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The Europe of Knowledge – or a Europe of Lost Spirit?

-Rethinking Politics of Education in Neoliberal Times

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ABSTRACT. This article seeks to listen out for contemporary echoes of the concerns and descriptions of social and political challenges Rudolf Steiner gave 100 years ago. It aims further to compare, with an emphasis on politics of education, Steiner's perspectives on social renewal with the perspectives of three contemporary intellectual and political activists: Simon Critchley, Slavoj Žižek and Bernard Stiegler. The article concludes that such echoes can be found, and that they can inspire to work for the autonomy of educational institutions.

Introduction

Rudolf Steiner's book *Die Kernpunkte der sozialen Frage in den Lebensnotwendigheiten der Getenwart und Zukunft* was first published in 1919, translated to several languages and sold in more than 80.000 copies. In English translation, the book was titled *Basic Issues of the Social Question: Towards Social Renewal*. Here, Steiner presents ideas of how to rethink society after the devastating consequences of World War I. In a preface to the Norwegian edition Waage notes that the reviews of the book were highly positive at the time (Waage 2008). Many politicians expressed their interest and inspiration. However, as we know all too well, politics and history took a different direction.

Steiner describes modern cultural life in 1919 as entirely dominated by political institutions and economic power, resulting in chaotic social and political situations. He sees this as a direct consequence of man's spiritual and cultural dependence of economic forces. Children were given over to a state educational system that seemed to shape their upbringing in correspondence to economic circumstances and interests. According to Steiner, the whole problem revolved around the shape of contemporary spiritual life.

Since the 1980s, politicians in the entire western world have taken an ever firmer grip on the educational institutions, inspired and promoted by economic motivation, interests and institutions. Political governance of the educational systems is performed by means of goal measurement, competition and a rhetoric taken from the business world. Steiner's description of children's upbringing in correspondence to economic circumstances and interests seems to fit perfectly to the current situation.

These economic forces underlying educational institutions may in part be explained by the term neo–liberalism. In a lecture held in 1979, Michel Foucault traces the roots of an economic ideology and practice identified as neoliberalism back to post-World War II politics, with ideas of economic growth and human

capital as some of its basic elements (Foucault, 2008). For more than 40 years, these ideas can be traced behind pervasive educational reforms in most European countries, and beyond.

These reforms are analyzed by De Groof, Lauwers & Dondelinger in *Globalization and Competition* in Education (2003). They identify three important factors behind the reforms: a) Economic globalization fronted by international organizations like The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and The World Trade Organization (WTO), b) a political wish to counteract economic stagnation by means of higher competence in the population, and c) to make it possible to educate a larger number of the population at a lower cost, this under the much used slogan *The Europe of Knowledge*. All three factors come from explicit economic motivation.

In *PISA, Power, and Policy: The emergence of global educational governance* (2013), Heinz-Dieter Meyer & Aaron Benavot present and problematize the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), sponsored, organized and administered by OECD. According to them, PISA promotes worldwide educational standardization from a principle of economic efficiency and leads to a sacrifice of the educational system's role in preparing students for independent thinking and civic participation.

The state of the educational systems, then, seems to be a consequence of the general politics identified as neoliberalism. This has been problematized by a lot of researchers from different angles and with different approaches on how to promote change, up to now with little political effect. Economic motivation seems to have an impressively firm grip on society and political institutions, educational institutions included.

In my attempt to listen for contemporary echoes of Steiner's concerns as outlined above, I have selected perspectives from three contemporary thinkers, who seem to pose similar or at least comparable questions concerning politics and education to those posed by Steiner. All three have comparable diagnoses of the current political situation, stressing how capitalism in the form of neoliberalism is forming both society and the individual in its image. Two of them, Slavoj Žižek (b. 1949) and Simon Critchley (b. 1950), are still active. Bernard Stielgler (1952-2020) passed away in August 2020. I have chosen to delve deepest into Stiegler as I find him the most fruitful and maybe the one closest to Steiner's ideas.

This article seeks to meet and treat the following question:

How are Steiner's concerns of politics of education echoed in some of today's critical thinking?

In a short article like this there is, of course, no way of doing these thinkers justice. All three have published numerous volumes on a wide variety of subjects. I have chosen to look into just a few, searching for some comparable principles central to my question. The limits of this article allow for no more than a scratching of the surface; its findings will hopefully still be of some interest and importance.

I will start with a presentation of a selection of Steiner's ideas as presented in *Towards Social Renewal.* I will further compare Simon Critchley's rather individual approach in *Infinitely Demanding, Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (2007) and in *The Faith of the Faithless* (2014) to Slavoj Žižek, who suggest a more radical political change of the entire capitalist system in *The Relevance of the Communist Manifesto* (2019). I will then present Bernard Stiegler, who will be given most space. Central titles here are *The Lost Spirit of Capitalism* (2014); *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology* (2013); and *The Age of Disruption: Technology and Madness in Computational Capitalism* (2019). In *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* (2010), Stiegler emphasizes the importance of schools and educational institutions in a rescue operation of the human mind.

My aim is to compare Steiner's ideas of educational policies and institutional autonomy with the ideas of these three contemporary thinkers. All three have expressed deep concern with today's political situation; two of them include concern for the educational institutions.

To promote ideas about a future society is a difficult and even potentially dangerous matter. During the last 100 years, utopian thinking has been discredited, especially so in the aftermaths of Nazi ideology and a Soviet version of communism. Ideas of ideal societies tends to take a path towards totalitarian politics. However, all four thinkers seem to open for a possible future without making their suggestions into fixed utopian systems. Steiner claims explicitly that his book is not utopian. He states that

> this book is not meant to be the least bit utopian. No hard and fast theories are found in it which say that things must be this way or that. On the contrary, its intention is to stimulate the formation of communities which, as a result of their common experience, will be able to bring about what is socially desirable. (Steiner, 1977, p. 15)

In my reading of them, this holds true for all of the thinkers presented in this article, in spite of their differences. In the following, I will look for centers of gravity in their approaches, some of which may be identified as the individual, institutions and/or the entire political system; and the role education in this.

Steiner's approaches to social renewal and the role of education

In *Towards Social Renewa*l, Steiner writes about the cause of the state of affairs at the time and calls it anti-social. This has much to do with an educational system that, according to him, dictates what to think and do instead of promoting individual responsibility. People are brought up to adapt to society rather than to become active civic participants:

> The current anti-social state of affairs is the result of individuals entering society who lack social sensitivity because of their education. Socially sensitive individuals can only develop within an educational system which is conducted and administered by other socially sensitive individuals. (…) It is anti-social to allow youth to be educated by people who themselves have become strangers to reality because the conduct and content of their work has been dictated to them from without. (Steiner, 1977, p. 15)

Steiner states here that the problem is part of deep structures in society, as well as individuals who have not developed individual thinking. In order to promote socially sensitive individuals, the cultural realm has to be liberated from political and economic power. This will have to include challenging the state's control over the educational institutions. Educational institutions must be thought of as a social organism, allowed to unfold independently.

This book, Steiner states, should not be seen as a program or a model, but as inspiration to let the experiences of life form the base on which people come together to find and fill social work and tasks. Steiner does not talk so much about concrete possible ends, as about possible steps to take. However, when discussing strategies for promoting possible social renewals, he is clear about what he sees as a main error of his time.

> This involves attacking certain wide-spread errors. For example, the political state's assumption of responsibility for education has long been considered to be beneficial for human progress. For people with socialistic ideas it is inconceivable that society should do anything but shape the individual according to its standards and for its service. (Steiner, 1977, p. 11)

A turning away from this object of shaping the individual according to society's standards was, according to Steiner, long overdue. Human culture has, in Steiner's eyes, matured towards freedom within the framework of the state. However, to exercise freedom, requires autonomy of action. Education is one of the main factors for cultural development, and must, according to Steiner, be turned over to the educators. No parliament or congress should have anything to say about the structure and content of education. According to Steiner, politics and economy will benefit from an educational system liberated from both. He also stresses that educational institutions should be led by those engaged in practical matters. The educational reforms since the 1980s have put much emphasis on research and expertise; less so on the autonomy of the practical performer. For Steiner, this is no recipe for success. Such experts will never be able to "turn out practical individuals who are equipped for life by their education" (Steiner, 1977, p. 15).

The schools should be established as free cultural institutions. The state would then be enriched by living ideas that can only arise within a free spiritual environment:

> Within a spiritual life of this nature society would encounter the men and women who could grow into it on their own terms. Worldliness does not originate in educational institutions organized by so-called ‚experts', in which impractical people teach, but only in educators who understand life and the world according to their own viewpoints. (Steiner, 1977, pp. 15-16)

Steiner links the idea of state control over the educational institution to socialist ideas. The last 40 years of educational reforms have, however, shown that this understanding in no way is limited to people with socialist ideas. To shape the individual according to society's standards and for its service is in fact one of the most distinctive features of neoliberal politics, all the way from the principles of early intervention up to lifelong learning. Educational policy is still being used to promote national interests, but even more so the interests of a global economy with a clear goal of shaping the individual in its image. As the queen of neoliberalism, Margaret Thatcher, stated in 1981: "Economy is the method; the object is to change the souls" (Thatcher, 3 May 1981). We will have to acknowledge that she succeeded.

Instead of presenting an alternative to the capitalist system, such as a socialist system, Steiner presents an alternative structure all together, with different contents and motivations. He states that the socialist claim for a more just distribution is highly recognizable. Socialism has traditionally drawn the conclusion that the means of production should be transferred from the private sector to the state. However, according to Steiner, this is not the only solution. The realm of economics could instead be formed on a model of limited ownership, in which ownership circulates in given time periods within the associations. The profit motivation is then arguably transformed into a model of division of labour driven by an impulse of fraternity, while education, as part of cultural life, is given the liberty to form its own structures and content.

Simon Critchley and Slavoj Žižek on social renewal

The three contemporary thinkers that I am presenting in this article have rather similar views to Steiner's in the critique of a society driven by mere economic motivation. However, in their ideas of how to promote change, they seem to have different emphases on factors which I above identified as centers of gravity, namely the individual, the cultural institutions as well as the political systems. This will have impact on the role of the educational system.

In *Infinitely Demanding* (2013), Critchley states that philosophy starts with disappointment, and that his book comes out of political disappointment. He claims that globally, the political situation is dominated by extreme injustice, with increasing social and economic inequalities. His hypothesis is that there is a lack of individual motivation at the core of secular, liberal democracies. As a counteraction he proposes to develop a moral philosophy based on normative principles that can foster people's abilities to meet and confront the present political situation. He proposes a theory of ethical experience and subjectivity that results in an ethic of commitment and a politics of resistance:

> Our time, which is characterized by an enormous political disappointment, lacks a motivating invigorating ethical concept which can meet and confront the dominating tendency, an ethic which can confront and actively enter into the actual political situation. (Critchley, 2013, p. 46)

Critchley seems to have little faith in institutions driven by the state in general, the educational institutions included. Instead, he proposes to see politics as initiatives at internal distance to the state; as networks of cooperation in all human areas of action, a horizontal working together of free individuals. In a classical Marxism state, Critchley says, revolution and class form a continuous unity. But the revolutionary proletarian subject has, according him, vanished in our time. In its place, he sees a need to establish an ethical subject. He states that ethics is about disturbing the status quo. Ethics is a form of anarchic metapolitics in which one constantly poses questions from below during any attempt at establishing order from above. "[P]olitics is to make an internal distance to the state, to make new political subjectivities" (Critchley, 2013, p. 51).

Slavoj Žižek seems to largely agree with Critchley's description of the current political situation, but he proposes different approaches to bringing about change. Their differences lead them to face each other in a public debate in which severe accusations were levelled in both directions.[1] Critchley accused Žižek of glorifying violence, and Žižek accused him in return for lodging non-committal protests on the premises of the system.

1. For more information on Critchley and Zizek's differences, see http://www.nakedpunch.com/articles/39 and https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v29/n22/slavoj-zizek/resistance-is-surrender.

However, both of them seem to agree on a critique of a society dominated by economic globalization, and that this domination has consequences for the individual as much as for society. Žižek expresses a concern for the educational system. He states in *The Relevance of the Communist Manifesto* (2019) that this neoliberal economic globalization has paradoxically made the state stronger in relation to the educational system: "Far from disappearing, the state is becoming stronger today" (Žižek, 2019, p. 9). He links this to an economic motivation and to a competitive job market:

> …fictitious capital is upheld in the expectation that valorization will occur in the future. Thus the reproduction of labour power is put under pressure so that those not labouring in the present will be ready to labour in the future. This is why the topic of education (in its productive-technocratic version: getting ready for the competitive job market) is so important today, and is also intertwined with debt: a student gets indebted in order to pay for his or her education, and this debt is expected to be repaid through self-commodification, that is, when the indebted student will get a job. Education also emerges as one of the main topics in discussions on how to deal with refugees – how to make them into a useful workforce. (Žižek, 2019, pp. 27-28)

According to Žižek, social control is presented by politicians as individual free choice. We are told to be entrepreneurs of the self, acting like a capitalist. He goes on to say that "one can risk the hypothesis that today, in the new epoch of global capitalism, a new era of slavery is also arising" (Žižek, 2019, p. 36). He calls this situation a new apartheid, occurring not by accident, but because it is a "structural necessity of today' global capitalism" (Žižek, 2019, p. 37).

Žižek seems to promote a total change of the political system, while rejecting Critchley's claim that his suggestions necessitate violence. In an interview with Gisle Selnes, he puts it this way:

> One and the same action can, depending on context, appear as violent or non-violent. Sometimes a polite smile can be more violent than a violent outbreak. As I have often underlined, the biggest threat is not to be passive, but pseudo-activity, the imperative that you should take part, engage yourself, and thus hide that in fact nothing is happening. Power brokers always prefer "critical" participation and dialogue before silence; they want us to engage in debate to bring an end to our alarming passivity. (Selnes, 2012, p. 32, my translation)

This pseudo-activity will take place on the premises of the system. Žižek identifies much of the events and proceedings in common democratic processes to be cases of pseudo-activity. He seems to include Critchley's approach in this identification. In terms of what needs to be done, he states the following:

> Sometimes I say that we need a big event that can change the system radically, other times I say that we shall … do nothing, still other times that we shall take part in the parliamental game or other pragmatic political contexts. (…) Why a categorical divide between these different alternatives – to do nothing, a radical overturning intervention and more pragmatic, particular interventions? Politics is the art of choosing between these possibilities. (Selnes, 2012, p. 33, my translation)

Žižek seems to emphasize change of the system while Critchley seems to put his trust in the anarchistic, but responsible individual. However, both of them are concerned with the understanding of the human subject, inspired by Freud's psychoanalytic approaches as well as different approaches to traditional religious thinking, without accepting any religious dogmas (Žižek, 2008; Critchley, 2014). They both seem to indicate that religious texts have something our time needs (Critchley, 2014; Žižek, 2012). In any case, both of them emphasize and put their trust in intellectual and political interventions rather than taking action to promote concrete practices in the form of social experiments. The next thinker on my list, Bernard Stiegler, seems to move in the latter direction.

Politics as libidinal ecology: Bernard Stiegler.

In *The Lost Spirit of Capitalism* (2014), Stiegler arguably comes closest to Steiner out of the three when he describes the current cultural situation as one in which spiritual misery reigns. Stiegler describes what he sees as a form of libidinal economy, which originated in the late nineteenth century and is seemingly heading towards the destruction of capitalism. Capitalism is in fact, Stiegler says, destroying itself from within. He does not propose a total change of the system in a more traditional socialist approach as Žižek seems to do.

Instead, he goes into deeper understandings of the driving forces in the individual as well as in society. The concept of libido, in what he calls the current state of libidinal economy, is here understood through its application in psychoanalysis as the energy of life, and death; the most basic of human driving forces. In the last decades, libido has, according to Stielger, been captured in an ever more dominant consumerism.

In *What Makes Life Worth Living* (2013), Stiegler is concerned with what he sees as a current instrumentalization of knowledge, and how culture has been subordinated to profit. This has created a consumerism which Stiegler sees as another stage in a process of proletarization, a term taken from Marx – this time not limited to economy, but also applicable to the human mind. This proletarization of the human mind is brought about by a superefficient marketing machinery and by infantilizing and stupefying mass media.

Stiegler links the proletarization of the mind to what Marcuse called *automatization of the super-ego*:

> [I]n order to think ethics, manners and morality, that is, the super-ego – in their relation to justice and law – that is to politics – at a time when capitalism is substituting the authority of the super-ego with what Marcuse already called, with good reason, the automatization of the super-ego, we must think the originary technicity of desire, and we must think it as a process of adoption, that is, as an originary potential for the libido to be diverted towards libidinal objects (…) (Stiegler, 2014, pp. 2-3)

Stiegler claims that consumerism has taken over this energy of life, the libido, and captured it, resulting in passive adaption and in different forms of addiction. The super-ego, as the norms of society, have become automatized, making us less able to connect our libido to objects, to the physical world, to other people, and to the world in general. This automatized super-ego is unable to take care of itself as well as its surroundings. As a result, many forms of addiction arise, whether it be to media, passive entertainment, the use of new technologies or drug-related addictions. To counteract this, one should seek to liberate the libido from this captivity and facilitate a society and an educational system in which active adoption of ideals and cultural values can occur. This process of adoption is presented as the individual's relation to the world through what he calls individuation. Individuation can only be achieved in relation to a we, in which the individual actively adopts collective traditions and in this way connects to cultural and physical surroundings. The I as well as the we are here understood as an ever-ongoing process, not as a state.

Instead of a political alternative system from the left, Stiegler proposes to start with saving the spirit of social life by turning economy into what he calls a libidinal ecology:

> From this it follows that politics – understood as the care a society takes of itself, a care that is inherently perverse, given that its spiritual and social energy, libido, by its very nature attaches itself to that which destroys it – faced as it is with the careless negligence (incurie) that hyperindustrial capitalism has become, must be thought as a libidinal ecology. (Stiegler, 2014, pp. 3-4)

Politics are here presented as care. And this care is currently lacking. The situation is described as a hyperindustrial capitalism that, by being careless, has allowed the libido to become attached to processes that destroy the social energy and obstruct its essential role as the driving forces, the driving spirit.

In *The Age of Disruption* (2019), Stiegler sees the loss of spirit as a loss of real content; therefore, he describes our time not as an epoch among other epochs, but as an absence of an epoch. There is not enough content to really confront our time, to question it in a fruitful way, or leap beyond it. We will have to start work on taking care, of individuals as well as of society. And we will have to start through minor experiments in practice, in concrete communities and institutions.

In *The Lost Spirit of Capitalism* (2014), Stiegler states that at present, 50 years after 1968, the control that was challenged and questioned by the student protests at that time now comes back in the form of prohibitions: "An epoch seems to have come to a close, and it has opened onto a spiritual poverty, in the name of which we see a return of all the forms of control that existed prior to 1968: as *prohibition*" (Stiegler, 2014, p.85).

Consumer capitalism has, according to Stiegler, promoted spiritual poverty. The libidinal energy is reduced to a mechanism of the drives in the absence of libidinal ecology of the spirit (Stiegler, 2014, p. 86).

He asserts that

> If it is true that the heart of capitalism is its libidinal economy, and that this is leading to the destruction of sublimation and the super-ego, then we must now enable this economy to move to a stage of libidinal *ecology*. The danger associated with any socio-pathological discourse is obviously that it will maintain the illusion that there is such a thing as social health, and that this is what must be *achieved*: that it *exists*. What must on the contrary be posited as a first principle of such a socio-pathology is that this kind of health does not exist, that society is always diseased, that there is no revolutionary Great Day, no horizon of redemption, whether hygienist or instinctual, but that, *nevertheless, health consists*, and that there would be no way to give up on it, as horizon of consistencies, without giving up on *everything*. (Stiegler, 2014, p. 92)

Here, Stiegler warns against any utopism, any final solution, any Great Day, as he warns about giving up. This mirrors his many concrete initiatives, like the think tank *Ars Industrialis* and his role in The Institute of Research and Innovation at the Pompidou Centre[2]. He proposes to rethink the more common understanding of work, promoting in its place what he calls a *contributory income* as part of an economy of contribution based on a new type of value production and social justice. *Plaine Commune*[3] is a concrete social experiment in which these ideas are tried out. In an interview translated by Sam Kinsley, he offers a little more detail on how one might go about creating an *economy of contribution*. He proposes Plaine Commune as a *'territoire contributif'*: a sort of region of contribution, a territory or zone delineated as an area in which the economy of contribution might take precedence:

> Plaine Commune is a bit like Bangladesh: the people there are exercising a remarkable energy. [Various] actors, businesses and residents are aware of the urgent need to invent something radically new, which is to use the mechanisms of contribution to develop a common in a project that promotes the development, exchange, and transmission of practical knowledge [savoir-faire], life skills [savoir-vivre] and theoretical knowledge [savoir théoretiques] among the younger generations, associations, businesses, public services of the area, and doctoral students from around the world. Researchers will have the mission to facilitate and work alongside these changes. (Kinsley, 2016)

Stiegler claims that the aim is not limited to building a specific local economy and that its ultimate goal is to transform the macro-economy. By reshaping motivation, this experiment might be the first step in changing economic systems from within. The researchers and their pedagogical abilities will have a major role to play in the development.

In his book *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* (2010), Stiegler is explicitly concerned with education. In an examination of the history of education, he points to the traditions of critical thinking and shows that the skills it requires are threatened today, maybe more than ever. Here he states that we as a generation of parents have allowed a powerful marketing machinery to take hold of the attention and the libido of the younger generation. This has made it difficult to give them the care they should have had. In many ways we have failed to defend them and have let the educational system be modelled upon the same motivation that sustains the dominant ideology of economic growth. Such motivation disrupts the process of individuation, which Stielger sees as the essential aim of education.

> Schools' fundamental mission is obviously not to produce anything like "national identity": on the contrary, it expands national differences and alterity in that it intensifies the process of individuation psychically as well as collectively, always pushing it to new singularities. Individuation is never finished: it never exists as *identity* (as a stable state), but consists as process: individuation is always to *come*, and thus it always open only to a future. (Stiegler, 2010, pp. 68-69)

In order to take its mission seriously, the school must be a place where the marketing industries are held at arm's length. Stiegler seems to think of schools as well as universities as important institutions in a new and intensified work of taking care, of new generations and of society at large. This culture of taking care will foster a new moral being, de-proletarianized, and once again capable of intellectual dreaming.

2. See https://www.iri.centrepompidou.fr/ for more information.
3. See https://plainecommune.fr/ for more information.

Discussion: The Europe of Knowledge or a Europe of Lost Spirit?

I introduced this article by raising the following question: How are Steiner's concerns politics of education echoed in some of today's critical thinking? So far, I have presented the perspectives of selected contemporary critics; moving forwards, I will examine and compare more concrete instances of the echoes I set out to find.

'The Europe of Knowledge' has served as a slogan for the last decades of international educational reforms. However, the emphasis seems to have been put largely on a rather narrow understanding of knowledge as competences in a work force that promotes economic growth; not so much on knowledge in a wider scope. Both Žižek and Stiegler use harsh words in their description of what this has brought about. Žižek talks about a modern form of slavery; Stiegler talks about proletarization. All three have their proposals for counteraction: Stiegler calls for the de-proletarized moral being capable of intellectual dreaming, Critchley calls for an ethical subject at an internal distance to the state, and Zizek calls for more than pseudo-activity on the premises of the system.

In spite of the efforts of a lot of researchers and philosophers, the situation today is just as dominated by political institutions and economic motivation as it was in Steiner's time, the educational systems included. The political left seems to have been unable to do anything about what Stiegler calls hyperindustrial capitalism. The educational systems are captured, not so much by a project of nation building, which was the case in Steiner's time, as by a global consumer capitalism. Some contemporary echoes of Steiners's descriptions of political situations in 1919, could thus be specified as follows:

Culture as dominated by political and economic institutions

This is a most distinct echo, sounding through the century. According to all three thinkers, culture seems to be as dominated by political and economic institutions, now as it was a hundred years back, if not more.

Spiritual misery

According to all three, Žižek, Critchley and Stiegler, spiritual misery seems to reign no less now than it did in Steiner's time. Steiner describes spiritual life as anti-social. Both Žižek and Critchley find inspiration in religious texts, though they see themselves as atheists. Stiegler does not deal with religious texts to the same extent, but he does seem to be the one most concretely concerned with lost spirit. For him, the spirit, which has been captured and passively adapted to consumer capitalism, is connected to the innermost human driving forces. This echoes Steiner's notion that people are brought up to adapt to society rather than to become active civic participants.

Concrete practical initiatives

The website *Steiner worldwide* lists 2.656 different initiatives inspired by Steiner and launched regardless of different national, political and ideological situations around the world. Steiner's ideas have become concrete practice in the most convincing way[4]. Compared to this, Stiegler's Plaine Commune seems rather minor. However, when it comes to political change, the fate of these initiatives is shared between the two. Stiegler's idea has been that small scale practice in due course will change politics, not only on a local level, but also on a national and international level. In spite of Steiner's 100 years old ideas, and the 2.656 worldwide Steiner initiatives, these ideas and initiatives have not so far changed national of international politics. Steiner's thoughts about politics as social renewal have to this date produced rather meagre outcomes. The educational institutions are either formed and driven by state politics, or they are increasingly given over to a private marked. In both cases dominated by the ideology of the last decades of international educational reform policies.

4. Details can be found here: https://www.waldorf-100.org/en/worldwide/

How to understand politics

While Stiegler sees politics as care, as libidinal ecology linked to concrete communities, Critchley presents ethics as anarchic metapolitics in which one constantly poses questions from below during any attempt at establishing order from above. To reiterate his own words: "politics is to make an internal distance to the state, to make new political subjectivities" (Critchley, 2013, p. 51). Critchley's political project can be described as an inspiration to form an ethical subject of the future, an *ethics to come*. Žižek on his part describes politics as the art of choosing between radical change of the system, doing nothing, or being pragmatic and taking part in what he calls the parliamental game.

In spite of their differences, all of them tend towards political activism, a wish to intervene, to promote change. In the preface of *The Ticklish Subject* (2008), Žižek states that this book "is first and foremost an engaged political intervention, addressing the burning question of how we are to reformulate a leftist, anti-capitalist political project in our era of global capitalism and its ideological supplement, liberal-democratic multi-culturalism" (Žižek, 2008, p. xxvii). While Žižek is challenging capitalism as such and Simon Critchley is suggesting a politics at internal distance to the state, Bernard Stiegler proposes to dig deeper into capitalism in search for its lost spirit, transforming economics to ecology by a new understanding of inherited traditions. Much like Steiner, Stiegler seems to dig into the realm of economy in order to rethink politics and the social systems. Most of Steiner's book is dedicated to economy and capitalism. They both seem to put emphasis on a transformation of the economic realm rather than to suggest alternative political systems.

Education and politics

In what might be seen as Steiner's political manifesto, *Towards a social renewal,* he is explicitly concerned with the role education must assume in this renewal. This is also the case in Stiegler's *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, which emphasizes an educational system able to hold a powerful marketing machinery at arm's length in order to counteract the instrumentalization of knowledge at the core of The Europe of Knowledge. Žižek mentions that the state has an ever firmer grip on the educational institutions, though he seems to be most concerned with macro political systems. As far as I have been able to find out, Critchley does not put much emphasis on educational institutions and educational policy. He seems to be more concerned with teachers and teaching[5].

Education has a long history of being given its justification outside its own chambers, earlier linked to religion and the church, later to the enlightenment and to a nation building project. For the last four decades, economic motivation and interests have been dominant in setting the standard.

100 years back, Steiner was challenging the state's control over education. This challenge has not, up to the present, given much result. If anything, the control is now in the hands of even more economic motivation, in which the state takes the role of a bureaucratic control apparatus. In order to open a free space for education, which Rudolf Steiner called for in 1919, the path seems to have to go through politics.

In countries like Norway, Waldorf schools have public funding. However, this arguably comes with a price. Public funding gives the state reason and opportunity to prescribe structures, content and outcomes. It takes a resoluteness and good argumentation to hold these prescriptions at arm's length. So far, this has been done rather successfully, but more and more adjustments are being made towards an ever ongoing political educational reform process. The best defense, then, could be to work for a transformation of the educational system in general, which may be difficult without changing politics.

The Europe of Knowledge or a Europe, and a World of Lost Spirit: echoes, concerns and a calling?

The ideas behind educational policy under the slogan 'The Europe of Knowledge', as described by De Groof, Lauwers & Donelinger (2003) and Meyer & Benavot (2013), seem to be challenged from different angles

5. See https://www.pdcnet.org/philtoday/content/philtoday_2017_0061_0002_0291_0303 for more about Critchley on Education and Philosophy.

and by many critics. Those presented in this article, however different, agree on a diagnose and on taking a responsibility to become intellectual and political activists.

At the end of *Towards a social renewal*, Steiner states that the three social systems, the spiritual-cultural, the political and the economic, must be seen as inter-independent spheres, much like different bodily systems, in which for example the respiratory system has its functions beside the nervous system. He states that a political system can do nothing else but to destroy economics if it takes over, as the economic system loses its life forces if it is made into politics.

While socialism in Steiner's understanding tends towards the first, that is to destroy economics, neoliberalism will tend towards the latter, to lose its life forces. Looking at today's situation, Steiner seems to be right. Internationally, the economic system has in the last decades been made into global politics in the form of an economic war of all against all, and it seems to be losing its life forces, its spirit, much like Stiegler states.

Steiner can be seen as an activist, launching initiatives in a wide range of directions. The fruits of these initiatives are impressive in content and scale. However, his political activism has so far borne little fruit. When Stiegler points out that the social norms challenged by the 1968 generation now comes back as law, as prohibitions, it should serve to remind us or the need for new interest in the political realm. Today, this might be one among many indicators suggesting that the time is right to rethink the basis of society, and especially to reshape and rethink the political, democratic system. Looking around, political questions seem to be raised with precaution in Hong Kong and China, in the US and Britain, as well as in European countries like Poland and Hungary[6]. In 1968, the young generation turned against the university in order to challenge narrow norms and outdated ideas. Today, the young generations take to the streets to protest against a political system in alliance with economic interests that threatens the climate, the planet and human existence. The less productive protests in the US and elsewhere are also directed towards the political system, but here the economic system seems to escape critics.

As in Steiner's time, the outcome of a crisis might go both ways, for the better or for the worse. Altogether, the most diverse protest initiatives and activism worldwide, including its highly destructive variants as well as the more constructive ones, seem today to be directed towards politicians and political systems. The agenda for a non-utopian activism will be to take actions to counteract a deeply felt spiritual misery. This will have to include educational institutions insisting on autonomy from both state and economy, which paradoxically can only be achieved through political means.

There might be echoes, concerns and a calling for those of us who have found inspiration in Steiner's texts, to not let ourselves be content with involvement in one of the practical initiatives, like Waldorf schools, but to also engage ourselves in social and political processes, in conversation with contemporary voices.

6. See the following New York Times article for more information: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/19/books/review/twilight-of-democracy-anne-applebaum.html

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