

The UKZN Teaching & Learning Office

Cordially invites you to a University-wide Seminar on

TECHNICS, NIHILISM AND THE CRISIS OF THE UNIVERSITY



by

Professor Bert Olivier

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About Professor Bert Olivier

As an undergraduate student, Bert Olivier discovered Philosophy more or less by accident, and set out to teach students the value of questioning which he did during the 1980s and '90s in opposition to apartheid. Since then, he has been teaching and writing on Philosophy and his other great loves, namely, the arts, architecture and literature. He later branched out into Psychoanalysis and Social Theory as well, and because Philosophy cultivates in one a strong sense of justice, he has more recently been harnessing what little knowledge he has in intellectual opposition to the injustices brought about by the dominant economic system today, to wit, neoliberal capitalism. His motto is taken from Immanuel Kant's work: 'Sapere aude!' ('Have the courage to think for yourself!') Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University recently (2012) conferred a Distinguished Professorship on him.

About this Seminar

Bernard Stiegler argues that contemporary technics is leading to the "stupidification" of societies across the world. For Stiegler, there is a connection between what happens in production and consumption (tied as they are to technology), on the one hand, and social relations, on the other. This is what is at stake in the "proletarianisation" of consumers, which was preceded by the proletarianisation of workers in the 19th century when their "know-how" was lost due to machines taking their place. This is crucial for understanding the social transformation, with the concomitant growth in nihilism, and the crisis of the university emerging today. With the two waves of proletarianisation, productivity, and hence profit, are involved, these being the result of improved machine technology that laid the foundations proletarianisation. "Proletarianisation" means first robbing workers of their "know-how" or savoir-faire (the knowledge of making things) by turning them into mere surplus labour power, and second, robbing consumers of this and their savoir-vivre (the knowledge of how to live a singular, creative, self-organising life), their lives having been hijacked by the culture and consumer industry, which pre-formats consumers' lives through advertising and lifestyle-templates or -prescriptions. This implicates the changed meaning of "work" in the present epoch, which involves the emergence of a "hypomnesic pharmakon", or "technology of the spirit" that makes "tertiary retention" possible, and as pharmakon has the potential, by robbing consumers of their internalised memory and knowledge, to give rise to either a proletarianisation of the "life of the mind" or to "its critical intensification" in the face of the demands of abstraction. Moreover, because universities have generally failed to take account of the effects of technological changes on human behaviour, the crucial function of "attention", and with it, "thinking", has been undermined. Stiegler's work has to be seen against the backdrop of that of Manuel Castells on the "network Society", which will be briefly reconstructed.

Seminar Details

DATE: Friday, 05 February 2016	TIME: 14h00-15h30	VENUE: Shepstone 2, Howard College	RSVP Online: utlo.ukzn.ac.za/rsvp
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