). New York: Vintage.

Giroux, H. (2007) *The University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex*. Boulder, Co: Paradigm Press.

Giroux, H. (2010a) *Youth in a Suspect Society: Democracy or Disposability?* New York: Palgrave.

Giroux, H. (2010b) *Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism*. New York: Peter Lang.

Giroux, H. (2012) *Disposable Youth: Racialized Memories, and the Culture of Cruelty*. London: Routledge.

Giroux, H. (2014a) *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*. Chicago: Haymarket.

- Giroux, H. (2014b) *The Violence of Organised Forgetting: Thinking Beyond America's Disimagination Machine*. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Giroux, H. (2015) *America's Addiction to Terrorism*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Giroux, H. (2016) *America at War with Itself*. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Giroux, H. and Evans, B. (2015) *Disposable Futures: The Seduction of Violence in the Age of Spectacle*. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Hayles, K. 'Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes' in *Profession* (2007): 187-199.
- Heidegger, M. (1997) *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. New York: Harper.
- Kellner, D. (2008) *Guys and Guns Amok: Domestic Terrorism and School Shootings from the Oklahoma City Bombings to the Virginia Tech Massacre*. Boulder, Co: Paradigm Press.
- Klein, M. (1997) *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*. New York: Vintage.
- Lazzarato, M. (2012) *The Making of the Indebted Man: Essay on the Neoliberal Condition*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Marx, K. 'Estranged Labour' in his *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844: and the Communist Manifesto* (1988). New York: Prometheus Books.
- Nehamas, A. (2000) *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Newman, O. (1973) *Defensible Space: Crime Prevention Through Urban Design*. London: MacMillan.
- Ranciere, J. 'Ten Theses on Politics' in his *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2003). London: Continuum.

Shriver, L. (2003) *We Need To Talk About Kevin*. New York: Counterpoint.

Stiegler, B. (1998) *The Fault of Epimetheus: Technics and Time: Volume I*. Redwood, CA: Stanford University Press.

Stiegler, B. (2009) *Disorientation: Technics and Time: Volume II*. Redwood, CA: Stanford University Press.

Stiegler, B. (2010) *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*. Redwood, CA: Stanford University Press.

Stiegler, B. (2011a) *Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise: Technics and Time: Volume III*. Redwood, CA: Stanford University Press.

Stiegler, B. (2011b) *Decadence of Industrial Democracies: Disbelief and Discredit: Volume I*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Stiegler, B. (2012) *Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals: Disbelief and Discredit: Volume II*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Stiegler, B. (2013) *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Stiegler, B. (2014a) *Symbolic Misery: The Hyperindustrial Epoch: Volume I*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Stiegler, B. (2014b) *The Lost Spirit of Capitalism: Disbelief and Discredit: Volume III*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Stiegler, B. (2014c) *The Re-Enchantment of the World: The Value of Spirit Against Industrial Populism*. London: Bloomsbury.

Stiegler, B. (2015) *States of Shock: Stupidity and Knowledge in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Cambridge: Polity.

Theweleit, K. (1987) *Women, Floods, Bodies, History: Male Fantasies: Volume I*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Theweleit, K. (1989) *Psychoanalyzing the White Terror: Male Fantasies: Volume II*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Weber, M. (2002) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: and Other Writings*. London: Penguin.

Winnicott, D. W. (2005) *Playing and Reality*. London: Routledge.