CHRISTINA HOWELLS AND GERALD MOORE (EDS.), *STIEGLER AND TECHNICS* (EUP, 2013)
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As with Jean-Luc Nancy, Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière and other contemporary candidates for that hoary chimera of a title, 'greatest living French philosopher', there are aspects of Bernard Stiegler's work that can appear entirely predictable. He is phenomenally prolific (thirty books in the past twenty years and counting). He is lyrical and wide-ranging in the themes he submits to philosophical interrogation. His work bears witness to a heady desire to theorise and, at points, is utterly frustrating in terms of the concepts it deploys (this is not to judge him by the standards of a G.E. Moore, merely to point out that terms like 'epochal redoubling' or 'epiphylogensis' can seem unnecessarily baroque once their content has been articulated). He is well read in Freud, Lacan, and the generation of French philosophers immediately preceding his own (in particular, Derrida and Deleuze). He is well versed in the history of philosophy in general, and not averse to creatively misreading it. His work is steeped in the sense of a broader literary, artistic and poetic culture and aesthetic, and he is not averse to using examples from these domains to make big philosophical claims.

So much for expectations. What is refreshing about this collection is that it does not pander to them. Rather, the lasting impression one takes away from it is that, among all the heavyweights of contemporary French philosophy, Stiegler might, by virtue of his core focus on technology, be uniquely placed to break out of the ghetto of our assumptions surrounding terms like 'continental philosophy', 'French Theory', and 'the greatest living French philosopher'.

There is a condition on this: that we find the time, the inspiration, and the attention to engage Stiegler's work in new and productive ways. Frustratingly, and not without irony, Stiegler himself has been particularly bad at building the case for why we should do so in recent years. At his best (in the *Technics and Time* (1994-2001), the *De la misère symbolique* series (2004), and in the short work *Réenchanter le monde* (2006), for example), Stiegler is an unsurpassed gadfly of contemporary technological and mediatised society, capable of bringing acute poetic intelligence to an assessment of its limits and prospects. More recently, however, he seems to have fallen into some of the same paradoxes of overproduction that affect the work of Žižek - the more he produces,

the less he seems to say; the more he repeats his core theses, the more one suspects a certain loss of focus (last year's *Etats de choc* (2012) was particularly egregious in this respect, seeming hastily put together and deeply reactionary at points).

The first great service this collection provides, then, is that it charts exactly the right balance between reading Stiegler selectively and reading him attentively. Howells and Moore provide an inspiring overview of Stiegler's life and work in the introduction, and merely observing the contents page gives the reader a sense of the focus to come: contributions are ordered into five key categories ('Anthropology', 'Aesthetics', 'Psychoanalysis', 'Politics', and 'Pharmacology'); of these, the first four are traditional but wide ranging and interdisciplinary, allowing us to see how Stiegler contributes exciting ideas to established fields; the fifth category, in contrast, is a kind of 'creative trajectory', giving us a sense of how one of Stiegler's key themes might lead to the establishment of a new field. This is exactly the kind of framework reading Stiegler requires - by overcoming some of the more aberrant and inconsistent aspects of how he presents his ideas, it gives them a new critical context in which to shine.

Gerald Moore's '*Adapt and Smile or Die! Stiegler Among the Darwinians*' opens the 'Anthropology' section. The tone is deeply polemical: situating Stiegler's work as a new form of 'humanism' premised on the 'adoption' of technical supplements, Moore attacks the contemporary capitalist ideology of 'adaptation', which he sees as a front for resignation to bad socio-economic circumstances, and which he traces in examples ranging from contemporary management culture to poststructuralist philosophy. Such themes have been explored in the work of others, but Moore's focus on Stiegler is instructive.[1] What's more, his writing is exciting and driven by an anarchic sensibility which, true to the excursus with which he begins the essay, may owe more to the work of Michel Houellebecq than that of Stiegler. In particular, his critique of poststructuralism is thought provoking, if a little open (perhaps necessarily so) to the riposte of not engaging subtly enough with canonical thinkers like Deleuze and Foucault. Next up is Christopher Johnson's 'The Prehistory of Technology: On the Contribution of Leroi-Gourhan', which reads as an extremely well-focused 'history of ideas' piece. It will appeal to students of the history of French anthropology, and its account of how Derrida acted as a middle term between the work of Leroi-Gourhan and Stiegler is illuminating for thinking through potential interdisciplinary connections. Michael Lewis' 'Of a Mythical Philosophical Anthropology' is the next essay. It offers a close reading of the first volume of *Technics and Time* that situates Stiegler between the 'transcendental anthropology' of Rousseau and the 'empirical anthropology' of Leroi-Gourhan. I particularly appreciated the unabashed close reading at the core of this piece, and its insistence on the necessary role of myth-making in Stiegler's work. Since the first volume of *Technics and Time*, this quality has become a more subterranean aspect of Stiegler's approach, with the consequence that some of his poetic moments begin to look like bare assertions; it was therefore refreshing to see it resurrected in this context. Ian James' 'Technics and Cerebrality' is the last essay in the 'Anthropology' section. James is perhaps best known for his work on Jean-Luc Nancy, and he brings the subtle and incisive style developed in this context to his reflections on Stiegler. As the focus of his essay is brain plasticity, it stages the appropriate encounter with Malabou's recent work, but also manages to do a great deal more: like Lewis' essay, it benefits from a close reading strategy (in this case, of Stiegler's *De la misère symbolique* series and Malabou's *Que faire de notre cerveau?*), and it provides an excellent account of Heidegger's philosophy of technology, as well as Stiegler's deviations from it.

The third volume of *Technics and Time* (*Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*) forms a key focus for the 'Aesthetics' section. Serge Trottein's 'Technics, or the Fading Away of Aesthetics' sets the tone by offering a clear exposition of Stiegler's account of cinematic technologies in relation to Kantian aesthetics and Husserl's reflections on internal time consciousness. Trottein's overall argument is, I think, accurate: that Stiegler slides towards a form of technological determinism occluding the domain of the aesthetic. If there is one criticism to be made of Trottein's essay, however, it is stylistic: Trottein had me utterly hooked by his literary approach at the beginning, but I was left feeling a little bereft of the thread of the argument by the middle; thankfully, this was resolved by the close of the essay. Next up is Patrick Crogan's 'Experience of the Industrial Temporal Object'. The key strength of this essay is that it demonstrates a different strategy for reading Stiegler selectively:

by structuring the engagement around a key concept (in this case, the 'industrial temporal object'). Guided by this thread, the essay contextualises Stiegler with reference to the history of cinema and cinema theory; granted, its treatment could be faulted for being broad brush at points, but, given length constraints (all essays in the collection are around 15 pages long), such tactics are necessary, and the focus on a key concept means that Crogan's piece is a long way from feeling superficial. The final essay of this section is Martin Crowley's 'The Artist and the Amateur, from Misery to Invention'. It is also one of the best in the collection. In terms of form, it is distinguished by its exemplary clarity, focus and pace. In terms of content, Crowley shaves off some of the rougher edges of Stiegler's writing in *De la misère symbolique* to fashion a cogent argument for "a new politics of aesthetic experience" (120), centred on the figure of the 'amateur'. What sets this essay apart from the other 'Aesthetic' offerings is its highly focused critical sensibility: for example, Crowley asks whether the move from TV "broadcasting" to Internet "narrowcasting" calls into question Stiegler's theory of "hypersychronisation", according to which consciousness is in danger of being standardised by the mass consumption of broadcast events; this is an important question which is only hinted at in the contributions of Trottein and Crogan.

Christina Howells' '*Le Defaut d'origine*: The Prosthetic Constitution of Love and Desire' opens the 'Psychoanalysis' section. This essay demonstrates yet another important strategy for reading Stiegler selectively: by focusing his work onto key themes (in this instance, love and desire). Beyond this, two aspects of this piece are particularly impressive: the way it characterises Stiegler within a broader account of Twentieth century French philosophy (its focus on Sartrean existentialism and Lacanian psychoanalysis in particular), and the implicit case it builds for tolerance of 'creative misreading' as tendency within this tradition. Having criticised Stiegler on Lacanian *jouissance*, for example, Howells maintains that the "possible pedantry"(148) of her criticism should not block the more creative consequences of Stiegler's alleged mistreatment. What is at work here is nothing so explicit as a Davidsonian 'principle of charity'; rather, we have an implied ethics and practice of reading, developed through close attention to the potentials of the text in question. The next essay is Tania Espinoza's 'The Technical Object of Psychoanalysis'. Beginning from Christopher Bollas' definition of the unconscious as the "unthought known", Espinoza states:

> Two claims about the relationship between Bernard Stiegler's philosophy and psychoanalysis can be made. First, that technics is the unconscious of psychoanalysis. Second, that psychoanalytic technique, insofar as it looks at the underside of discourse, is central to the philosophy of technics. (151).

These are acute and well formulated claims, worthy of a book length study unto their own. In her essay, Espinoza goes on to develop them in some detail by thinking through connections between Stiegler's work and that of Donald Winnicott, among others. As might reasonably be expected, however, we are not left with a definitive sense that her claims have been addressed; rather, we are left with a sense of an emerging author who has identified key themes for future research, and who has offered an exciting foretaste of them. Oliver Davis' essay 'Desublimation in Education for Democracy' is the last in the 'Psychoanalysis' section. Surveying the titles before I read the collection, this was the essay that appealed the least; now, I am of the opinion that it is the best in the collection. As per Crowley's earlier contribution, it is characterised by a clear argument and a trenchant sense of critique. The argument is that Stiegler, in persistently deploying a rhetoric of "sublimation" (the investment of desire), ignores the extent to which "desublimation" (the uncoupling of desire) is an important aspect of any libidinal economy. The critique is that, unconsciously, Stiegler is himself an "adept of the desublimatory" gesture (176). What Davis means to highlight by this is the sense in which Stiegler's rhetoric often tends towards bare assertion and an "apocalyptic tone" (176) which, he contends, is designed to uncouple readers from libidinal investments (whether philosophical, technological, or political) that are incongruent with Stiegler's own worldview. Davis' approach could be criticised for being too traditionally 'deconstructionist' at points, and he does veer dangerously towards an *ad hominem* attack at the end of his essay. Such is the strength of his argument and the clarity of his focus, however, that the reader is apt to overlook these issues.

The penultimate 'Politics' section begins with another strong contribution in the shape of Miguel de Beistegui's 'The New Critique of Political Economy'. This sets out to examine Stiegler's contribution to a resurgence of political themes in continental philosophy, with special reference to *Pour une nouvelle critique de l'économie politique* (2009). Although the shortest essay in the collection, at 11 pages, de Beistegui's piece charts an excellent balance between being descriptive of Stiegler's approach, and being critical of it. Given de Beistegui's background as a Deleuze scholar, the concluding argument is somewhat predictable (that Stiegler's restriction of his analysis of desire to libido ignores '…vaster, more impersonal and *pre*-individual' forms of desire (p 191)), but this does not detract from what is a high quality reading and contextualisation overall. The next piece is Sophie Fuggle's 'Stiegler and Foucault: The Politics of Care and Self-Writing'. Stiegler's engagement with Foucault's concept of '*hypomnemata*' is arguably one of the most interesting aspects of his recent work, and Fuggle is to be congratulated for delivering an essay that develops this theme in order to chart wider resonances between two thinkers so important for contemporary political thought. My impression is that her essay tails off a little towards the end, but the quality of her exposition is consistently clear, particularly in terms of her elaboration of key concepts and stages in both Stiegler and Foucault's philosophical developments. The next piece is enticingly called 'Technology and Politics: A Response to Bernard Stiegler', by Richard Beardsworth. What really grabs attention about this essay is its willingness to reach into the idiom of contemporary philosophy of technology (in repeatedly prosecuting the charge that Stiegler's approach is 'technologically determinist', for example). This form of explicit engagement with philosophy of technology is notably lacking in many of the other pieces, so it is a very good thing that Beardsworth's essay is strong enough as a stand-alone to go some way towards remedying it for the collection as a whole. Somewhat frustratingly, his essay has been shortened (through the use of ellipses dots), but this at least has the virtue of keeping it congruent in size with the other contributions in the collection. The last essay in the 'Politics' section is Ben Roberts' 'Memories of Inauthenticity: Stiegler and the Lost Spirit of Capitalism'. This is the only essay in the collection to be focused on Stiegler's *Mécréance et discredit* series (2004-2006), and develops a convincing argument that Stiegler's "…transformation of work by Derrida, Simondon and others has allowed a rearticulation of some of the concerns of the Frankfurt school" (225). The focus on Simondon is particularly instructive here, as Roberts develops a critical exegesis of Stiegler's reading of Boltanski and Chiapello's *Le Nouvel Esprit de capitalisme* (2005). The productive series of contrasts he builds throughout the essay leads to a convincing conclusion that Boltanski and Chiapello's outlook finds a useful critical supplement in Stiegler's "more nuanced account of the relationship between technics and culture" (238).

The last section of the book comprises two essays on Stiegler's concept of 'Pharmacology'. Following Derrida, Stieglerian 'pharmacology' entails the study of technologies as '*pharmaka'* (that is, as a both 'poisons' and 'cures'). At certain points in reading Stiegler, the content of 'pharmacology' can seem to amount to little more than the instrumentalist truism that technological artefacts can be used for both 'good' and 'bad' purposes. Read together, however, the concluding two essays of this volume give the sense that 'pharmacology' might offer an exciting new trajectory for contemporary thought - one that builds on and surpasses Derridean deconstructionism. The first essay is 'Pharmacology and Critique after Deconstruction' by Daniel Ross. It is an extremely well structured and direct piece, which offers a high level encounter with the approaches of Derrida and Husserl. Given Stiegler's Derridean background, and his appropriation of Derridean concepts such as *différance* and 'grammatisation', it is especially important that this encounter features in the collection, and Ross makes a good job of it (the focus on the issues of 'will' and 'decision' in the conclusion is particularly interesting). The second essay is by Stephen Barker, and carries the somewhat unwieldy title of 'Techno-pharmaco-genealogy'**.** Like Roberts' essay, it offers an engagement with Simondon, but goes much further, developing a rich focus on the concepts of '(trans)individuation', 'transduction' and 'collective individuation'. I must admit that I find Barker's prose dense at points, but he makes many acute observations. In particular, his concluding suggestion that, "…as *pharmaka*, technologies themselves are …profoundly neutral – which is to say, indifferent to the ways in which they individuate their users" (271) is thought provoking, with its suggestion that Stiegler returns us full circle, as it were, to a kind of (utterly altered) 'instrumental and anthropological definition' of technology, as described by Heidegger in *The Question Concerning Technology*.

What can be made of this collection as a whole? First and foremost, it was long past time for a text like this to appear in English, and exciting intimations of future publications on Stiegler are contained within it (Moore's forthcoming *Bernard Stiegler: Philosophy in the Age of Technology*, for example). Second, the tone and pitch are exactly right: the editors have drawn together a selection of high quality essays from both established and emerging voices; none of these is slavishly enthralled to Stiegler; each highlights aspects of his work that are exciting and of value, and all are of roughly equal (and eminently manageable) length. What emerges, in short, is the sense of a rich critical introduction, one that signposts the right names, concepts and directions for taking scholarship of Stiegler's work further. To be sure, the majority of the contributors are, liked Stiegler himself, steeped in the terminology and attitudes of contemporary continental philosophy. Beyond this, however, the potential tangential impacts of both his work and this book are huge, for four fields in particular: art and media, literary studies, performance studies, and the coalescing field of contemporary 'philosophy of technology'.

Let me conclude with a reflection on the place of Stiegler's work in relation to contemporary philosophy of technology. This is an excitingly inchoate field at present, incorporating aspects of everything from analytic philosophy, to the Dutch 'empirical' approach centred on the University of Twente , to social constructivism[2] Of all the approaches contributing to the field, however, two are especially inspired by continental philosophy: Don Ihde's 'post-phenomenology' and Andrew Feenberg's 'critical theory of technology'.[3] Compared with Stiegler, both of these approaches are apt to seem tame in the extreme. Indeed, the harsh critic would perceive a struggle on the part of Ihde to move beyond late-Husserl/early-Heidegger, and a struggle on the part of Feenberg to move beyond Marcusian critical theory. Stiegler's reflections are much less safe than this, and, at least potentially, a good deal more interesting for contemporary philosophy of technology as a result. Many within this field are currently primed to write him off (as a 'technological determinist', or as a thinker in the vein of 'classical' philosophers of technology like Ellul, Jonas and Heidegger, for example); through the intervention of collections like *Stiegler and Technics*, however, we might just learn to read his work with the degree of selective attentiveness appropriate to it. Should this occur, Stiegler may emerge as a poetic and aporetic philosopher of technology *par excellence*, at the threshold of a 'continental turn' in philosophical reflections on technology.

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NOTES

1. In Catherine Malabou's recent work, for example. See Catherine Malabou, *Que faire de notre cerveau?* Paris: Bayard, 2004, and *Les Nouveaux Blessés: de Freud a la neurologie: penser les traumatismes contemporains*. Paris: Bayard, 2007.

2. For analytic interventions, see Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action and Cognitive Extension*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, and Luciano Floridi, *The Philosophy of Information*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. For the Dutch approach, see Philip Brey, "Philosophy of Technology after the Empirical Turn", *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology* 14:1 (2010, 36-48) and Petere Paul Verbeek, *Moralizing Technology: Understanding and Designing the Morality of Things*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011. For social constructivist approaches, see, for example, Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theo*ry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, and Langdon Winner, *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986.

3. See, for example, Don Ihde, *Multistabilities: Experimental Phenomenology*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2012, and Andrew Feenberg, *Between Reason and Experience: Essays in Technology and Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.