

‘Thou art a scholar; speak to *it...*’: Digital Pharmakology and the Future of Academic Practice

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At no point in history has the education system been so intimately entwined with a globalised, market-driven, technical system. As Bernard Stiegler has argued, this synchronization of the education system's mnemotechnical capabilities with technical systems of production is unprecedented (Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, Vol.3, 2001). Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the figure of the scholar; a nexus of personal drives and social influence, public and private spheres, (mnemo)technology, educational institution and market influence. This paper argues that the confluence of these factors raises urgent questions as to the future of digital technology in education, and scholarship in general.

The paper will address these issues through two interrelated discourses: one which reads digital technology through the figure of the pharmakon (that which can be both poison and remedy), and the other which aligns the scholar ‘to come’ with a future it must remain impossible to pre-programme, predict or know in advance. Both strands of the paper follow the work of Jacques Derrida and — via the work of Donald Winnicott on the Transitional Object — Bernard Stiegler, but resituate their argument within the realms of academic practice and technology enhanced learning. It argues that Derrida's reading of the pharmakon in Plato's *Phaedrus* (Derrida, *La dissemination*, 1972), in which he deconstructs Plato's opposing of anamnesis and hypomnesis (between ‘originary’ knowledge and hypo-mnematic writing as its technological and supplementary contamination), and Bernard Stiegler's repositioning of this through his reading of the technical/‘transitional object’ (Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 1971), suggests that the inherently ‘pharmakological’ nature of *tekhnē* gives us a framework to think through the position, application and impact of the digital

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upon academic scholarship. By reading this against Derrida's distancing of 'the future' (le futur) from the 'to come' (l'avenir), however, we can also suggest how digital technology provides conditions for a scholarship 'to come'; one which can look the radically ambiguous technological condition of the modern academic institution in the face and speak to it.

It begins, however, with Hamlet, and with the odd suggestion that only Horatio, the scholar, can speak to the spectre of a King who demands justice.

Keywords

Academic Practice, Derrida, Digital Scholarship, Shakespeare

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'If he loves justice at least, the "scholar" of the future, the "intellectual" of tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost.' (Derrida, 1994; 279)¹

The French expression '*apprendre à vivre*' can be translated in at least two different ways; it can mean both to '*teach* how to live' and to '*learn* how to live'. Teaching and learning, then, are inextricably entwined in a phrase that underpins the drive for much of our intellectual activity. For what is the point of pursuing such activities – whether that's as a teacher or a student (and it's the border between these two terms that is being complicated here) – if not with a view to asking how best we might continue to take part in the world. But what if learning/teaching how to live depended upon something wholly other to it? What if, in order to learn/teach how to live we must somehow communicate or negotiate with something that was reducible to neither life nor death? Indeed, what if that irreducible something was, in fact, the very condition of learning and teaching? This is Jacques Derrida's suggestion in *Spectres de Marx*. Here, '*apprendre à vivre*' is not taught or learned by or from life, it is taught and/or learned '[o]nly from the other and by death. In any case from the other at the edge of life. At the internal border or the external border, it is a heterodidactics between life and death.' (Derrida, 1994; xvii). Teaching/learning how to live, then, requires a heterodidactics which is neither alive nor dead. Something ghostly, then.

Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 1; Marcellus suggests that Horatio speak to the King's ghost. He makes this suggestion because Horatio is a 'scholar', and, for Marcellus, this term implies that Horatio must somehow be capable of communicating with something that is neither alive nor dead. But Marcellus is wise too, because he doesn't explicitly name the thing Horatio must speak to, instead he says 'it'. Horatio must speak, as a scholar, to *it*. It is almost as if, like Derrida, Marcellus is suggesting that one who has an intimate knowledge of learning and teaching must also have some capacity to speak with that which is beyond or on the edge of life, and indeed, that it is this very ability which is the reason they can be referred to as a scholar at all. But Horatio fails, as a scholar he cannot persuade the ghost to speak. The ghost 'will not

answer' him and exits the stage leaving Horatio trembling at the thought that this spectral arrival prefigures something both unexpected and unwanted: 'this bodes some strange eruption to our state.' (Shakespeare, 1980; 1.1:69).

Despite Horatio's failure, can we rephrase Marcellus' suggestion and ask: what if we can only call ourselves 'scholars' once we've acquired the ability to *speak with* ghosts? What if the mark of our becoming-intellectual is, as Derrida phrases it, in our learning 'not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself [...]' (Derrida, 1994; 176). Perhaps this also explains why Horatio fails. He does indeed try to make conversation with the ghost, rather than let it speak or give it speech 'in the other, in the other in oneself'. Indeed, perhaps Horatio's failure lies in his inability to become ghostly himself; in his inability to let the other speak through him — something which perhaps resembles a medium at a séance. My claim in this essay is precisely this, that what we might call a scholar — and scholarship in general — demands this ability to let the other speak in and through oneself, and moreover, that digital technology provides a set of conditions through which this can be put to work.

The (digital) *pharmakon*: poison and remedy

In *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, Bernard Stiegler glosses Derrida's seminary reading of the *Phaedrus* in terms which mark out the significance of the ghost. It is worth quoting this text in some length:

[...] in 'Plato's Pharmacy'² [Derrida] developed a large part of his project of the deconstruction of metaphysics on the basis of his reading of *Phaedrus*, by showing how this dialogue opposes philosophical anamnesis (that is, the remembrance of the truth of being) to sophistic hypomnesis (that is, to mnemotechnics and in particular to writing as a fabricator of illusion and a technique for the manipulation of minds), and by showing that it is impossible — according to what Derrida describes in *Of Grammatology* as a logic of that supplement which is the trace — to oppose the interior (anamnesis) and the exterior (hypomnesis): it is impossible to oppose living memory to the dead memory of the hypomnematon, which the final Foucault will find so interesting and which constitutes living memory as learned [savante]. This impossibility opens the pharmacological question, according to which the hypomnesic is a *pharmakon*: at once poison and remedy (Stiegler, 2010; 29).

Let's unpack this a little. The notion of the *pharmakon* (that which is 'at once' poison and remedy) was highlighted in Derrida's reading of the *Phaedrus* because it was used by Plato to describe mnemotechnics (in this case writing) as that which is at once both a help and a hindrance to the acquiring of philosophic knowledge. In other words, writing allows us to remember knowledge we might not otherwise be able to memorise or learn 'by heart', but it is also that upon which we depend so that we *don't* have to remember or learn things by heart. In this sense, writing as mnemotechnics can

supplement and enhance the learning process, but it can also short-circuit it. What Derrida will go on to show, however, is that writing, as a *pharmakon*, is the very thing which breaks down the proposed opposition between internal, real, live memory, and external, virtual, dead mnemotechnics. In a certain sense, then, this effect of writing is at the heart of Derrida's project of deconstruction, and Stiegler's suggestion that a large part of Derrida's work was based on his reading of the *Phaedrus* is in some sense justified.³ Derrida's description of the *pharmakon* is particularly helpful for thinking the relation between writing and technology. In describing how it is possible for Plato to turn a positive notion of writing into its opposite, Derrida states that such

an operation would not be possible if the pharmako-logos did not already harbour within itself that which prior to any distinction-making, that which, presenting itself as poison, may turn out to be a cure, may retrospectively reveal itself in the truth of its curative power. The "essence" of the pharmakon lies in the way in which, having no stable essence, no "proper" characteristics, it is not, in any sense (metaphysical, physical, chemical, alchemical) of the word, a substance.[...] If the pharmakon is "ambivalent", it is because it constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (soul/body, good/evil, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing, etc.) (Derrida, 1981; 125-27).

What we need to take from what Derrida is describing here, are the conditions for the irreducible ambivalence at the heart of anything that can be thought of as pharmakological. From this, it is easier to see how, for both Stiegler and Derrida, pharmakological mnemotechnics (the technique or technics of memorialisation – whether that's a note on a page or a neurological inscribing of the brain), can be neither living (solely internal, live memory) nor dead (solely condemned to lifeless, external inscription), but somewhere inbetween. Plato's treatment of writing (by trying to decide once and for all if it is a remedy or a poison), seeks to contain this pharmakological dimension, a dimension which, in fact, will always-already outrun or exceed such an attempt. In taking its lead from Derrida's work, however, Stiegler's thought will take up the suggestion that technology is inherently pharmakological, which is to say that *all* technology, at some ghostly and fundamental level, is irreducibly ambivalent, and thus can be interpreted as either a poison a remedy, or both (Derrida, 1981; 126-27).⁴

To situate this in the context of this essay, let's think of the notion of pharmakological mnemotechnics in terms of digital scholarship. With the increased take-up of social media networks, more and more academics are now being 'encouraged' to develop an online presence. The technological conditions of this online presence means that an academic's identity can be dispersed across the borders of both private and personal realms, as well as the external/internal limits or borders of the university. On a very basic level, then, an academic's use of social media networks can

be both positive and negative, a remedy to those who rarely network with their peers, a poison for those who want to avoid depleting their already rapidly diminishing amount of personal and private space. Social media might also allow a lecturer to enhance their teaching – via Twitter perhaps – to reach some students they might otherwise have struggled to involve. Alternatively, conducting their teaching practice across a potentially global network opens up the possibility of a huge amount of otherwise unwanted contact and connectivity, as well as potential data protection issues. Of course (and this is the point), conducting an academic life even partly online can be *at once* a help and hindrance; in actuality it's not an either/or dilemma. And so the question we face – as teachers, learners or both – revolves around how to deal with these conditions, which can be both positive and negative at the same time. This fundamentally ghostly and pharmakological aspect to academic life has perhaps always been there (we might think of an ability to write on a blackboard being both positive and negative, or the advent of email bringing similar, though more local, problems to those outlined above concerning social media) but with the advent of digital technology the stakes have been raised to an unparalleled level. This in turn suggests that there is an increasing need for theoretical and practical methods for thinking this through.

This paper will argue that Bernhard Stiegler's reading of the *pharmakon* – through the work of Donald Winnicott, and in particular his thinking through of 'transitional phenomena' – can provide us with a timely and extremely rich exploration of the impact of the digital upon academic practice, because it links our first experience of the *pharmakon* with a locus of teaching, learning, our becoming-social, and the notion of technology. In turn, this will also let us re-think the relation between what has become the rather problematic notion of the 'intellectual', and what might currently be thought of as the 'public'.

Transitional objects and spaces

In *Playing and Reality*, Donald Winnicott describes the transitional object as an infant's original 'not-me possession'; that which comprises an 'intermediate area of experience, between the thumb and the teddy bear' (Winnicott, 1971; 2). It is located somewhere between 'oral eroticism and the true object-relationship, between primary creative activity and projection of what has already been introjected' (Winnicott, 1971; 4). Things that could be considered transitional objects, then, are blankets, particular words and phrases, the mother (or primary carer), the breast, and indeed anything that has come to be invested with a particular resonance for the infant, something which occupies a transitional space between oral eroticism (sucking thumbs, feeding etc), and an 'addiction' to particular objects such as teddies, dolls and hard toys, objects that 'are to part of the infant's body yet are not fully recognized as belonging to external reality.' (Winnicott, 1971; 2). Putting aside arguments concerning the

possibility of ever recognising once and for all something that can be called ‘external reality’, Winnicott’s suggestion is particularly interesting in that in the transitional object is both internal and external; it helps condition an ‘*intermediate* area of experiencing, to which inner and external life both contribute’ (Winnicott, 1971; 2), but to either of which it cannot be reduced. The transitional object, then, inhabits a space which is neither subjective nor objective, neither internal nor external, neither self nor (m)other. It marks a stage of signification which is not absolute, that is, the transitional object is neither (or both) the object of desire *and* its substitute; it both is *and is not* the mother, it is *and it is not* the breast. In this sense, then, it is impossible to describe once and for all the ontology of the transitional object; it is both itself and something else, both present and absent. Indeed, it is this indeterminate quality, this ghostly status of the transitional object, that makes it such an important phenomenon for Stiegler, because such an inherent instability helps condition a creative space for thinking and learning which, for him, seems to have eroded in today’s hyper-industrial or hyper-capitalist relation to technology.

Stiegler quotes Winnicott at length when discussing the possibility for creative thinking that the transitional object makes possible:

Transitional objects and transitional phenomena belong to the realm of illusion which is at the basis of initiation of experience. This early stage in development is made possible by the mother’s special capacity for adapting to the needs of the infant, thus allowing the infant the illusion that what he or she creates really exists.

This intermediate area of experience, unchallenged in respect of its belonging to inner or external (shared) reality, constitutes the greater part of the infant’s experience, and throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work (Winnicott, 1971; 19; cited in: Stiegler, 2010; 14).

Transitional phenomena, then, belong to an illusory dimension produced through the infant’s relation to their mother (or primary carer). The transitional object ‘enables and conditions the relation between mother and child and, as such, it is not a mere intermediary: it *constitutes* the mother as this mother, in her very way of being a mother, and this child her child.’ (Stiegler, 2013; 1). Significantly, in this slightly later reading of the transitional object, Stiegler clearly states that the argument that will structure his whole text is that ‘the transitional object is the first *pharmakon*’, and that, as the first *pharmakon*, the early relation to the transitional object is also a profound, early encounter with technology, an encounter that will set a pattern for all our relations with technology in the future (Stiegler, 2013; 2).

It is particularly useful to think through some of the implications of a connection between the *pharmakon* as technology, and the *pharmakon* as transitional object. What this will do is place the *pharmakon* at the origin of creative and

intellectual life, ‘the origin of works of art and, more generally, of the life of the mind or spirit in all its forms, and thus of adult life as such’ (Stiegler, 2013; 3). Here we have, at the origin of a healthy, creative and intellectually stimulating adult life, a ghostly dimension in which illusion, reality, self, other, subject and object, life and death, technology and nature, poison and remedy are impossible to determine once and for all. Echoing Derrida’s description of the (non)essence of the *pharmakon*, the dimension of the transitional object is one where everything remains to be decided, where the child and the (m)other inhabit a creative space where the very patterns of creative play they develop their will lay the foundation for that child’s creative, intellectual and spiritual future. From these readings, it is clear that a relationship to a mother or primary carer — one which is *constituted* by transitional phenomena — is at the origin of intellectual life, and yet because the transitional object is also our ‘first *pharmakon*’, then this experience is at once positive and negative, and so a healthy, creative mind might also take a turn for the worse at any moment. This is, therefore, a relationship that needs to be nurtured continually; as one transitional space opens onto another (as a child passes from spending most of their time with the mother to a time when most of their creative energy is spent at nursery or school), it is imperative that the educational institution offers the same opportunities for creative ‘play’ that were there in the child’s earliest relationships. And if these transitional objects and spaces were not there for any reason, there is an argument or perhaps an imperative that institutions work to reintroduce them.

Stiegler’s more general argument in these texts is that the advent of a technologically driven consumer culture has led to a handing over of the responsibility for nurturing our children to a capitalist economy whose very success depends upon obliterating the ability to creatively explore transitional phenomena. Indeed, for Stiegler, the ‘spread of industrial hypomnesic apparatuses [think everything from film-making to mobile phones to social media platforms] causes our memories to pass into machines [this is the negative reading of the *pharmakon* that we find in the *Phaedrus*], in such a way that, for example, we no longer know the telephone numbers of those close to us — while the spread of spell checkers causes fear of the end of *orthographic consciousness* and of the literary hypomnesic knowledge that goes with it and, *with that*, the anamnestic knowledge of language.’ (Stiegler, 2010; 30). The conditions Stiegler describes are ones where the *pharmakon* is being directed towards solely negative ends, towards ‘a vast process of *cognitive and affective proletarianisation* — and a vast process of the loss of knowledge(s): *savoir-faire, savoir-vivre*, theoretical knowledge [*savoir théoriser*], *in the absence of which all savor is lost*’ (Stiegler, 2010; 30).⁵ Indeed, Stiegler argues that it is because everything is ‘grammatised’ through industrial technology that there is no need to think anymore, or, that all we need in order to think is knowledge of how to search quickly and effectively through an ever increasing archive of pre-inscribed memories.

Stiegler's interest in the transitional object is focussed on its ability to generate care (the mother/primary carer encourages the child to take care of the object), attention (losing our capability to pay attention for any reasonable period of time is another problem Stiegler assigns to the dominance of industrial mnemotechnics), and creative thinking. The impression that this kind of relationship engenders in the child (a feeling that Stiegler describes as that of life being 'worth living') is one which will prepare it for a chain of similar, increasingly complex but generally productive and healthy relationships extending into adult life: 'what Winnicott calls the good mother also teaches the child to detach itself from the transitional object so as to engage with other transitional spaces, with which it will establish other relations, all of which may distance the child from the mother herself – despite which she does not lose her infinite dimension' (Stielger, 2013; 3). A healthy relation to the transitional object is one which is instigated by the mother/primary carer – whose 'infinite dimension' colours every similar relation in the future – but which is not confined to this figure as such. Transitional objects and spaces can be found anywhere that this kind of creative relation to the *pharmakon* is replicated. And it is these kind of relations that produce the kind of thinking which can begin to both think and outrun the stultifying effects of general proletarianisation.

L'avenir, le future

Before beginning to tie up some of these threads, particularly in terms of what it means for scholarship, academic practice and the 'public intellectual' in the age of digital technology, I want to add another strand of thought, one which will return us to *Hamlet*, to the ghost, and to Derrida's notion of 'heterodidactics'. In the opening scene to Amy Ziering and Kirby Dick's 2002 documentary, *Derrida*, the philosopher gives us a particular succinct description of how he tries to distinguish between a predictable notion of the future, and a thinking of a future which must remain open:

In general, I try to distinguish between what one calls the future and "l'avenir". The future is that which – tomorrow, later, next century – will be. There's a future which is predictable, programmed, scheduled, foreseeable. But there is a future, l'avenir (to come) which refers to someone who comes whose arrival is totally unexpected. For me, that is the real future. That which is totally unpredictable. The Other who comes without my being able to anticipate their arrival. So if there is a real future beyond this other known future, it's l'avenir in that it's the coming of the Other when I am completely unable to foresee their arrival (Dick, K. and Ziering, A.; 2002).

Here Derrida outlines two ways to think the future; one which he will refer to as *la futur*, which is predictable (e.g. I will be meeting a friend on Saturday), and a notion of a future which is wholly unpredictable: *l'avenir* (translated as what is 'to come'). It is important to note that these two forms of the future are irreducibly entwined – we can't have one without the other – and therefore that we can't eradicate one in favour

of the other (most often the desire for this can be seen when the risk or threat of unpredictability causes a certain anxiety — hence the wish to plan everything in advance and to the most minor detail). The necessity of a more mundane '*futur*' intertwined with a more radical unpredictability is clear for the possibility of thinking; if everything was planned in advance, and if there were no room for the unpredictable, then there'd be no space for things like spontaneity, originality, revolution and chance, things which — in terms of scholarship for example — would result in a very sterile, dull, unoriginal and wholly uninspiring future. Indeed, if the possibility of creative and original thinking can be linked to a future which is always 'to come' (*l'avenir*), as I suggest it must, then we must somehow work to reserve spaces in our programmes, our campuses and our institutions for the arrival of what must remain wholly unpredictable. This, I'd argue, would spectralise the very fabric of academia, in that it would be shot through with the ghost of what remains 'to come' (remember we cannot identify or name what is wholly unpredictable, merely reserve a space for what might arrive). Derrida's two definitions of the future, then, provide a thinking of temporality which links to his suggestion that a learning/teaching how to live must take the form of a certain heterodidactics, a learning/teaching that comes from the Other. In other words, if it is possible to learn 'from the other at the edge of life', then such a heterodidactics — and one which I argue is exemplified in Stiegler's reading of the transitional object — must affirm, welcome, or say 'yes' to a future which nevertheless cannot be thought, programmed or scheduled in advance.

To do justice to the subject, then, whether that be a subject who addresses themselves or a subject to be addressed (including the subject of academic inquiry and scholarship) a welcome must be offered to that which comes or returns (as the ghost in *Hamlet*) from a future which remains unpredictable. If we could truly predict what would be the result of our research, or our interviews, conversations, readings, then there would be no need to carry out those activities in the first place. Which is to say that without a radically unpredictable element, academic inquiry and scholarship would be redundant in advance. So when Derrida states that an 'arrivant' (his term for the ghostly Other which might come from the future — or *l'avenir*) would be that to whom 'a hospitable memory or promise must offer welcome — without certainty, ever, that they ever present themselves as such' (Derrida, 1993; 175), then he is referring to the impossibility of knowing — once and for all — the subject we nevertheless welcome. The *arrivant* is ghostly precisely because this virtual presence haunts us at every turn (the *arrivant* might come or return at any moment). It is inscribed upon the edge of life; assuming a ghostly 'presence' without being fully present or wholly dead. This suggests, in turn, that reserving a place for the *arrivant* might be the very condition of original thought.

The need to introduce this element of Derrida's work comes from the lack of a temporal reference in Stiegler's reading of the transitional object as a model for creative and original thinking. Not that Stiegler's reading forecloses such a dimension,

but rather that it isn't explicitly drawn out. But the spaces of transitional phenomena open up the precise opportunities for a creative play in which a space is reserved for what remains to come. It is as if what Stiegler's reading gives us is a blueprint for a dimension in which the realisation of creative, original learning and teaching is determined by its radical instability; the latter the result of a relationship which says that, whatever might arrive and/or happen in this space, it cannot be pre-programmed or predicted in advance, and indeed its very success lies in such a claim. Indeed, Derrida's *Specters of Marx* is one such demonstration of a scholar speaking *with* ghosts. The text welcomes the return of a certain ghostly Marx; it is a reading of the thinker and his critics which, rather than trying to exorcise the ghosts which inhabit the text, affirms them and lets them speak in and through the text. The central reading – if it can be called 'central' – is the importance Derrida places on the very notion of revolutionary promise, the promise that justice will arrive and/or return (and it is important to note that we cannot decide once and for all if this is a truly original 'arrival' or the return of what has already been and gone), and how such a promise is linked to that of actually doing justice to Marx and his work. It is as if the very practice of scholarship – of how we might *read* Marx – is linked to the notion of justice 'as such', and what is essential to both – to both scholarship and justice – is both the importance of the spectral dimension as the very condition for *doing* justice, and its relation to the future. In other words, both spectrality and the future as *l'avenir* are irreducibly interlinked as essential prerequisites to both justice and the scholar 'to come'; the scholar 'to come' is the one who might 'do justice' to their subject, be it Marx, justice itself, or something completely other.

What we have seen, then, and through a Derridean lens, is Stiegler's re-positioning of Winnicott's work on the transitional object. This has provided a framework for re-thinking our relation to the indeterminate status of the *pharmakon* by identifying its relation to an unpredictable future, whilst also affirming its irreducibly ghostly dimension.⁶ With the *pharmakon* offering the opportunity of both positive and negative relations, affirming such instability through the notion of transitional phenomena gives us a model that can then be read in relation to the current status of the 'public intellectual', for it is the latter which, by putting such a model to work, might come closest to the notion of a scholar 'to come'.

Pharmakological scholarship and the 'Public Intellectual'

In an article in the [LA review of books recently](#), Stiegler notes the supposed opposition – at work since at least the 18th century – between the 'intellectual' and the 'manual':

The "intellectuals," whether of the "left" or the "right," are stuck in an antiquated opposition between "intellectual" and "manual" that refers in a more profound way to the opposition between *logos* and *tekhne* against which Marx fought, and which he posited as the basis of the ideology that was then called "bourgeois" (Stiegler, 2015).

Mapped onto the opposition between *logos* and *tekhne*, then, the figure of the intellectual also returns us to the opposition which was played out in the *Phaedrus*, that between the philosopher/thinker who recalls himself to himself through self-knowledge and live, spontaneous memory, and the dead, automatic, mechanical life of writing (which the figure of the manual worker, alienated from themselves through proletarianisation and the mechanics of industrial revolution, comes to signify). If the digital era's 'industrial hypomnesic apparatuses' has inaugurated a general proletarianisation, as Stiegler claims, then it is not a big jump to see how the figure of the intellectual is now as much a fantasy as that of the notion of the (petit) bourgeois, a fantasy deployed as and when it suits market-driven institutions which are increasingly coming under the sway of the private sector.

If the figure or trope of the 'intellectual' is to retain the aim of being a creative, original and critical thinker who works towards the idea of a positive evolution of society and public life (someone who teaches/learns how to live), then the oppositions that have historically structured this term must somehow be deconstructed. Might a *public* intellectual be the very site of this deconstruction; a notion of the intellectual which is not founded upon the opposition between *logos* and *tekhne*, left and right, bourgeois and proletarian, manual and intellectual? Indeed, might the notion of a public intellectual radicalise the very notion of the public, to render it a term that does not stand in direct opposition to the private?⁷ If this is not the case, then the phrase 'public intellectual' will seem as oxymoronic as that of a right (or left) wing intellectual. Which is to say that if the public intellectual is to have any weight at all, it must in some way resemble a scholar 'to come', a scholar who — through transitional relationships and phenomena — speaks *with* ghosts, who let's the other speak in and through them, and which as a direct consequence will put into question the notions of the 'public' and the 'intellectual'. If this is not the case, then any notion of a public intellectual will, ironically, continue to 'privatise' and/or foreclose any potential for critical thinking before it has even begun.

Let's conclude, then, with some suggestions of how a deconstructed figure of the public intellectual might inform academic practice, and specifically how digital technology might present the conditions for this to take place. Such a figure, whose ontology — or rather *hauntology*⁸ — could never be decided once and for all, would never be entirely certain as to who they were speaking to, and where they were speaking from. A *deterritorialized* academic, then, (to use a term from Deleuze and Guattari's work⁹), where the border between public and private would be precarious. Yet this essential instability would also provide opportunities for reaching — or having an impact upon — an other we might not normally reach, or that might not normally reach us. An online social media network would be a particular example of this, and despite claims that these are almost always privately controlled, they can also — as can any pharmacological dimension — be turned against itself to communicate with a more expansive and dispersed notion of the public. Indeed, I'd argue that engaging in

such networks to practice our scholarship, and thus speaking with/to the other on a potentially vast scale, would come closest to the kind of reading public Kant had in mind when he discussed the possibility of Enlightenment in 1784.

Digital technology (whether it's a social media network, a virtual world or even a comment enabled online tool such as a blog or a wiki) allows an academic to be less oneself, and more a conduit to let the other speak with and through them. Through the public dispersal of their practice via digital technology, their online 'presence' itself becomes a transitional space which both links and disconnects; a network traversed by conversations with the other. The identity of the public intellectual is 'disaggregated' or 'diffused' over a 'cultural field' – as in the 'fate' of transitional phenomena in general:

[The transitional object] is to be gradually allowed to be deattached, so that in the course of years it becomes not so much forgotten as relegated to limbo. By this I mean that in health the transitional object does not 'go inside' nor does the feeling about it necessarily undergo repression. It is not forgotten and it is not mourned. It loses meaning, and this is because the transitional phenomena have become diffused, have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between 'inner psychic reality' and 'the external world as perceived by two persons in common', this is to say, over the whole cultural field (Winnicott, 1971; 5).

In thinking of a 'cultural field' between inner psychic reality and an external world, it might also be worth noting Derrida's notion of a 'visor effect' (also something which he works on through his reading of *Hamlet* in *Spectres of Marx*). Derrida finds the visor effect at work when the ghost of the King addresses the other characters in the play; it is an effect whereby the King sees from a position which itself cannot be seen, in other words: 'we do not see who looks at us' (Derrida, 1994; 7). Derrida generalises this effect as a certain phenomenon which involves us being addressed by something which we cannot apprehend, the effect being a certain ghostly, uncanny sensation of also having to address something which we can't actually pin down, or determine who or what it is we're meant to be addressing. This effect, however, is not limited to a particular text or experience; it occurs everywhere and in everything, whether we're addressing a person or a theme or a concept (Derrida speaks of addressing the notice of justice for example). To think of this in terms of digital scholarship, then, we could perhaps think of facing a public across a wide social network, where profiles and/or avatars are merely the visor behind which something 'other' resides. When we post online we can never be sure of where our comments or thoughts might end up, where they are destined and to whom – we're never sure who we are addressing and yet the need, desire or requirement to attempt that address remains. What was once a more local effect – addressing a student or colleague, or even an academic subject in our work – now becomes a much more expansive and global phenomenon as the visor

effect of the online world inscribes us in an increasingly complex network of virtual addressers and addressees.

We might refer at this point to the term ‘unbundled’ — a term fashionable some years ago in reports announcing the death of the traditional HE institution — as that which could describe this form of deconstructed public intellectual. Echoing Derrida’s description of the *pharmakon*, the public intellectual would be ghostly in their very essence, both public and private, scholarly and playful, and — following Stiegler’s remarks on the rather problematic genealogy of the ‘intellectual’ — an amalgam of both *logos* and *tekhne*. Of course, the (il)logic of the *pharmakon* also suggests that this eternal double-edge could be seized upon, corrupted and exploited at any moment.¹⁰ And indeed, if the borders of the public intellectual are porous, so are those of the University ‘in which’ they work, for those borders bleed into each other and become undecidable as both the academic and institution find it impossible to say once and for all where one ends and the other begins.¹¹

The increasing use of digital video, moves towards radical open-access, student-driven programme design (where the traditional hierarchies of the academic are put in question), the death/resurrection of the lecture (itself augmented by digital technology in live, online polling, or the VLE becoming a character put on stage in the lecture theatre), the flipped-classroom, social and informal learning (where the academic/university extends out into the everyday life of the student), all this can be seen to be the influence of the spectralisation of academic practice which has always-already impacted upon (academic) life. Which is to say that the scholar of the future, the one who fully embraces the future as *l’avenir*, is *already here*; our job is merely (and yet it’s no small task) to affirm this kind of practice, to say yes to it and welcome it as a possible future for a University ‘to come’. Scholars have always spoken with ghosts; their work cannot but be influenced and animated by the voices of the past. Publications, lectures and seminars are always-already haunted by the return of the previous voices of a particular discipline. And yet this has been contained — wilfully or not — within that vulgar but symptomatic notion/fantasy/fetish of the ‘ivory tower’. Whatever that tower stands for (and it could be that it’s the most phallic — and thus the most apt — of academic motifs¹²), the technological conditions are now there to deconstruct it, and I’d argue that the figure of a radicalised or deconstructed public intellectual — one that cannot even live up to the accepted traditions and/or definitions of the very terms which describe it — is proof that this particular academic haunting is now becoming more general.

Ghosts, spectres, spirits, revenants; what could they possibly have to do with the figure of the public intellectual? Well the scholar of the future, if they are to retain a productive relation with an unpredictable future as the condition of original thought, must speak with ghosts. Such scholarship must, in turn, be public, but in a sense which embraces the Kantian sense of that term and yet goes even further in terms of its deconstruction. Finally, and what has been the structuring argument of this paper, is

the suggestion that the condition of this 'public intellectual' is the enacting of a heterodidactics which a pharmacological digital technology has already gone some way to enable.

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¹ The original French reads: 'Si du moins il aime la justice, le « savant » de l'avenir, l' « intellectuel » de demain devrait l'apprendre, et de lui', (Derrida, 1993; 279). This translation is by Peggy Kamuf, see Derrida, 1994; 176.

² See: Derrida, 1981; 61-171.

³ If Stiegler is correct here, then it's interesting to think (and this is something Derrida never failed to notice) that the project of deconstruction opened with a re-thinking of the very notion of technology, as that which does not function as an addition to the notion of the human, but as that which is central to its thinking.

⁴ It is useful to note a further translation of the word 'pharmakos' to mean 'scapegoat'. The 'pharmakos' is a figure which features in descriptions of Greek *Thargelia* (the 'pharmakos' were the people banished from the city in order to purify it), a definition which also surfaces across western literature. According to Northrop Frye, the figure of the *pharmakos* is a 'permanent archetypal structure', which spans texts from Melville's *Billy Budd* to Septimus Smith in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. These figures are neither guilty nor innocent but function as scapegoats which can be banished in order to purify a text of its ambivalence (see Derrida, 1981; 132 (fn.59)). These examples of the *pharmakon* offer some further themes we unfortunately don't have the space or scope for in this essay; one such theme might be the consistent scapegoating of technology as that which can be banished — perhaps from education — in order to purify it. Technology is neither innocent nor guilty here, but rather that which can be put to use under either guise to suit more dominant desires.

⁵ As Stiegler points out, the proletariat were never just the working class for Marx and Engels; the proletariat were all those whose knowledge and expertise had been gradually subsumed by the machine. Thus, for Stiegler, proletarianisation now extends to 'all those whose knowledge is absorbed by hypomnesic processes consisting

not only in machines, but in apparatuses, expert systems, services, networks, and technological objects and systems of all kinds' (Stiegler, 2010; 39).

⁶ It is worth noting Derrida's neologism 'hauntology' here. 'Hauntology' is an ironic nod to western metaphysics' preoccupation with the ontological status of beings. In French, 'hauntologie' and 'ontologie' are homophonic; thus linguistically preforming the deconstruction of the concepts that Derrida seeks. In other words, when spoken, one cannot determine the difference between 'hauntologie' and 'ontologie', thus the need to defer to the written text, the very thing that western metaphysics, from Plato onwards, has attempted to avoid (as we've seen above in terms of the resistance to 'writing' in the *Phaedrus*).

⁷ I'd argue that Immanuel Kant goes somewhat towards this in his re-ordering of the public and private in 'What is Enlightenment'. For Kant, a scholar who is to be truly be thought of as 'public' would be one who would address the 'the world at large'. In this sense even a University environment would be considered 'private', an example mirroring Kant's description of a member of the clergy addressing their congregation. For the clergyman to put their reason to 'public' use, he would have to become a 'scholar' who 'enjoys unlimited freedom to use his own reason and to speak in his own person' (Kant, 2009; 6).

⁸ See note 6 above.

⁹ See: Deleuze and Guattari, 1984.

¹⁰ An excellent exploration into this negative side can be found in Gary Hall's recent essay on '[The Uberfication of the University](#)'; accessed 22_09_15.

¹¹ With the increased emphasis put upon metrics, especially in terms of the learning analytics available as a result of the collection of big data, a further and increasingly important question will revolve around how we might measure this kind of academic practice? How exactly do you measure the pharmacological dimension of a specialised scholarship (especially a scholarship where the border between research and teaching is unclear)?

¹² Because this is also and already a question of sexual difference. Again this theme is beyond the scope of this essay, although it remains necessary to say that the influence of digital technology might offer another way to think the often rigid idea of sexual difference which helps structure our HEIs.