

Editor's Introduction

Arne De Boever

In the spring of 2011, Kenneth Reinhard, Stephen Barker, and I invited contemporary French philosopher Bernard Stiegler to deliver three lectures in Los Angeles—at the California Institute of the Arts; the University of California, Los Angeles; and the University of California, Irvine—about aesthetic theory. While the first of these lectures, titled “The Proletarianization of Sensibility,” was published shortly thereafter in the journal *Lana Turner*, the other two lectures have never appeared in print. This special issue includes Stiegler’s three Los Angeles lectures. In addition, it features both responses to the lectures as well as more general engagements with Stiegler’s work.

One of the most important French philosophers writing today, Stiegler has published more than thirty books in French, several of which have already been translated into English. While Stiegler is mostly known as a philosopher of technics, his work encompasses much more than this and has developed as a sharp analysis of our contemporary situation: the rise of the digital, the contemporary state of attention, the ethics and politics of care and the welfare state, the rise of the extreme right in France and in

boundary 2 44:1 (2017) DOI 10.1215/01903659-3725821 © 2017 by Duke University Press

Europe in general, the culture industry and “the American way of life,” the destruction of desire and the economy of the drive, the politics of friendship, the future of Marxism, the risks of anticapitalism, et cetera.

In coordination with the theoretical issues that his work lays out, Stiegler and a few others have also started *Ars Industrialis*, a political group that seeks to respond, in practice, to the challenges of our contemporary time. Most recently, Stiegler has founded a school in his hometown, Épineuil-le-Fleuriel, through which he has run both a yearly seminar and a summer session around central themes in his work. A public intellectual who writes regularly for French newspapers and magazines, Stiegler has proved himself to be a formidable philosophical and political figure whose personal history has shaped not just his philosophical career but also the very core of his thought.

While aesthetics, understood as the theoretical investigation of sensibility, has arguably been central to Stiegler’s work since the publication of the first volume of *Technics and Time* in 1994, the 2011 Los Angeles lectures explicitly link Stiegler’s interest in sensibility to aesthetic theory proper and art history. Starting from an aesthetic shift in the work of Marcel Duchamp from *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) to *Fountain* (1917), Stiegler reads this shift through the lens of his philosophy of technics and its effects on human sensibility. Technics’ proletarianization of sensibility—a key idea in Stiegler’s oeuvre—thus becomes linked to a major *art historical* shift that is indicative of changes in both psychic and collective individuation (to borrow the terms of one of Stiegler’s main influences, the underrecognized French philosopher Gilbert Simondon).

What has become lost in this history of proletarianization, Stiegler argues, is the figure of the amateur, who *loves* what he or she does; instead, we have entered into a time of lovelessness, in which everything has become merely “interesting” (Stiegler evokes Hannah Arendt’s figure of the “cultivated philistine”). Through readings in art history and philosophy (Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*), Stiegler sets out to recover and revitalize the aesthetic figure of the amateur from underneath the ruins of technical history. On the far side of the mediocre judgment, Stiegler mounts a defense for the interested judgment, which would have a strong connection to desire and what he calls “belief.” It is through such belief that desire can be refueled in the decadent industrial democracies in which we live, thus revealing the close connections between Stiegler’s aesthetic and political projects.

In the opening paragraph of the recently translated first volume of *Symbolic Misery*, titled *The Hyperindustrial Epoch*, Stiegler writes, “The

question of politics is a question of aesthetics and, vice versa, the question of aesthetics is a question of politics" (Stiegler 2014: 1). It is at this cross-roads and within the particular theoretical history that it evokes—recalling not only Walter Benjamin's famous comments on the issue but also, for example, Kant's third *Critique* and Aristotle's philosophy (the notion of "theos," which Stiegler reads as "desire") before that—that Stiegler's California lectures are also situated.

As a philosopher who has consistently aimed to understand the present by developing a theoretical, historico-political thought that is shaped by practical experiments in individual and collective individuation, Stiegler should be of interest to anyone engaged in the contemporary state of affairs. In the spirit of Stiegler's plea for an interested judgment, this special issue collects a number of responses to Stiegler's lectures, situating the lectures in the context of Stiegler's work as a whole and using them as a springboard to reflect—after Stiegler—about what we consider to be the crucial issues of our time. The aim is not only to *understand* Stiegler but to think *with* him—and *after* him—so as to see what new possibilities for psychic and collective individuation his project opens up.

Reference

- Stiegler, Bernard. 2014. *Symbolic Misery, Volume 1: The Hyperindustrial Epoch*. Translated by Barnaby Norman. Cambridge: Polity.

