

struggle necessary to seize these rights. In fact, in light of the crisis, if anything the turn seems to be to 'reterritorialized' religious and nativist identities rather than any global claims. This links to the problem of 'how'. Like many in these currents the collection is repetitively insistent that there cannot be any 'New Deal', and in this they are in unfortunate agreement with the managers of capitalism. The reason they give for this is the loss of national sovereignty and the related mechanisms of global governance. The mantra of no return to Fordism, social democracy or the New Deal is irritating because the new demands of 'commonfare' seem firmly social democratic, but are left detached from any mechanism to implement them – that is, the state. Use of reformism, yes, but pending the emergence of a global multitude, produced by the dialectical irony of capitalist history, that is supposed to provide the means for global allocation, distribution and management of the new 'commons'.

Nietzsche famously remarked that we have not given up believing in God because we continue to believe in grammar. Although not doubting the good intentions of the project, nor its attempts to specify the sharpness of contemporary contradictions, the key problem is that it fails to problematize the 'grammar' of neoliberalism, and it is not alone in this. A metaphysic of increasing flows, irreducible creativity and desire, uncapturable singularities, and so on, leaves the political terms of the crisis in place. We are called, once again, to another effort of production and acceleration out of frozen abstractions, whereas it is exactly this metaphysics of production we need to negate and destroy.

Benjamin Noys

## In the community

Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, trans. Stephen Barker, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2010. 264 pp., £24.95 pb., 978 0 80476 273 1.

Bernard Stiegler, hitherto known in the English-speaking world as a philosopher of technology with strong Heideggerian tendencies, has undergone something of a makeover in recent years. With *Prendre Soin: De la jeunesse et des générations* – the title and subtitle are merged in English as *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* – it is possible to see the normative aspects of this work in sharper focus. Indeed, today, Stiegler is in many ways best read as a moral philosopher, inspired

perhaps by Stoicism and its 'art of living': one who writes of the values of attention and of care, and of 'the attentive life of the care-ful being'.

With a nod to Marx's theory in volume three of *Capital* on the tendential fall in the rate of profit, Stiegler laments here a tendential fall in the rate of desire. By the withering of desire, Stiegler gestures towards the erosion of libidinal energy in contemporary life, the elevation of the consumer, the destruction of the classical Freudian subject, and the reorganization of this energy in terms of purely machinic 'drives'. What an unfortunate outcome, he cries: to lose the desires and gain the drives. For in Stiegler drives are a form of bad repetition since one always wants more of the same, while desire is a form of good repetition since the object of desire changes in alterity. (This is part of a trend in recent years for various wanings and declinations: Jameson's theory of 'the waning of affect', Hardt's essay on the 'withering of civil society' or Žižek's 'decline in symbolic efficiency'.) Still following his moral compass, Stiegler lambasts what he terms a *je-m'en-foutisme* (I-don't-give-a-fuckism): a general attitude of irresponsibility that pervades contemporary societies, as well as the rise in *bêtise* (stupidity, silliness, crassness), which he describes as 'the destruction of attention, then irresponsibility, incivility, "the degree zero of thinking."' The former pushes us toward a generalized social irresponsibility resulting in the neglect of long-term interests for short-term ones, while the latter accelerates the corruption of attention and brings with it a rise in incivility and boorishness. Together they engender an erosion in the art of living. Writing recently in conjunction with his group *Ars Industrialis*, Stiegler ultimately offers an appeal that the world needs to establish nothing less than a new 'industrial politics of spirit' (see *Réenchanter le monde: La valeur esprit contre le populisme industriel*, Flammarion, Paris, 2006). Attention and desire thus emerge as moral necessities.

Stiegler starts from an assumption that is simple but perhaps not yet fully accepted by many: one must take Deleuze seriously, not simply as a philosopher, but also as a critic of political economy. That is, one must take the late Deleuze seriously, the Deleuze of 1986 when he wrote his book on Foucault, and of 1990 when he gave us the short 'Postscript on Control Societies' and spoke with Antonio Negri in an interview titled 'Control and Becoming'. What are the repercussions of this? How can 'control' be a political concept? How can it be a philosophical concept? The answer lies in Stiegler's ability to move beyond the two great anti-modern and anti-positivistic philosophical movements

of the twentieth century: phenomenology on the one hand, and structuralism and poststructuralism on the other. The problem is that both of these traditions are born from and find their energy in a reaction to the high modern mode of disciplinary society: phenomenology in its romanticist rejection of the very terms of disciplinary society, lapsing back to the virtues of sincerity, of authenticity, of the poetry of being; and poststructuralism in its hyperbolic race to outwit disciplinary society by creating ever more complex logics, pointing out the ever more corrupt systems of organization that in the end are defeated in their naive attempts at the universal.

To triangulate the theme of control and to probe its repercussions, Stiegler deploys with some regularity the twin terms 'psychopolitics' and 'psychopower'. These can be understood easily by someone familiar with the field because they have an analogous relationship to the terms 'biopolitics' and 'biopower' in the work of Foucault. That is to say, psychopower refers to the way in which power is invested in the psychological or immaterial realm; it is often construed as normatively negative. Likewise, psychopolitics is any political relationship, or possibly a political critique, that exists within that same psychological or immaterial realm; it is often construed as normatively positive. The engagement with and transformation of these terms represents the way in which Stiegler *extends* the work of the late Foucault, particularly by way of Deleuze's concept of control. Stiegler's provocation to Foucault, then, is that one must not simply think of power at the level of biological life, but at the level of mind – something which Foucault himself admittedly addresses in his work on madness and psychiatric power. This does not mean a return to idealism, for mind too is material.

*Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* reads like two volumes revolving around a central axis. Chapters 1–6 form a continuous argument concerning the destruction of inter-generational relations, and hence the destruction of subjects as they are properly formed via desire and memory. The second half of the book, Chapters 8–11, consists of a discussion of Foucault on the theme of taking care followed by Giorgio Agamben on the apparatus. Yet the central and most important chapter is Chapter 7, 'What is Philosophy?' The title alone quickly transports the reader to Deleuze and Guattari's 1991 book of the same name. And in some ways Stiegler is adding his voice to an ongoing French conversation – one recalls that Deleuze and Guattari were themselves partially responding to Alain Badiou's interest in the same question in his then recently published *L'Être et l'Événement*, which

they took as something of an insurgency needing to be subdued. In offering his own answer to the query 'What is Philosophy?' Stiegler writes that the first question (and indeed the first practice) of philosophy is not being, not becoming, not technology, not poetry, not the concept, not the event, not the decision ... but *teaching*. Perhaps this is Stiegler's Heideggerianism shining through again, that philosophy is a pathway, a process of questioning. He instructs us that philosophy is a third mode between two dogmas: on the one hand mysticism, and on the other hand what one might simply call the pure virtuosity of being too smart ('sophistry' is the more technical term). Philosophy

is a system of care located between dogmatic modalities: *mystagogy*, descending from the age of *muthos*, in which the philosopher calls to the *logos*; and a kind of knowledge that, having stopped questioning, has lost its object without knowing it, still believing more than ever that it *does* know. Plato calls this latter modality *polimatheia* (the knowledge of 'Mister Know-It-All'; the Sophist as seen by the philosopher).

Thus philosophy, as an act of love, is as much a reaction to the lack of wisdom, the lack of knowledge, as it is a reaction to the instrumentalization of knowledge for its own ends. Mister Know-It-All is the wiz-ard, the soph-ist, the one who turns thinking into an extreme sport. The philosopher is the solicitous one, the one who cares, the friend.

*Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* thus hinges on the powerful distinction in Greek thought, presented in the late Foucault, between the Delphic dictum to 'know thyself' and the alternate proscription that one should 'care for thyself'. Stiegler agrees with Foucault that there emerged a hierarchy of knowing over caring, and thus an eventual marginalization of the latter in philosophy. The dictum to 'know thyself' leads philosophy away from sophism, yes, but in so doing it also leads philosophy away from care, eventually coming to privilege *what is*, i.e. ontology, instead of what cares, what affects, or – shall we just say – *what does*.

I am not sure philosophy has a name for 'what does' but if it did it would probably be filed under either physics or ethics, these being the two branches of philosophy that consider the doing or the practice of things, the two branches that consider the machinic energies of the world that Stiegler so avidly entreats us to cultivate. Or perhaps one wanders too far afield. Perhaps this is simply what one calls the political.

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