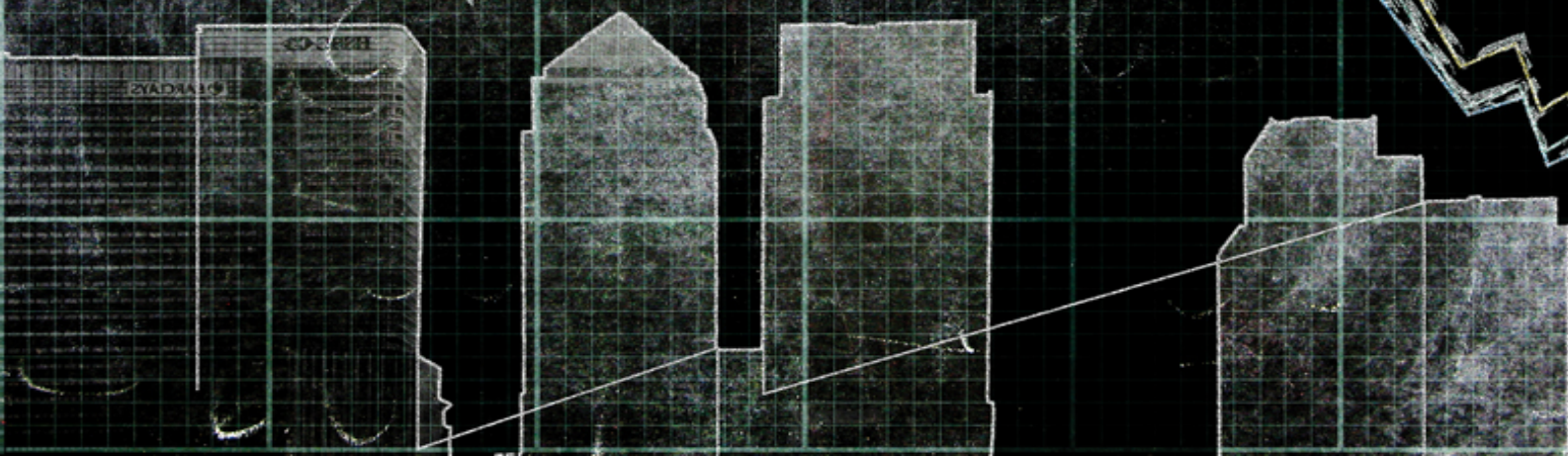


# Bernard Stiegler

## *States of Shock*

*Stupidity and Knowledge  
in the 21st Century*





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For Dominique Bourgon, Jean-Claude Bourgon, Hidetaka  
Ishida and Kuniko Ishida



# States of Shock

Stupidity and Knowledge in the  
Twenty-First Century

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Bernard Stiegler

Translated by Daniel Ross

polity



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# Introduction

## 1 Sovereignty and submission

In 2010 several texts appeared in France and Europe, manifestos, petitions and academic analyses concerning academic and scientific life. Quite a number of newspaper articles about national education and teaching also appeared. And various polls showed that these questions were indeed of major concern to the French people – the number one concern according to one poll, and according to others number two.<sup>[1](#)</sup>

At the same time, *Inside Job*, Charles Ferguson's 2010 documentary about financialization – an austere subject, perhaps, but one that did not prevent it from finding a record audience (and receiving a prize at Cannes), prior to the explosion of what is now called the problem of ‘sovereign debt’<sup>[2](#)</sup> – highlighted the role that American universities, and certain academics, have played in the establishment of a literally suicidal financial system.

Furthermore, in 2011 the private ratings agencies downgraded the ‘ratings’ of Ireland, Greece, Spain, the United States, Japan and Italy (as well as certain French banks) – radically challenging the very idea of sovereignty, an idea that lies at the base of those historical movements that emerged from the eighteenth century and shaped the modern world, a world in which, until recently, we more or less believed we still lived (however ‘postmodern’ it may have become).

The movements that arose in the nineteenth century in order to constitute a ‘public thing’, itself forming a sovereign public power – that is, a *res publica*, and in this



sense a republic – led to the widespread introduction of public education, positing in principle and by right that any citizen should have the chance and the duty to receive an education that will grant them access to that autonomy referred to by Kant as *Mündigkeit*, that is, ‘maturity’ or ‘majority’, through which the foundation would be laid for a public community and a sovereign politics.

In other words, the questions raised by *Inside Job* in the field of economics were echoed in appeals and articles about the dilapidated state of academic research and public education, and the collapse, and not just in Europe, of the economic and political credibility of the Western world, and of its legacy for the entirety of humanity, all this belonging on the same register. *All* these questions and the calamities accompanying them (and in particular the protean regression they threaten to bring with them) are generated by the very system that is sending us headlong into a world where political and economic sovereignty are eliminated and the forming of maturity via education is abandoned, a maturity that, as the autonomy obtained by frequently engaging with rational knowledge, was for the *Aufklärer* the *sine qua non* of such a sovereignty.

Western universities are in the grip of a deep malaise, and a number of them have found themselves, through some of their faculty, giving consent to – and sometimes considerably compromised by – the implementation of a financial system that, with the establishment of hyper-consumerist, drive-based and ‘addictogenic’ society,<sup>3</sup> leads to economic and political ruin on a global scale. If this has occurred, it is because their goals, their organizations and their means have been put entirely at the service of the destruction of sovereignty. That is, they have been placed in the service of the destruction of sovereignty as conceived by the philosophers of what we call the Enlightenment, a sovereignty founded on *Mündigkeit*,

maturity or majority understood as the exit from *Unmündigkeit*, immaturity or minority, in the Kantian sense of these notions.

Abandoning this obligation – even though we must understand its limits, so that a new political discourse can be elaborated, and a new critique of political economy, capable of projecting an alternative to what has proven to be paving the way for a global political and economic catastrophe – will lead capitalism to be destroyed from the inside, and by itself. Such an outcome does not depend on hateful speech or actions: democracy is being destroyed, not by those who ‘hate democracy’, but by those who have abandoned critique – given that a genuine democracy will constantly critique what, in it, means that it never stops changing. Public space and public time constitute a democratic public thing, a democratic public good, only to the extent that they are always precarious, and those democrats who are so sure of themselves as to doubt nothing (in their democracy) are always democracy's worst enemies.

In the Western industrial world, however, democracy has given way – and has done for quite some time – to consumerism (which is now taking hold in countries that seem to feel little need for democracy). This consumerism is itself based on the liquidation of maturity through the *systemic generalization of minority and the industrial dilution of responsibility*, or in other words: based on the reign of stupidity [*bêtise*], and of what so often accompanies it, namely cowardice and viciousness. It is this development that has been internalized by the academic world as simply a fact, with no alternative. And it is the possibility that there *is* an alternative to this fact, and as a new law, that we wish to assert here.

## 2 The war of reason against reason

The *Aufklärung*, writes Kant, is *Mündigkeit*, that is, maturity, that reason that is formed only through 'humanity's emergence from its [...] *Unmündigkeit*, its minority. [That is, from] the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another.'<sup>4</sup> The passage from immaturity to maturity, from minority to majority, is a conquest, according to Kant, and this conquest is referred to as the *Aufklärung*: the *Aufklärung* is an historical movement. What was gained with the Enlightenment, and thanks to it, is, however, what is at present being lost: it is literally being squandered in the course of a war of reason, and in this war, as we shall see, reason stands on both sides of the conflict, as if reason were at war with itself.

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer posited in 1944, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that this historical movement leads to a reversal and eventually to an inversion of the goals of this Enlightenment, and that reason as a political, economic and social stake thereby decomposes into what Weber and Habermas called *rationalization* – where reason comes to serve what the Frankfurt School called *reification*.

These questions – sovereignty, minority, majority, reason and even history – no longer seem to be posed in these terms, as if what is referred to as 'postmodernity'<sup>5</sup> had emptied them of content. For this reason, at the very moment when we are discovering that some of the greatest universities participated in the implementation of a system conceived by the 'conservative revolution' – a system lying at the origin of financialization<sup>6</sup> and installing an economy of carelessness [*économie de l'incurie*] on a global scale, founded on a systemic extension of stupidity, which is also to say one of submission, infantilization and regression to

minority – it also seems that the legacy of twentieth-century thought is simply to leave the human beings of the twenty-first century totally defenceless and unarmed in the face of a situation that appears hopeless.

This is also why I believe we must reopen the question of what links academic research, public education, politics and economics. It is a question that must be revisited in a profound way. We must, on the basis of the questions raised by not only Adorno and Horkheimer but also Karl Polanyi,<sup>7</sup> re-read both:

- the texts of so-called ‘poststructuralist’ thought; and
- the corpus that dominated the Parisian intellectual scene prior to the appearance of this so-called ‘French thought’ – that is, the dialectical philosophies of Hegel and Marx.

As for the texts or initiatives that have recently emerged from the academic world, triggered by the crisis of the university and the school, I refer in particular to five:

- a call to the political responsibility of academics launched in Italy with the title *After the End of the University*, confronting the catastrophic policy pursued in that country by Silvio Berlusconi (<http://th-rough.eu/writers/bifo-eng/after-end-university>);
- a legal challenge undertaken in Portugal by three economists at the University of Coimbra and an economist at the University of Lisbon, against the ratings agencies responsible for downgrading Portugal's sovereign debt rating;
- a petition launched in France in favour of ‘slow science’ ([slowscience.fr](http://slowscience.fr));

- a call for the organization of a civil society seminar on the stakes of research ([sciencescitoyennes.org](http://sciencescitoyennes.org));
- a manifesto launched in Paris calling for the development of digital humanities in French universities, signed by researchers from the EHESS, the laboratories of CNRS, and some thirty French universities.

This final text did indeed clear my vision, which was essential in order to comprehend the crisis of the university, a crisis that stems from the radical transformation of the modern world brought about by the appearance of analogue technologies in the twentieth century and the development of digital technologies in the twenty-first century.

I will attempt to show that the disarming and rearming of thought are essentially tied to the possibility of theorizing and practising these *hypomnēmata* – I will try to show this by offering a commentary on *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), in the context of the advent of public access to the internet via the world wide web, which occurred on 30 April 1993, fourteen years after Jean-François Lyotard published his book.

### **3 Shocks, therapies, pharmacology**

As for the poll that showed (in the context of the then upcoming 2012 French presidential election) that education and teaching are the premier concern of the French public, it echoes an article that appeared in *Le Figaro* on 29 July 2011, on which I will offer a detailed commentary in the next chapter.<sup>8</sup>

The crisis in education – education, which was conceived on the basis of writing in order to form a ‘public that



reads', as Kant said – is nothing new. In Part II, I argue:

- that the reason this has become of such concern to the French public is that the situation has reached a point of no return, directly related above all to the deployment of analogue technologies during the 1960s (leading to the hegemonic rule of what Adorno and Horkheimer called the culture industry), and then, beginning in the 1990s, of digital technologies;
- that this question involves the entire academic project, and that it amounts to the question of what, with *Ars Industrialis*, I refer to as 'technologies of the spirit'.<sup>9</sup>

This analysis leads me to propose in the second part of this work that, in all universities and in all disciplines, 'digital studies' programs should be developed (of which so-called 'digital humanities' would be a specific element).

In the course of these inquiries I will relate the crises of education and the university to Naomi Klein's analysis, in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*,<sup>10</sup> of the way in which this shock strategy was applied in the United States to complete the destruction of public education in the wake of the Hurricane Katrina disaster. The current economic catastrophe is no doubt the subject of similar strategies, referred to as 'shock therapies'. And Europe is now massively confronted with just such strategies.

Faced with this situation, universities – that is, academics, lecturers and students – must assume their responsibilities at a time when this strategy, which is a 'market' strategy, is, in Europe, attacking the very structures of political sovereignty.

This work aims to supply conceptual, that is, *peaceful*, weapons, and to open up prospects for action founded on

rational, that is, *political*,<sup>11</sup> argument, in order positively to oppose proposals for, or impositions of, ‘shock therapies’. These should be opposed in France, in Europe and throughout the industrial world, a world fortunate enough still to possess public education and research systems, but also in those countries that once had such systems but have since lost them – for example, Chile, where 2011 was marked by a battle by students for the right to public higher education, and against the catastrophic degradation of teaching and research that occurred after privatization, a situation orchestrated by Augusto Pinochet, by Milton Friedman and by the latter's so-called ‘Chicago School’ of economics.

Working here from a pharmacological perspective that I have already put forward elsewhere,<sup>12</sup> I develop an analysis of the question of therapies in general, given that technological shocks, which have constituted the basis of capitalism ever since the implementation of what Joseph Schumpeter called ‘Creative Destruction’ (the capital letters are his),<sup>13</sup> must *in our time* be rethought.

A ‘social therapeutics’ for the shocks caused by technological *pharmaka* is what politics must prescribe. For a lengthy period of time this did in fact take place, from the moment politics became, in the industrial ages of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a political economy that required an overall industrial policy. But this is no longer the case, specifically since the ‘conservative revolution’.<sup>14</sup> I argue here that it is therefore a matter of completely rethinking industrial political economy in the hyper-industrial epoch of the twenty-first century. This is why I propose a re-reading of Hegel in chapter 5 and of Marx in chapter 6.

The shock therapies implemented by neoliberalism – under the guidance of Milton Friedman, whose methods were put

to the test in Chile after the assassination of Salvador Allende – may have proven their ‘efficacy’ in the short term (while nevertheless leading in the medium to long term to the contemporary catastrophe wherein this suicidal doctrine proves to have installed an economy of carelessness and neglect). But if this has been possible, it is only because the university, as a project of modernity fundamentally proceeding from the Enlightenment and the Kantian discourse on *The Conflict of the Faculties* (I will return to this in chapter 8), has been incapable of thinking *shock* in general, and the shock that technics *always* is, insofar as it is irreducibly pharmacological, this being even more true when technics becomes technology.

Universities may not have managed to know or do anything about this, but this is less because they have been prevented from doing so, or because they have been bought off (even if this has also happened), than because their development has been based on something that has remained unthinkable, even repressed:<sup>15</sup> the repression of the role of technics in the constitution of the ‘noetic soul’ in general,<sup>16</sup> and in the formation<sup>17</sup> of every form of knowledge. And the repression in particular of the role of technics in theoretical knowledge: the mnemotechnics that is writing is the condition of possibility of reason (of *logos* and of its logic) as theorematic faculty. Analogue and digital mnemotechnologies, however, represent a new stage of the process of grammatization, a process through which alphabetic writing led to the foundation of the *polis*.

Digital technology is a new stage of writing (and thus also of reading),<sup>18</sup> an industrial system founded on the production and activation of traces, of ‘grammes’ and ‘graphemes’<sup>19</sup> that discretize, affect, reproduce and transform every flux and flow (well beyond just language). This writing is produced and written in silicon with new

codes, tools, instruments and devices of publication, and the story must be told from this perspective, from clay and papyrus to today's micro-electronic structures (and tomorrow's nano-electronic, if not bionic) that encode in silicon the industrial standards we refer to as ASCII, XML, and so on, that 'scan' the algorithms of search engines that automate reading and writing, and that index, 'tag' and categorize the new metalanguages which all of this presupposes – the totality of which results in generalized traceability and trackability.

The massive and brutal eruption of these new kinds of *hypomnēmata* radically changes the very conditions of education and research, as well as the relations between educational institutions and universities on the one hand, and what lies outside them on the other hand. This protean 'outside' is now permanently 'inside', thanks to computers and mobile phones, but also to those 'reforms' intended to dictate to the Academy in its totality the non-academic imperatives to which it is now required to submit. These imperatives arise from a *technological shock strategy*, the result of which is that the conditions of autonomy and heteronomy of academic institutions in a broad sense (in a sense whereby education and research together form the academic world, the matrix for which takes shape in Athens in the fourth century BCE) find themselves radically changed.

With Pierre Macherey, to whom I shall refer later in this work,<sup>[20](#)</sup> I question the validity of a discourse – which I find fantastical – premised on the necessity and possibility of 'resisting' by maintaining the illusion of a 'university without condition'. I do indeed support the need to assert the autonomy of the university, but as a *dependent* autonomy, and in a way as a conditional freedom<sup>[21](#)</sup> – as a pharmacology of autonomy under retentional conditions. Such conditions constitute the condition (always

precarious, never assured for anyone) of *responsibility*, a recurring theme in the writings that Jacques Derrida devoted to the university. It is clearly Derrida's thinking that makes possible my own discourse here, which is therefore not an 'anti-Derridian' discourse, but which, if I may put it like this, envisages the possibility of a deconstruction of deconstruction.<sup>[22](#)</sup>

## 4 Responsibilities

Technical traces – the existence of which is the condition of formation of what Freud called mnesic traces for the human psyche, that is, of the 'soul' (in Aristotle's sense) constituted by a libidinal economy – are the milieu of that cerebral plasticity on the basis of which the psychic apparatus is formed, or what Simondon called the psychic individual. These technical traces, which constitute 'tertiary retentions',<sup>[23](#)</sup> are now being placed under the control of a global industry, even though the university is yet to understand fully their role in the noetic activity through which are formed and trained not only the psychic apparatus, but the social apparatus, and knowledge itself, under the auspices of what is called 'reason'. This fact, which inscribes the economy of the *libido sciendi* within the irreducible horizon of an industrial political economy, demands that we think libidinal economy in the industrial epoch.

This book was written after the economic crisis brought about by the 2008 collapse of Lehman Brothers, as well as the insurance company AIG.<sup>[24](#)</sup> It builds on more general analyses of the consequences of this economic crisis,<sup>[25](#)</sup> and strives to deepen the lessons to be learned in terms of the responsibility of academics in general in relation to the epistemic, economic, social, psychic, aesthetic and political aspects of the crisis – and more particularly for philosophy



and for the industrial economy, the crisis of which is that it is a *libidinal diseconomy*.

The thesis of this work is that the question of knowledge, of its irreducibly instrumental dimension – that is, its ambiguous, *because pharmacological*, dimension – and, given this condition, of its place in industrial society, lies at the heart of all these questions. This is why it is also and at the same time a matter of investigating the future role of universities in the re-elaboration of the educational project in the context of the development of new digital technologies,<sup>26</sup> as well as their role in the invention of a new global society, founded on a new industrial model in which knowledge would be fundamentally re-valorized, rather than compromised and discredited, as has been the case in recent decades, as a result of the difficult relationship it has maintained with its economic, social and political environment. It is, then, a matter of struggling against what Paul Valéry long ago described as the lowering of ‘spirit value’, the lowering of the value of spirit.<sup>27</sup>

This work thus attempts to continue the discussion I began in *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*: a reading of French thinkers of the second half of the twentieth century. That book concentrated in particular on certain aspects of the work of Michel Foucault. Here, in dialogue with texts by Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard, I return to the intergenerational question that I introduced in the first chapter of *Taking Care*.

This earlier debate focused on the question of discipline in Foucault,<sup>28</sup> and the evolution of its meaning, that is, on his relation to discipline understood successively in terms of *epistēmē*, *epimēleia*, *melētē*, *tekhnē*, and so on,<sup>29</sup> and on what seemed to me to be unresolved contradictions in this evolution,<sup>30</sup> that is, ultimately, in the thinking of writing,

and the links between the thinking of discipline and the thinking (and non-thinking) of writing. Continuing this debate, this book will in a certain sense be a critical and contextualized introduction to poststructuralist thought, to its legacy, and to the necessity of continuing it, but of doing so in a renewed way.

The question that will arise is indeed that of the role that poststructuralism *could* play, but that it *does not* play, in a situation where, for the first time in human history, the entire world seems threatened by 'impersonal forces' that it has itself unleashed. These forces are both rational, in that they are the outcome of conscious and reflective human activity, and irrational, in that they are removing any control we might have, and not only are they conditioning consciousness 'behind its back',<sup>31</sup> but they are doing the same to the unconscious.

On the basis of these analyses, I try to pose anew the question of responsibility in general, in regard to the past, present and future responsibilities of the university after Fukushima. This nuclear catastrophe of unprecedented global magnitude, with incalculable consequences in a thousand spheres, occurred at a time when financialization has managed to annihilate political legitimacy and every form of sovereignty. It has crystallized, and taken to a new level, the questions thrown up by a set of technological disasters, and by the discovery of toxicities of all kinds, that have marked the first decade of the twenty-first century, after that inaugural shock that took place on 11 September 2001 – from Benfluorex (or Mediator) in France and elsewhere, to attention deficit disorder throughout the world, and passing through the systemic dilution of responsibility in and by the 'financial industry', not to mention all the disruptions of the biosphere.

What we learn from *Inside Job* is that American economics professors played an important role in the so-called 'financial industry', and were sometimes able to amass small fortunes – the financial sector being willing to spend an enormous amount in order to influence the public sphere in general:

Between 1998 and 2008, the financial industry spent over 5 billion dollars on lobbying and campaign contributions. And since the crisis, they're spending even more money. The financial industry also exerts its influence in a more subtle way; one that most Americans don't know about. It has corrupted the study of economics itself.<sup>[32](#)</sup>

George Soros himself confirms this analysis in the clearest possible terms:

Deregulation had tremendous financial *and intellectual* support. [...] The economics profession was the main source of that *illusion*.<sup>[33](#)</sup>

And the narrator adds:

Since the 1980s, academic economists have been major advocates of deregulation, and played powerful roles in shaping U.S. government policy. Very few of these economic experts warned about the crisis. And even after the crisis, many of them opposed reform.

Interviews then follow with Martin Feldstein, economics professor at Harvard, Glenn Hubbard, dean of the Columbia Business School, and Frederic Mishkin, professor at the same university in New York.<sup>[34](#)</sup> The film also mentions the positions of Laura Tyson at Berkeley, Ruth Simmons, president of Brown University, and Larry Summers, former Treasury Secretary under Clinton and president of Harvard University.

It is tempting to conclude that if everything has gone so badly, this must be due, in terms of academic responsibility, to economists. It must be due, that is, to the fact that this discipline has given up its theoretical dimension, its discipline in the sense of its rigour, its rationality. And it has done so in order to become econometrics, that is, a technology of indicators, and a mathematization of anticipation that is ever-more self-fulfilling, that is, as Derrida and Lyotard put it, performative, a technology of models and simulations that is turning into a technology of dissimulation, the eventual result of which is the development of financial software that can only ruin the economy. Many economists themselves have reached such conclusions, those who belong to currents of the discipline that are for this reason known as 'heterodox economics': they attack neoliberalism for basing itself on a concept of rationality that has been corrupted by its abandonment of all criticism of its own status as scientific – the capacity for critique being the basis of all reason – and that therefore leads to the spread of practices whose result is profound economic irrationality.

It is indeed tempting to think this way – it is all the fault, in terms of universities, of economists who are either corrupt or simply inadequately equipped with critical sense, that is, rational sense – and it would be comfortable to be able to leave it at that. But this would be a grave error, in the first place because, especially as concerns philosophy, it has itself, since 1968, very generally abandoned the economic field and the critique of political economy, and this abandonment was even greater after the collapse of the Communist bloc. Having attempted to outline the theoretical stakes of this situation in *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, here I shall continue and deepen this analysis by attempting to show that the abandonment of economic questions and of the critique of political economy

rests on much more general theoretical misunderstandings – and is founded on a *repression* lying at the very origin of philosophy.

Before clarifying these points, it is necessary to reiterate here<sup>35</sup> that the fundamental issue in this global crisis is not essentially financial. If the financial industry has become violently toxic since the ‘conservative revolution’, accelerating and intensifying the destructive effects of contemporary capitalism, the more fundamental question relates to the obsolescence of the consumerist industrial model, a model that arose at the beginning of the twentieth century with Fordism and was consolidated with the American New Deal of 1933, before expanding to Europe with the Marshall Plan and eventually to the entire world with the ‘conservative revolution’ that began in the late 1970s.

As I have already tried to show, contemporary philosophy, as a general rule, and with the exception of the Frankfurt School, has largely ignored the toxic, addictive and self-destructive becoming of consumerism. Hence philosophy has allowed the arguments of Herbert Marcuse and Guy Debord on this subject to fall into oblivion, but also those of many others (such as Henri Lefebvre) – and contemporary writers who have addressed this subject (such as André Gorz), too, have been neglected.

As Marx understood in 1857,<sup>36</sup> just as Schumpeter made it the new leitmotiv of American capitalism under the name of ‘innovation’, and just as it is now expressly thematized with the advent of digital networks and the ‘information society’, knowledge has become the crucial issue in the economic war currently destroying the world. ‘Poststructuralist’ thought has at times been able to teach us things about this situation, and in some ways to fight against it, as we shall see. But it has done so on the basis of two misconceptions

themselves grounded in the original repression of the technical question by nascent philosophy – a repression that, strangely, ‘poststructuralist’ philosophy has itself in some ways exposed, while nevertheless perpetuating it.<sup>37</sup>

The two misunderstandings that such a repression reinforces concern:

- the meaning of what Marx referred to as the ‘proletariat’; and
- the status of the drives in Freudian theory.

These points will be argued at length in chapter 6, which concludes the first part of this work. The second part will attempt to draw some theoretical and practical consequences from these re-readings of the philosophies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – re-readings conducted in the aftermath of 2008 – by advancing a series of proposals that together constitute a call to the international academic community to constitute what in 1920 Marcel Mauss called an ‘internation’.

The first part was written after the second: it outlines the conceptual underpinnings. Therefore the reader who prefers to begin with the positive proposals I put forth in the second part may do so without much problem. For a thorough understanding of these proposals, however, it is necessary to read the first part. The first part is composed of six chapters, of which the fifth is the most difficult. Readers may also skip this chapter, and turn from the fourth directly to the sixth chapter, returning to the fifth at a later time if possible.<sup>38</sup>

## Notes

- 1 See Claude Lelièvre, 'L'éducation, sujet majeur des présidentielles?', *Mediapart*, 18 July 2011, available at <http://blogs.mediapart.fr/blog/claude-lelievre/180711/leducation-sujet-majeur-des-presidentielles>. And see Denis Kambouchner, Philippe Meirieu, Bernard Stiegler, Julien Gautier and Guillaume Vergne, *L'École, le numérique et la société qui vient* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2012).
- 2 As if the true problem is debt, and not the major discredit through which the capitalist economy, which has systematically cultivated debt while privatizing everything, has established a generalized insolvency, beginning with the banks.
- 3 The expression 'addictogenic society' was used by Jean-Pierre Couteron, president of the Association nationale des intervenants en toxicomanie et addictologie (ANITEA).
- 4 Immanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?" ', *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 54, translation modified.
- 5 There is great confusion about the meaning of this word, which, especially in the way it is understood in the United States, tends to paint Lyotard, Derrida and Deleuze, Baudrillard and Virilio, and even Barthes and Lacan, and others, all with the same brush. An example of this confusion can be found in Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age of Access* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 2000). Be that as it may, Jean-François Lyotard claimed that during this so-called 'postmodern' period, which he himself attempted to describe in detail – and I will return to this in [chapter 4](#) – we must *stop telling stories*, namely, those speculative and emancipatory stories that would be the