



## States of Shock: Stupidity and Knowledge in the 21st Century

By Bernard Stiegler

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In 1944 Horkheimer and Adorno warned that industrial society turns reason into rationalization, and Polanyi warned of the dangers of the self-regulating market, but today, argues Stiegler, this regression of reason has led to societies dominated by unreason, stupidity and madness. However, philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century abandoned the critique of political economy, and poststructuralism left its heirs helpless and disarmed in face of the reign of stupidity and an economic crisis of global proportions.

New theories and concepts are required today to think through these issues. The thinkers of poststructuralism Lyotard, Deleuze, Derrida must be re-read, as must the sources of their thought, Hegel and Marx. But we must also take account of Naomi Klein's critique of Milton Friedman and the Chicago School and her account of the 'shock doctrine'. In fact, argues Stiegler, a permanent 'state of shock' has prevailed since the beginning of the industrial revolution, intensified by the creative destruction brought about by the consumerist model. The result has been a capitalism that destroys desire and reason and in which every institution is undermined, above all those institutions that are the products par excellence of the Enlightenment the education system and universities.

Through a powerful critique of thinkers from Marx to Derrida, Stiegler develops new conceptual weapons to fight this destruction. He argues that schools and universities must themselves be transformed: new educational institutions must be developed both to take account of the dangers of digitization and the internet and to enable us to take advantage of the new opportunities they make available.

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### **Editorial Review**

#### Review

This is Stiegler at his finest. This book offers a penetrating diagnosis of a contemporary configuration that links the shocks of modern political economy to profound transformations in the psychic sphere. But Stiegler also gives us a powerful argument -- based on highly original interpretations of major thinkers -- revealing the radical importance of technology for all human experience. This is in essence a call for a new Enlightenment, one appropriate to our digital age.

**David Bates, University of California Berkeley**

Stiegler poses the question of how reason can renew itself in the face of unfettered global capitalism and the economic ideologies which propel it. Moving decisively beyond French poststructuralism his thinking creates new conceptual weapons with which thought and knowledge can renew their sense of responsibility and engagement in the early 21st century.

**Ian James, University of Cambridge**

#### About the Author

Bernard Stiegler is the Director of Cultural Development at Centre Pompidou, Paris

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