

**Bernard Stiegler**

*Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise.*

Translated by Stephen Barker.

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Bernard Stiegler's ambitious exploration of the nature of technology and the complicated ways with which Western philosophy treats (or neglects) it continues in the third volume of *Technics and Time: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*. In this long-awaited English translation (it was published in France in 2001), Stiegler delves in depth into the question of consciousness, memory, and culture while also elaborating on his previous theses. As such, even though in his 'Notice' at the beginning of the book Stiegler invites the possibility of treating the work either by itself or as an introductory volume to its precedents, the informed reader will be better equipped to grasp his particular conceptual framework.

In the first volume of the series, *The Fault of Epimetheus*, Stiegler argues that technology is an ontological constituent of the human. In this long critique of Heidegger, through analyses of Gilbert Simondon, Andre Leroi-Gourhan, and Jacques Derrida, Stiegler re-reads the myth of Prometheus and challenges the strands of Western philosophy that posited an originary, non-technological human. The second volume, *Disorientation*, focuses on the implications of this conjoining of human and technology for time and memory. Insofar as Western philosophy's claims about a non-technological human with a self-sufficient nature are unfounded, an idea of original time is also illusory. Human memory and consciousness can access time and events only through supplements, forms of recording that include all technologies—but first and foremost the elementary technology of writing.

*Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise* begins where the previous volume left off, and outlines the nature of such an 'exteriorized' consciousness. Here, Stiegler develops the idea of cinematic consciousness through a reading of Kant, Husserl, Adorno and Horkheimer, and Barthes (among others), as well as a detailed analysis of films of Fellini, Hitchcock, and Antonioni. Such a heterogeneous list of references indicates the difficulty of task at hand: Stiegler aims to trace how Western philosophy, in general, overlooks the constitutive role of technology in human consciousness, while formulating a new schema of consciousness. Although Kant and Husserl develop an intricate framework for consciousness, they neglect the co-emergence of perception with its supplements. There is no such thing as pure perception, abstracted from the interplay between imagination and technological mediation. In other words, for Stiegler, Husserl's chief failure lies in his inability to think of primary retention (which belongs to the present of perception) in its intrinsic relation to secondary and tertiary retentions (which belong to imagination and exteriorization of memory, respectively).

Instead of such a compartmentalized consciousness, Stiegler sketches a cinematic consciousness. He argues that cinema mimics the structure of human consciousness in its very principle of joining, or montaging, disparate elements into a single temporal flux (15). Similar to the way ‘post-production’ functions in cinema, consciousness assembles ‘the montage, the staging, the *realization*, and the direction of the flow of primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions, of which the *unconscious*, full of possibilities (including the speculative), would be the producer’ (29). Moreover, television, as a logical continuation of cinema, extends the reach of cinematic consciousness and hence creates the grounds for a mass market of the culture industry. Although cinematic consciousness precludes any sense of ‘de-naturing’ of an originary human essence, the ways in which consciousness becomes an industry creates the contemporary malaise. In the first volume, Stiegler strives to distinguish between objectification that constitutes human as such and alienation that occurs under specific conditions of industrialization. This volume demonstrates his efforts to account for the increasing oppression of human consciousness by the culture industry without resorting to an idea of authentic unmediated consciousness.

Stiegler is by no means an apologist for technological determinism. On the contrary, he treats contemporary cultural and educational institutional change, or lack thereof, with great concern. However, unlike his works that deal specifically with cultural or political policy-making, this volume is concerned with philosophical formulations of culture industry. For him the danger is twofold: there is the ‘disastrous spirit of a long scholarly tradition as old as philosophy itself in which technics and technology are trivialities’ (86), along with a crisis resulting from the maladjustment of the technical system to the other social systems such as law, economy, education, and political representation (132). Although such crises and maladjustments are endemic to social and technical change and are overcome once the other systems ‘adopt’ the new technical system, the current situation presents an exception. The magnitude and extent of the global mnemotechnical systems (technical systems of consciousness) threaten humanity far more dramatically than any previous period in human history.

Although in this work Stiegler does not name it as such, the culprit is global capitalism and its ever expanding ‘law of value’ that reaches into the depths of human consciousness to extract profit. He briefly mentions the war of large industrial groups to control what he defines as ‘retentional stockpiles’, including genetic and intellectual material, and cautions against subordinating the technical system to the imperatives of the market. However, readers looking for a more concrete political criticism need to turn to his other works, such as *For a New Critique of Political Economy* or the multi-volume work *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies*. The skeptics might be unsettled by Stiegler’s heterogeneous conceptual framework, his transference of contemporary discussions of globalization or media into philosophical idioms, and the epic proportions of his works (for instance, the present volume promises at least two more volumes to come). However, as Stiegler suggests, there is so much at stake in constructing new systems of thinking and analytical criteria in an age where specific forms of knowledge are unable to understand the contemporary situation (151). It is only an all-encompassing

task of 'critique' that can undo the present crisis (152). Stiegler is one of the most provocative thinkers of our time, and this volume is yet another indication of his powers of reading Western philosophy against the grain.

**Irmak Ertuna-Howison**  
Beykent University