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Bernard Stiegler's Love of Music

SUSANNA LINDBERG

Bernard Stiegler was neither a musician nor a musicologist. He did not compose his philosophy in a distinctively musical manner. Yet his life twice connected with concrete musical institutions. In his youth, he was committed to jazz. In an interview with Jean-Jacques Birgé and Jean Rochard, Stiegler tells how, prior to his prison sentence in 1978, he was a total jazz enthusiast and even had a jazz bar in Toulouse.

'I had created a sort of a jazz bistro in order to be able to listen to music all the time. I received musicians, I was the DJ, I thought that my job was to make others discover music – and to sell beer. I spent hours in record shops looking for good things to listen to. It was a period of my youth when I had a rigorous practice of listening. Then I stopped [...].'¹

Later, when he had already dedicated his life to philosophy, he also collaborated with people like the philosopher-musicologist Peter Szendy, the musicologist Nicolas Donin and Laurent Bayle, who was the director of the IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique; English: Institut for Research and Coordination in Acoustics/Music) in Paris. The IRCAM, an institution created by Pierre Boulez, is one of the world's most selective and sophisticated places for the creation of 'contemporary classical music' (this wobbly oxymoron does not really translate its French equivalent '*musique savante*', which better suits the IRCAM). In 2002, Stiegler was appointed as its director. In interviews at the time of his nomination, he recounts that he was attracted to the IRCAM because the institution was busy studying and inventing new musical technologies – not only sound syntheses but also the analysis of sound, new possibilities of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, etcetera – in a context which could foster the needs of creation rather than commerce.²

Are the jazz bar and the laboratory of contemporary music just biographical coincidences or symptoms of a fundamental musical experience with philosophical consequences? In reality, and although it may not be apparent at first glance, music constitutes an originary impetus for Stiegler's philosophical thinking, equal in importance to the more *visible* (precisely) cinematographic and televisual themes and – I suggest – more emancipatory than them. Music has for Stiegler a

1 Stiegler's interview with Jean-Jacques Birgé & Jean Rochard (10 February 2008), 'Bernard Stiegler, La musique est la première technique du désir', *Mediapart* (7 August 2020), available at:

<<https://blogs.mediapart.fr/jean-jacques-birge/blog/070820/bernard-stiegler-la-musique-est-la-premiere-technique-du-desir>>. All quotations from the original French have been translated by S.L. Stiegler describes his more distant relation to rock in a dialogue with Rodolphe Burger, 'Électricité, scène et studio', *Révolutions industrielles de la musique: Cahiers de médiologie / IRCAM* 18 (2004), pp. 101-108.

2 The nomination is noted for example in Mark Bachaud, 'Le philosophe Bernard Stiegler est le nouveau directeur du prestigieux IRCAM. Entretien', *L'Humanité* (17 June 2002), available at: <<https://www.humanite.fr/node/267037>>, and in Bruno Serrou, 'Bernard Stiegler, nouveau directeur de l'IRCAM', *Res Musica* (4 June 2002), available at: <<https://www.resmusica.com/2002/06/04/festival-agera/>>.

fundamental philosophical role comparable to the role of writing for Derrida and to such an extent that Stiegler even says in an interview titled ‘Le circuit du désir musical’ that he had wanted to study in the domain of music the question that Derrida had studied under the name of grammatology.³

In what follows, I will first present the ‘heuristic privilege’ that Stiegler accords to music on account of its ‘marked instrumental nature’⁴ that distinguishes it among the arts. In the domain of music, the process of instrumentalisation not only began very early on but is ‘originarily manifest’.⁵ Music is also the best possible illustration of Stiegler’s central idea of the interlacing between technics and the time of consciousness. Secondly, I will show how the question of music structures Stiegler’s diagnosis of contemporary globalised society interpreted as the epoch of the industrial production of affects. Finally, I will show how music provides means of escaping the depressing standardisation that is characteristic of this epoch.

1. Instrument and Recording

The philosophical anthropology or existential analytic developed by Stiegler in *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*⁶ thinks human existence (who?) in function of technical objects (what). The philosophical starting point for this work is Stiegler’s objection to Heidegger’s reduction of the who-what-relation to the relation between *Dasein* and its equipment (*Zeug*). One interesting counterexample to the interpretation of technical objects in terms of equipment is provided in an earlier article, ‘La lutherie électronique et la main du pianiste’ in which Stiegler shows that unlike equipment the musician’s instrument is not a tool for... but the occasion of a specific instrumental practice in which

the instrument is not submitted to a pre-constituted aim but on the contrary constitutes it. The aim of an instrumental practice is informed by the instrument. The pianist manifestly invents herself [*s’invente*] in her tireless practice of the instrument and this is how she invents her piano playing [*s’y invente*] endlessly.⁷

The musical instrument is not a prosthesis overcoming an organic lack either, but an instrument that is desirable because it opens a new world – although in so doing, it creates another kind of a lack, the default of instrumental skill. Its sense emerges through a ‘paradox of exteriorisation’: the instrument seems to be an exteriorisation of human interiority, but actually it only produces the interiority it presupposes. For example, the pianist expresses herself with the piano, but at the same

3 Bernard Stiegler & Nicolas Donin, ‘Le circuit du désir musical. L’interprète, le compositeur, l’auditeur – organes et instruments’, *Circuit, musiques contemporaines* 15/1 (2004), pp. 41-56, p. 55.

4 Bernard Stiegler, ‘Prologue with Chorus. Sensibility’s Machinic Turn and Music’s Privilege’, in Bernard Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery, Volume 2: The catastrophe of the sensible*, trans. Barnaby Norman, Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2015, pp. 6-20, p. 7. The article was first written together with Nicolas Donin, ‘Le tournant machinique de la sensibilité musicale’, *Révolutions industrielles de la musique: Cahiers de médiologie / IRCAM* 18 (2004), p. 7-17.

5 Bernard Stiegler, ‘La lutherie électronique et la main du pianiste’, *M/I/S (Mots / Images / Sons)* n° spécial des *Cahiers du Cirem* (1989), pp. 229-236, p. 231.

6 Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and time, 1: The fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth & George Collins, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

7 Stiegler, ‘La lutherie électronique et la main du pianiste’, p. 229.

time the piano forms the pianist's hands, memory and judgement in accordance with what the expression demands.

In the third volume of *Technics and Time*, Stiegler complements the Heideggerian starting point of the first volume by raising the Kantian and Husserlian question of the structure of consciousness. Husserl's 1905 'Lectures on the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time'⁸ is particularly important for him. In his interpretation, Husserl's example – a melody – is much more than just a possible example among others: it is the prototype of a purely temporal object that makes it possible for Husserl to articulate the structure of consciousness. This example also allows Stiegler to distance himself from Husserl by emphasising the fundamentally technical character of all musical objects, including the melody, which turns out to be more complex than it sounds.

Stiegler returns to his reading of Husserl's 'Lectures on the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time' in two important articles on music, 'Le circuit du désir musical' (2004) and 'Les instruments de la musique du nous' (2008).⁹ In these texts he revisits his reading of Husserl's idea of consciousness as a temporal flow from the point of view of music. As consciousness is, according to Husserl, always a consciousness *of* something, the temporality of consciousness comes forth when this something is itself temporal. There is no better example of a purely temporal object than a piece of music, because it *cannot* be reduced to discursive *logos* nor to visual spatial image and yet it has a structured and finite identity. A melody is a phenomenon that only appears in its disappearance: it is pure passing that cannot be fixed without destroying its very phenomenality – and this is why its correlate, the I, also appears as a pure and incessant passing. Husserl describes this flow in terms of primary and secondary retentions, which Stiegler reinterprets and complements with his own idea of tertiary retentions.

Primary retentions are whatever consciousness retains in the flow of now, for example a resounding note. The primary retention is not a punctual impression, like an instantaneous sound frequency, but it already consists of two acts of consciousness. Firstly, in order to appear as a note, the sound must refer to other sounds in relation to which it has a musical sense (e.g. a melodic, a harmonic, or a rhythmic function): an A is not really, not only, a sound of 440 Hz but a certain interval from C, D, etcetera. According to Husserl, the A is not A if the previous notes are not also still present in the A although they have already passed. Secondly, consciousness does not retain everything that is present in the now, but it selects meaningful elements of the now through the filter of its secondary retentions. Against Husserl, Stiegler posits that the primary retention is already selective (for example it retains the note but ignores the noise coming from the next room). The secondary retention is a memory of earlier primary retentions that are conserved in memory, that means not the past that is still present, but the past that is properly in the past. In the case of the melody, the secondary retentions constitute the typical features of the musical culture in which the melody is heard. For example, in Western musical culture, which is strongly marked by tonality, there is a very strong expectation that a melody in C major ends in a C-chord, instead of a chord based on a B or a D. The primary retentions filtered by secondary retentions give rise to expectations of what will follow, or protentions, like for example the expectation that a tonal

8 Edmund Husserl, 'Lectures on the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time', in Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917)*, trans. John B. Brough, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990, pp. 1-137; Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*, trans. Stephen Barker, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011, pp. 13-16.

9 Bernard Stiegler, 'Les instruments de la musique du nous', in Jean During, *La musique à l'esprit*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008, pp. 21-34, pp. 29-31; Stiegler, 'Le circuit du désir musical', p. 43-44.

melody in C major will end in C major, even though the melody has not yet come to its end. 'Music is essentially protention, that is to say, expectation.'¹⁰ Stiegler stresses the difference between primary and secondary retentions by saying that primary retentions belong to perception while secondary retentions belong to imagination and therefore to the past proper.

Stiegler adds a new element to this Husserlian explication of the temporality of consciousness: tertiary retentions. In *Technics and Time, 3*, Stiegler shows that the intervention of the secondary retention in the act of primary retention becomes obvious only thanks to the tertiary retentions.¹¹

A tertiary retention is a technical object or system: a phonographic disc, a musical instrument, a score, a recording, a book, 'whatever object that serves as a support of memory that can be transmitted from one generation to another, from one individual to another, or from one culture to another'.¹² As examples of the structure that Stiegler also calls epiphylogenetic memory, these tertiary retentions 'engram' experiences on supports that have some kind of materiality (even digitalised memories are materialised). The material objectivity allows, on the one hand, for a much longer conservation of an experience than a conscious memory or even an individual experience that has fallen into oblivion. On the other hand, it allows the sharing of the experience: with an instrument, a particular *sound* can be given from a person to another; with a score, a *composition* can be shared by a whole orchestra and by many orchestras in one place and time and other places and times; with a recording, a particular *interpretation* of a given score can be shared by countless auditors. Stiegler emphasises that our ears are not just formed by our personal listening experiences but by the entire system of tertiary retentions that make up our musical culture, for example the scores that we may or may not know (and know how to read) but that remain indispensable elements of Western musical culture.

According to Stiegler, this threefold retentional structure constitutes the musical phenomenon perceptible as a melodic/temporal flow. In the event of perceiving a melody, the temporal flow of the melody coincides with the temporal flow of consciousness. The melody is audible in function of the expectations of consciousness. For the philosopher, this reveals the structure of consciousness. But over and above this, the melody communicates its structure (as well as its unexpected features) to consciousness, for the listening consciousness adapts to the structure of the perception. In 'Les instruments de la musique du nous', Stiegler emphasises that the adaption of consciousness to music is so total because their structure is similar.¹³ This has important affective, ethical and political consequences that Stiegler has investigated in *Symbolic Misery* and in several articles.

2. Political Music

Music's structure is not only similar to that of consciousness, it is similar to the structure of the entire soul in the Antique sense of the word. This is why music can touch, seduce, manipulate, lead and finally form the entire soul so well. This accounts for the affective force of music. Its affectivity can turn into a political force, as shown already by Plato, who imposed strict controls on music in his *Republic* in order to regulate the way in which music forms souls: like strong and courageous music forms strong and courageous souls, sly and dissolute music forms crooked

10 Stiegler, 'Les instruments de la musique du nous', p. 31.

11 Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3*, p. 18.

12 Stiegler, 'Les instruments de la musique du nous', p. 31.

13 Stiegler, 'Les instruments de la musique du nous', p. 30.

citizens and should therefore be banned. Artists have always loathed the censorship that he recommends, but Stiegler follows Plato's fundamental intuition in his analysis of the political implications of the way in which music is used today in marketing.

In 'Les instruments de la musique du nous', Stiegler explores music's ethical effect and therefore its political significance with a reference to the Greek understanding of *ethos*. Continuing his analysis of Husserl but referring also to Bernard Lortat-Jacob, Stiegler stresses that in music one cannot separate the musical object from the listening subject:

the musical object only presents itself as a subject, or more precisely as listening [*écoute*] (it is essentially listening), while listening can also be, and it very often is what gathers singular listeners into a listening 'we'. [...] I believe that this relation between the 'I' and the 'we' constitutes every musical experience: the music that resounds in my intimacy, and that can only resonate in me as my intimacy, is precisely the outside: I only hear it as something that resonates outside, as what comes from the outside to resonate in me, as what is always already outside of me and in this sense always forms the horizon of a 'we', being at the same time very intimate and radically exterior to me.

I believe that this is also the structure of the ethical relation.¹⁴

Switching over to Gilbert Simondon's vocabulary, Stiegler continues by explaining that all psychic individuation constituting an 'I' (for example, somebody speaks, writes, makes music) happens within a collective individuation that constitutes a 'we' (between us, we speak, write, make music in this way). Stiegler follows a motif that resurfaces regularly from Plato to Nietzsche when he describes the individuation of a 'we' in terms of music: like music, a collective identity cannot really be explained as a discursive *logos* or as a visible image and yet it gives form to individuals. It can be a common experience, like music that attunes a public; but it can be a common experience only because – before and independently of any real experience – it contributes to the secondary and tertiary retentions that filter and orient individual experiences like a stock of pre-individual experiences. It is not by chance that the same vocabulary of apparently irrational and nevertheless effective phenomena is used to describe both music and the features and humours of collectives: affects, tonalities, harmonies and rhythms.

Ethos and music function in the same way. They constitute the most intimate intimacy of who I am, but they do this from an exteriority that is more distant than any objective, objectifiable, – that is, ideal and discursive – externality, but comes from an unobjectifiable outside (*le dehors* in Blanchot's sense). They do not tell what to think and what to do, but they prepare the soul to think and to act or to refrain from thinking and acting. Now, if the isomorphism between music and consciousness explains the affective force of music, what constitutes the difference between ethical and totalitarian – individualising and de-individualising – ethico-musical experiences? In *Symbolic Misery, Volume 2: The catastrophe of the sensible*, Stiegler explains this difference in terms of the *lack* that translates the '*défaut qu'il faut*'. If for Plato music, together with mathematics that is consubstantial with it, is the spiritual discipline par excellence, this is because it expresses 'the transcendental affinity between consciousness and world':

¹⁴ Stiegler, 'Les instruments de la musique du nous', p. 25. *Écoute* is not only hearing but listening and attentiveness (to discourses and ethical injunctions).

since Kant, we know that this affinity is only by default. Musical consciousness *should* be structured mathematically like the musical world, but only through a lack, and this lack is unavoidable [*c'est ce défaut-là qu'il faut*]: this lack is what makes music *ring out*. [...] The lack as that which *rings out as music itself*, is the power of the Siren song.¹⁵

To put it very bluntly, the 20th century totalitarian and the 21st century hyper-industrial musical experiences suppress the lack by filling it overabundantly, whereas singular and therefore active musical and ethical experiences become possible when the lack is *felt* and *desire* emerges. In the modern world, the lack rises from the experience of the fissuring of the world reflected in the fissuring of consciousness that, says Stiegler, we hear in Schönberg's music.¹⁶

Stiegler unfolds the general structure of the musical-ethical experience by referring to its history that starts in ancient Greece, develops throughout Western history and finally becomes global. This story gets a different, brighter tonality when told as a history of different ways of 'engramming' (writing) music.

Stiegler recounts how the earliest known instruments are 45 000 years old, although our ancestors surely had musical instruments well before this.¹⁷ After all, there do not seem to be human societies without music. The more 'primitive' the societies, the greater the function of music in the synchronisation of consciousnesses appears to have been (working music, trance music, etcetera; war music is also an interesting example, but Stiegler does not discuss this). Stiegler does not interpret the musical instrument as a *tool* but rather as an '*engramme*', that is, as a 'writing' that records the same sound and makes it reproducible. It can be an instrument of collective individualisation precisely because as 'writing' it makes the repetition of the same sonority possible – and each repetition is already the beginning of a rhythm. An excellent example of the capacity for collective individualisation provoked by a specific instrument is the unique sound of the archaic Jewish instrument the shofar, whose uncanny capacity to evoke an entire religious culture, as described by Theodor Reik, was powerfully analysed by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in 'The echo of the subject'.¹⁸

A wholly different musical 'engram' is the musical *notation* that became the base of learned Western music since Guido D'Arezzo's invention of solmisation at the turn of the first millennium¹⁹

15 Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery*, Vol. 2, p. 53. Stiegler refers to Maurice Blanchot's reading of the Siren song in *Le livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), which I also comment on in my 'Les Filles de la Nuit', in Éric Hoppenot (ed.), *L'Œuvre du féminin dans l'écriture de Maurice Blanchot*, Paris: Éditions Complicités, 2004, pp. 81-94.

16 Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery*, Vol. 2, p. 54.

17 In Birgé & Rochard, 'Bernard Stiegler, La musique est la première technique du désir,' Stiegler gives the age of the oldest instruments as 40 000 years, and in 'Prologue with Chorus' as 45 000 (Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery*, Vol. 2, p. 8). These are the datations given by Stiegler – whether they are exact or not is immaterial. For my part, I tend to agree with Bataille: the birth of the human is the birth of art: this is another way of saying that the birth of the human is the birth of technics, as Leroi-Gourhan says. Personally, I also believe that music was there first: in humming, singing, clapping hands, stamping feet, hitting hollow trees... organic sounds that have left no other traces than the pleasure of our body when it molds to such rhythmic and harmonic patterns.

18 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 'The Echo of the Subject', in Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. Christopher Fynsk, with an introduction by Jacques Derrida, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 139-207, p. 152.

19 Stiegler, 'La numérisation du son', *Communication et langages* 141 (2004), pp. 33-41, p. 36. This article has also been published as 'L'armement des oreilles: devenir et avenir industriels des technologies de l'écoute',

(although different notation technics did exist long before this). The score is a new way of producing secondary retentions: it does not conserve a sound but a *work* and it makes the distinction between composer and interpreter possible.²⁰

The passage from 19th to 20th century, marked by Wagner, Nietzsche and Schönberg, marks a particular crisis in the European psyche in which consciousness discovers itself as incapable of harmony and unity, as reflected in the strange and dissonant music of early 20th century²¹ (and one could say that it accompanies the increasing crisis-consciousness of the nascent phenomenology). Stiegler stresses that the musical revolution that he indexes to Schönberg and Bartók (and Adorno) in particular is contemporaneous with the invention of a new technology – the invention of the *phonograph* by Thomas Edison in 1877. The phonograph, like photography, cinema, radio and television, contributes to a new synthesis of time, but Stiegler thinks music is a particularly interesting example because, unlike other industrial arts, music has a vast pre-machinic instrumental history.²² Against this background the specificity of the new epoch shows itself distinctively. The phonograph is an unprecedented kind of a tertiary retention insofar as it, for first time, enables the absolutely identical repetition of a musical object. As Bartók already realised in 1938 and as Adorno elaborated in 1969, the mechanical reproducibility of music is a new form of musical writing that leads to a genuine revolution in our relation to music. This is why it allows the study of the changes of sensibility that accompany technological changes.²³ On the one hand, it led to a certain loss of competence because it became possible to relate to music without practising it: one could listen without eyes (to read the score) and without hands (to play it).²⁴ But on the other hand, the phonograph brought music to a wider public than ever before and created new practices of listening or, as Peter Szendy puts it, ‘a more thoughtful auscultation of works’.²⁵ Using Szendy’s terms, what the phonogram makes repeatable is not only an act of hearing (*audition*) but also listening (*écoute*) – not as a simple perception but as an interpretation – that enables analytic practices of listening that can open up new interpretations, arrangements and appropriations of works.²⁶

For Stiegler, the birth of jazz is an extraordinary example of what the phonograph makes possible. In ‘Programmes de l’improbable, court-circuits de l’inouï’, he explains how Charlie Parker really had two instruments, the saxophone *and* the phonograph with discs.²⁷ If the classical composer

Circuit, musiques contemporaines 16/3 (2006), pp. 33-42; an initial shorter version – ‘La numérisation du son’ – was published in *Culture et recherche* 91-92 (2002), pp. 3-6.

20 Stiegler & Donin, ‘Le circuit du désir musical’, p. 51.

21 Stiegler, ‘Les instruments de la musique du nous’, p. 28.

22 Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery*, Vol. 2, p. 10.

23 Stiegler, ‘La numérisation du son’, p. 37.

24 Stiegler, ‘La numérisation du son’, p. 34.

25 Peter Szendy, ‘La fabrique de l’oreille moderne’, in Peter Szendy (ed.), *L’écoute*, Paris: L’Harmattan, IRCAM/Centre Pompidou, 2000, pp. 9-49, p. 37. Stiegler quotes Szendy’s text in ‘La numérisation du son’, p. 35.

26 Szendy, ‘La fabrique de l’oreille moderne’, p. 47, and Szendy, *Écoute. Une histoire de nos oreilles*, Paris: Minuit, 2001, p. 19. Like Szendy, Nicolas Donin studies the *fabrication* of the ear through different technics: the 19th century used scores, piano transpositions and listening guides, to which the 20th century added all kinds of recordings, radio transmissions, and now digital recordings. Both also ask how one can ‘*sign* one’s listening’, leave one’s traces on a recording as on a score and use it as a source for new listenings or even new musical works. Cf. Nicolas Donin, ‘Comment manipuler nos oreilles’, *Révolutions industrielles de la musique: Cahiers de médiologie / IRCAM* 18 (2004), pp. 219-228.

27 Stiegler, ‘Programmes de l’improbable, court-circuits de l’inouï’, *InHarmoniques* 1 (1986), pp. 126-159.

signs *compositions*, the jazz musician signs *performances*, which are ‘engrammed’ in discs that can then be listened again and again, and also cut in parts, recomposed, played at different volumes and speeds, etcetera: jazz music pioneers the adoption of the recording technology to constitute a new art form. Through these recordings the musician can relate to a tradition consisting of specific interpretations of a stock of standards that function as the basis for new improvisations. Such a work of art is no longer characterised by the unique aura Walter Benjamin describes in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* nor is it a copy of a superior original. It is from the outset an interpretation, hence always already a repetition.²⁸ In classical music, the possibilities of conserving performances, and not just works, was discovered by Glenn Gould in particular.²⁹ But on the other hand, the phonograph is also the basis for the new music industry. As Stiegler summarises it in ‘Les instruments de la musique du nous’³⁰, while music is always a power of synchronising the time of consciousnesses, the new music industry extends this power even further until it becomes global:³¹ music is a particularly powerful vehicle for cultural globalisation because it is not limited by linguistic boundaries. The music industry also uses this power for new objectives: it standardises behaviour in order to enhance consumption. In *Symbolic Misery, Vol. 2*, Stiegler adopts Jeremy Rifkin’s description of the present hyper-industrial context:

Jeremy Rifkin has rightly argued that we are living in the era of ‘cultural capitalism’. Because it allows for the separation of producers and consumers, the machinic systemization of all forms of symbolic and sensible expressions is able to put all kinds of aesthetic spheres into the service not only of social control, but also of control societies – where it is a matter of capturing the attention of souls so as to control the behaviour of bodies, with the intention of getting them to consume goods and services.³²

According to Stiegler, in traditional places of worship music synchronised consciousnesses in such a way that individual diachronisation remained possible, but in a consumer society individual diachronisation is quite simply eliminated such that the difference between ‘I’ and ‘we’ disappears and melts into the general ‘they’ (*le on*, ‘*das Man*’). This is the present situation of aesthetic capitalism, in which all ears are submitted to formatting by industrially produced retentional dispositifs in such a way that individuals are pushed into an increasing de-individualisation.³³ In the case of music, this means submitting to passively listening to (or hearing) several hours of music per day³⁴ without being able to select and actively produce the music one is exposed to.

28 Of course, the musician of the so-called oral tradition also uses different mnemo-technics (themes catalogues, standards), but the phonograph adds an unprecedented material support to these mnemotechnics. Cf. Stiegler, ‘Programmes de l’improbable, court-circuits de l’inouï’, p. 132, p. 143.

29 Stiegler, ‘La numérisation du son’, p. 39.

30 Stiegler, ‘Les instruments de la musique du nous’, pp. 32-33.

31 See also Stiegler, ‘Programmes de l’improbable, court-circuits de l’inouï’, p. 133.

32 Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery, Vol. 2*, p. 12.

33 Stiegler fundamentally agrees with Adorno’s interpretation of the culture industry. See in particular the introduction to Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans., ed., and with a new introduction by Robert Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, pp. ix-xxx.

34 Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery, Vol. 2*, p. 9, p. 14.

Even though the art world seems to provide hyper-idiomatic reactions to this, Stiegler is not sure if these constitute genuine objections to the present situation or just dialectical modulations of it.³⁵

3. Hearing Aids

According to Stiegler, in our epoch industrially produced and distributed music is one of the central modes of the aesthetic war that capitalism wages on everybody while extinguishing desire and thereby engendering a symbolic misery.³⁶ However, it seems to me that music is also his most developed example for new kinds of openings, because ‘music is by nature addiction and desire, but positive addiction’.³⁷ All musical organologies are technics for synchronising souls. Not only 20th century totalitarianism and 21st century capitalism,³⁸ but all musical organologies possess the capacity to turn individuals into a mindless crowd. However, all of them also open up possibilities of active listening and invention. Discovering active listening practices today does not just mean reviving amateur practices,³⁹ but really *thinking* through the new organological context of music. In ‘Le circuit du désir musical. L’interprète, le compositeur, l’auditeur – organes et instruments’, Stiegler shows what such an active relation to music could be today. In this text, his demonstration takes the form of a deconstruction of the opposition between the composer and the interpreter in the context of Western ‘learned music’ (say from Monteverdi to Hector Parra and Olga Neuwirth). To start with, he emphasises that the supposed opposition between the composer who creates and the instrumentalist who only interprets is false. Obviously, every composer works by interpreting existing secondary and tertiary retentions including the available instruments (*luthérie*) and every instrumentalist interprets the work instead of simply reproducing it. But much more essentially, both are first and foremost *musicians*, that is, persons who *hear*:

A musician is somebody who first of all hears (*entend*), that is to say, she is primarily affected by the ear, by the ear which has also eyes and hands and a body that connects them. She cannot limit herself to calculating. She can calculate, she must calculate, but if she does this, it is only in order to give to hear what she has heard herself, and which is incalculable. This is inscribed in a circuit of desire which is constituted by a web of exclamations.⁴⁰

35 In *Symbolic Misery*, Vol. 2, Stiegler examines Andy Warhol and Joseph Beuys in particular as artists who studied the effects of consumer society and the possibilities for new kinds of participation in contemporary consumer society. Martin Crowley claims that even Beuys’ efforts have failed (Crowley, ‘The Artist and the Amateur, from Misery to Invention’, in Christina Howells & Gerald Moore (ed.), *Stiegler and Technics*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013, pp. 119-134, p. 127) while Noel Fitzpatrick claims that newer forms of participatory art might overcome Beuys’ shortcomings (Fitzpatrick, ‘Symbolic Misery and Aesthetics – Bernard Stiegler’, *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics* 6 (2014), pp. 114-128, p. 126.)

36 This is the main thesis of the two volumes of *Symbolic Misery*. See also Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery, Volume 1: The Hyperindustrial Epoch*, trans. Barnaby Norman, Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2014), p. vii-viii.

37 Birgé & Rochard, ‘Bernard Stiegler, La musique est la première technique du désir’.

38 While Stiegler analyses the role of music in industrial capitalism, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe analyses its role in totalitarianism and in particular Nazism in Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta (Figures of Wagner)*, trans. Felicia McCarren, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

39 Martin Crowley stresses the role of the amateur in the taking hold of the artistic and especially musical technologies in Crowley, ‘The Artist and the Amateur, from Misery to Invention’, p. 129. Stiegler surely recognises the importance of amateur practices, but he also emphasises the importance of research done by artists and institutions who have more know-how as regards resisting industrial standardisation.

40 Stiegler & Donin, ‘Le circuit du désir musical’, p. 42.

What the musician hears is, of course, the stock of the pre-individual musical experiences that constitute her musical culture. But it is also all kinds of other affects that need not have anything to do with music (a person, a work of art, finally any echo of the world in which she lives). Such primary affections constitute the musician's ear. 'The composer has an auditory organ, or an auditory apparatus, which needs to translate itself into [...] the form of exclamation, that is to say, she needs to spatialise and temporalise her listening, in such a way that it becomes immediately a writing.'⁴¹ She uses the available pre-individual stock in order to play with the auditors' horizon of expectations while trying to produce something unexpected.⁴² The interpreter, for her part, does not simply *reproduce* the score but *repeats* the composer's listening, as well as her own listening that arranges and deranges the score. Without interpretation, music is only virtual, it suffers from a lack of being, it does not *exist* without this interpretative exclamation, which can also become a writing (e.g. on a disc).⁴³ Music is really a tissue of retentions in which the composer and the interpreter can hear a default to which both of them need to answer, but that also shows their respective defaults. Finally, the contemporary auditor, who can very well ignore how one writes and plays music, can also be an active part of the musical event. Stiegler reminds us that the auditor does not only hear a concert but also judges and interprets her act of listening and today also repeats it.⁴⁴ Indeed, the emergence of recording technologies that first seemed to detach listeners from musical practice has led to new forms of participation in music-making and to new musical practices. Some of these are born when musical 'engrams' become means of active listening, like Miles Davis's work with discs or classical music amateur's practices in studying and annotating scores, performances and recordings. But there are also more and more musical technologies that enable an even more active relation to recordings. In 'Prologue with Chorus', Stiegler mentions musical amateurs whose practices open up new possibilities of listening (such as himself in his jazz aficionado period and today's samplers and turntablers), but also pioneers of electronic music such as Karlheinz Stockhausen and Iannis Xenakis as well as work done in avant-garde research organisations such as the IRCAM.⁴⁵ Stiegler emphasises that music takes place as tertiary retentions, which are not only scores, or only instruments, but also recordings, concert halls, systems of distribution and dispositifs for the formation of ears such as radios, conservatories and institutions of programming. Together they constitute the techniques that format sensibility and push towards a 'politics of the sensible life of souls and bodies'.⁴⁶ When this politics is reduced to a politics of control, it can numb sensibility. But a politics of sensibility can also become an active aesthetic judgment. One mode of such an aesthetic judgement takes form when the machinic epoch gives rise to a machinic turn in which sensibility is reconfigured, imagination is stimulated, and new forms of imagination can take place. This is not only a theoretical possibility but an active practice for innumerable professional and amateur musicians who learn to play with new digital recording, sampling, and distribution technologies and who even invent new digital music-making tools and instruments. They make

41 Stiegler & Donin, 'Le circuit du désir musical', pp. 42-43.

42 Stiegler & Donin, 'Le circuit du désir musical', p. 48.

43 Stiegler & Donin, 'Le circuit du désir musical', pp. 48-49.

44 Stiegler & Donin, 'Le circuit du désir musical', p. 52.

45 Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery*, Vol. 2, pp. 10, 13 and 16.

46 Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery*, Vol. 2, p. 13.

evident a 'desire of music' that consists in a circuit of the exclamations of composers, instrumentalists, auditors, and other active listeners.⁴⁷

It seems to me that in Stiegler's thinking, the desire of music that moves in this circuit has a particularly great potentiality for short-circuiting the extinction of desire: not because it should always circulate better symbols than those that push towards symbolic misery, but because whatever circulates arises from the desire of music. Stiegler says: 'Music is addiction and desire, but positive addiction [...] Real music, if you can say acting music, is a practice of putting out of control – even by the very institutions and dispositifs that make of a music a dispositif of control.'⁴⁸ It realises a gift economy⁴⁹ that short-circuits the closed economy of capital because it constantly gives more than it has and gives what it does not even have, as Derrida said of the gift. This is why music is Stiegler's true love.

47 Stiegler & Donin, 'Le circuit du désir musical', p. 46.

48 Birgé & Rochard, 'Bernard Stiegler, La musique est la première technique du désir'.

49 Stiegler & Donin, 'Le circuit du désir musical', p. 53; Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery*, Vol. 2, p. 19.