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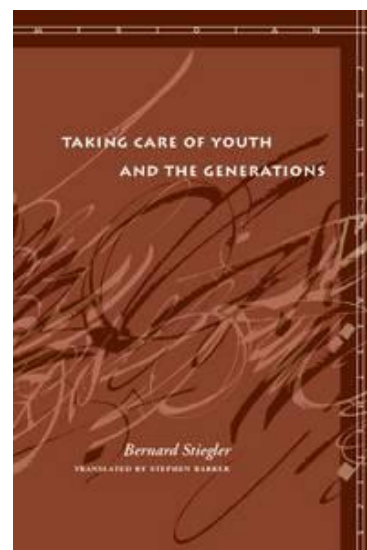
Stiegler, Bernard. (2010). *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*.
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Taking Care of Youth and the Generations offers no introduction or translator's note—instead thrusting the reader immediately into a social crisis. That crisis, in short: modern and digital media are undermining the sociocognitive development and persistence of critical intelligences. Yet *Taking Care* is a difficult book to categorize, as it is part sophisticated philosophical discussion and part decades-old swipe at the effects of media. For instance, readers familiar with popular culture will have heard more compelling and tangible versions of Stiegler's media critique, but they're likely to be lost in the dense business of psychoanalysis, in Stiegler's row with Foucault. That said, this review first orients and encapsulates the content of *Taking Care*; then it offers a critical read of the book, focused particularly on audience and the education community.



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Orientation

What defines the adult is responsibility, notably the taking care of non-adults. **Stiegler** writes that "intelligence is first and foremost a taking care" (p. 35), and that "any system of care is a social pedagogy whose goal is to reground primary psychic identification as primary collective and social identification" (p. 60). This responsibility seems to be practiced through education, which for Stiegler is conveying generational knowledge (and systems of thought); in turn, "this intergenerational [exchange] constitutes the formation of *attention*" (p. 8, emphasis in original). Attention forming and capturing is "both psychic and social," "transindividual" (p. 17), and is one key site at which Stiegler feels we're failing one another.



Our attention is formed and captured through what Stiegler calls *psychotechniques* and *psychotechnologies*. These include everything from "lullabies, counting rhymes, fairy tales, and oral storytelling" to "video games, MP3s, and targeted youth Web sites such as MySpace and Facebook" (p. 36). Instead of building children's attention through intergenerational and cultural psychotechniques like stories, we sit them in front of "technologies of stupidity" (p. 34). He finds France's Channel Y particularly offensive, and includes statistics and anecdotes throughout the book to critique TV and video games. In one such anecdote, he cites Al Gore in a shared position that the lack of participation in watching television has a corollary in the poor participation in modern democracy (p. 90). Ultimately, Stiegler argues that modern media captures attention, persuading (young) people to pursue pleasure, to consume, to create imbalance in the mind by allowing the id to dominate.

In addition to brief linking modern psychotechnologies to ADHD, ADD, and COS, "cognitive overflow syndrome," essentially the "adult form" of ADD (pp. 56-57), Stiegler includes data supporting his claims:

Current brain imaging allows us to observe ways in which synaptogenesis is profoundly modified by

contemporary media, which create an environment...in which the brains of the youngest children, living in a numeric world of "rich media," are structured differently from those of the preceding generation. And more specifically, these young brains are having increasing difficulty reaching..."deep attention." (p. 19)

Stiegler moves between young people and adults often, and here he notes that "*we* are that generation: the readers as well as the author of this very text" (p. 19, emphasis in original).

Following his argument regarding this crisis, he makes a distinction between controlling attention "to motivate the courage and will 'to know,' to gain knowledge" and "to maintain a minoritized-adult condition" (p. 37). The former is care, responsibility, intelligence. The latter represents a condition on which Stiegler dwells extensively—"adulthood's regression into childhood" (p. 16). He writes, "Kant tells us that as an adult minor defined by laziness and cowardice, I can always avoid the dialectical responsibility of thinking," for instance, and Stiegler frames a good deal of his writing around an adult "battle of intelligence against laziness and cowardice" (p. 22). In fact, Kant poses an incredibly straightforward challenge for reflection: It is so easy to be immature. If I have a book to serve as my understanding, a pastor to serve as my conscience, a physician to determine my diet for me, and so on, I need not exert myself at all. (p. 21)

Stiegler seems to suggest three major results of this crisis. First, he aligns with a common cultural critique: "as consumers generally, we are becoming systematically unconscious" (p. 43). He explains how his understanding of care, intelligence, and attention utilizes the common framework:

In our disrupted age, amid the confusion and negligence catalyzed by the psychotechnical destruction of attention, it is difficult to remain dispassionate: regressive identification processes lead to "crowd psychology," archaic processes

resulting in identity drives that are poison to unification, yet these regressive phenomena have now become dominant. In such circumstances, children are encouraged to construct themselves as referential individuations (but having neither authority *nor* intelligence), resulting in identification not with parents, nation, or any idealized object but with merchandise and brand names. (p. 62, emphasis in original)

Indeed, Stiegler goes on to explain that individuals are increasingly without conscience or free will (p. 184), and that we're facing a "liquidation of our cognitive faculty itself" (p. 183).

Second, Stiegler links his argument with our collective health and the health of the planet. For instance, he reasons that Consumer irresponsibility, of juveniles as well as adults—the former prescribing the behaviors of the latter more and more frequently—degrades the familial (and social) environment by both destroying intergenerational links and weakening laws. But such irresponsibility also, and as a consequence, degrades the natural environment by normalizing waste and "disposability": nonattachment to things as such. The generational confusion inherent in consumerism destroys any shared concern for taking care of the world and of oneself, self-care as opposed to a consumption resulting in obesity and other 'sedentary' problems (such as cardiovascular pathologies). (p. 42)

The third result of this crisis might be described by a marked increase in "incivility and delinquency" (p. 35). Stiegler discusses economic and literal war, rhetoric around "Axis of Evil," and the like to support his point. He suggests that "the problem of care for youth has already begun to take place...*violently*, massively, and very dangerously, throughout the world" (p. 87, emphasis in original). Essentially, modern media's quest to produce consumers and increase profits has created apathy, crime, and war.

Stiegler does indict "The American way of life," specifically, though. Beyond just modern media, in different places in

Taking Care, Stiegler singles out the neoliberal, capitalist, consumerist Joneses *and* the parallel (although not often made parallel) self-centered, gun-toting, gang-banging Joneses. He writes that this American way of life has already become, in terms of the conditions we are living today, "unsustainable," and will become massively and irreversibly deadly if adopted by the three billion human beings now "modernizing," who appear to be driven by an ultra-speculative and completely insane logic, taking care of *nothing*, frequently criminal, spreading care-less-ness everywhere. (p. 183, emphasis in original)

Answers to the crisis seem to involve circulating terms "sociotherapy," "metacare," and "education." He writes, for instance, that "this metacare must become a psychopolitics, an industrial politics of techniques of the mind, even before it struggles against the disastrous effects of the savage use of psychotechnologies by the programming industries as they destroy attention and consciousness" (p. 179). Those involved in such "metacare" will be finding the way to abandon this way of life and to invent new modalities of non-inhuman existence within societies that have become thoroughly technological—modalities that are less toxic, more useful to a non-inhumanity that has become a global community in which isolation is impossible. (p. 183)

It is interesting to consider Stiegler's only apparent commentary on those involved. Based on his argument throughout the book, one might expect philosophers or scholars to take up the task, but no—"Our political representatives, particularly those in power, are thus faced with exceptional responsibilities" since "we now know that the misuse of psychotechnologies can have catastrophic effects on juvenile consciousness" (p. 190). He also warns that, like sanctions against cigarettes and car emissions, "at some point in the future such a case will be brought against the programming industry" if it takes "no action against the attentional deficits and intergenerational problems to which [it is] contributing" (p. 191).

Critical Read

Taking Care shifts between dense, passionate, and straightforward—never settling into a cadence or content that seems directed at any particular audience or reader. The back cover purports that Stiegler engages a "crisis in education," for instance, but he doesn't address modern, formal education (i.e., there are no classrooms, no educational policies in *Taking Care*). Further, while including ADD, ADHD, and COS, the limited use of these conditions and diagnoses wouldn't possibly connect with scholars and educators, say, in educational psychology and special education. Stanford University Press categorizes the genre as Philosophy/Media Studies. To the latter, while criticizing Channel Y and its advertising campaigns, Stiegler offers essentially no tangible instances or discussion of media. Viewing *Taking Care* as the former, as "philosophy" and for philosophers, makes more sense. Plato, Kant, and Foucault play prominent roles in the book (at least three chapters seem to be almost wholly devoted to interaction with Foucault's work), with the philosophical references including Heidegger, Derrida, Marcuse, Aristotle, Weber, Lacan, and more.

However, readers must be invested in and able to follow Stiegler through philosophical discussions of "*pharmakon*" and "grammatization" and "Foucauldian archaeology" and "nootechnique" *while* being agreeable to bizarre constructions like "I-don't-give-a-damn-ers." Questioning yourself while reading as the intended audience for *Taking Care* becomes almost reasonable when following Stanford's rationale behind the Meridian series (to which *Taking Care* is a part). Hamacher (2010), editor of the series, writes: "Presenting investigations in philosophy, literature and its theories, psychoanalysis, ethnology, politics, and history, the series will set the arts in their broadest contexts, seeking to rechart the territory of the aesthetic and to disclose new horizons for critical thought. Respecting the singularity of analytical experience, Meridian books conform to no established disciplinary or methodological program." (n.p.) The fluidity Hamacher describes, while potentially liberating, can come across as disorienting to the reader of *Taking Care*.

After all, how many individuals can identify with the same range of disciplines and ideologies?

Again, Stiegler writes, "the brains of the youngest children...are structured differently from those of the preceding generation" (p. 19). He goes on to state that "*we* are that generation: the readers as well as the author of this very text" (p. 19, emphasis in original). This "we" suggests something more problematic for the reader and audience of *Taking Care*. Stiegler is in his late 50s, is French, a continental philosopher. It's not difficult to imagine ways in which this "we" fails. Perhaps the one way it succeeds—implicating the audience Stiegler anticipates for *Taking Care* and perhaps offering a litmus test for the potential reader.

Beyond questions of audience and readership, *Taking Care* poses questions about clarity and perhaps about cultural structures of writing. The back cover purports that "Stiegler works systematically through the current crisis in education and family relations." Frankly, there is nothing systematic about *Taking Care*. Any work that attempts to include both Al Gore and Aristotle may suffer structurally. Clear and current political information (e.g., TV programming in France) literate adults should understand collides with deeply difficult and convoluted intellectual information (e.g., psychoanalysis, generally) that only graduate students and scholars understand. Stiegler also moves between economics, politics, education, history, philosophy, psychology (psychoanalysis), and more—and while these areas certainly intersect, he fails to make any of it lucid for an audience that diverse.

Stiegler provides few roadmaps through *Taking Care*, but he anchors the reader to certain thematic and conceptual elements of his argument. That redundancy is not necessarily helpful, though. Circuitous statements and a general lack of precise or persistent definition—especially without tangible contexts (e.g., classrooms)—may leave the reader lost. Some might find, as this reader did, that *Taking Care* is most lucid when Stiegler is quoting others, like Kant.

In addition to audience and clarity issues, *Taking Care* doesn't appear to have a strong sense of its context or the implications for its arguments and recommendations. As detailed above, Stiegler indicts TV, video games, "cell phones, networked computers, and the many other devices" (p. 176). The fact is that corporate industries and political institutions are making policies, products, and services that are more caring, intelligent, responsible. Further, some of the attention-capturing and consumerist psychotechnologies corporations and media employ trickle down and are applied to, for instance, improving education. When Stiegler writes, then, that "there is no reason to think that [programming industries] will not continue to do so or that they will always evolve in the same direction" (p. 89), one might wonder if effort shouldn't be placed, instead of indicting TV, on pragmatically addressing problematic marketing or TV programming.

As detailed above, it's also interesting to consider the individuals Stiegler seems to see taking up his "battle of intelligence against laziness and cowardice." While Gore and Sarkozy may have the critical sensibilities required to do so, it makes little sense in a book suggesting a near-pervasive crisis, one involving delinquent, apathetic, cognitively-liquidated adult-minors, that none of the "political representatives" Stiegler drafts will be affected. Significantly, politicians around the globe also often have serious links with corporations and corporate media. Politicians may then have significant influence, but general perception is that the influence moves more readily from the corporation to the politician. Further, Stiegler cites Brodeur to that effect: "Few governments have shown themselves capable of regulating marketing practices targeting young children" (p. 88).

The most fundamental critique of *Taking Care* is derived in part from statements, particularly near the conclusion of the book, like "we now know that the misuse of psychotechnologies can have catastrophic effects on juvenile consciousness" (p. 190) and "now that we know about its effects on both children and society in general" (p. 191). There is nothing new in Stiegler's basic argument, about what he proposes in *Taking Care* (published first in French in

2008, and in English in 2010). The essence of Stiegler's condemnation of media could probably go back at least as far as Elvis (and rock and roll) in the US, but has certainly been around since the early 90s with the politics of (the violent video game) *Mortal Kombat*. Politicians, parents, advocates, scholars, and kids have been involved in a fairly consistent (though generally unintelligent) debate about the effects of media on children and our critical sensibilities. Instances have included video games and (epileptic) seizures, cop-killing lyrics in rap music, corporate product placement in media (e.g., movies and video games), bullying through digital social networking sites, addiction to MMOs (massively-multiplayer online games), branding and synergies in children's and YA literature, and more. There are certainly scholars who have convincingly disputed Stiegler's argument (e.g., Gee, 2007; Johnson, 2005), scholars more focused on working tangibly toward a realistic future than toward a future without corporations interested in capturing attention in order to increase profits. Beyond the public, political, and scholarly debates over the last several decades, there is plenty of postmodern media (that critiques itself) and plenty of media for diverse audiences that explicitly or implicitly debates the issue (e.g., Anderson, 2002; Molen, Curtis, Parkes, & de Bont, 2002).

Finally, several times in *Taking Care*, Stiegler refers to a second book. Readers, especially those interested in tangible examples and implications, will likely be displeased by side-steps like "problems to be addressed in the following volume of *Taking Care*" (p. 185). Compounded by the fact that Stiegler's media argument is bested by many other sources, and that his philosophical argument which aligns with the rationale for Stanford's Meridian series of books is likely understood by and appeals to a small audience, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* is probably not the best source for any of its many topics.

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