

## **Towards a Postdigital Sensibility: How to get Moved by too Much Music**

By Rasmus Fleischer

### **Abstract**

The article explores the affective consequences of the new mode of instant access to enormous levels of musical recordings in digital format. It is suggested that this “musical superabundance” might weaken the individual’s ability to be affected by music in everyday life, while at the same time leading to a renewed interest in collective experience, in ways which are not limited to established notions of musical “liveness”. According to a theory of affect influenced by Spinoza, what is at stake is the capacity of the body to be affected by music. The article proposes that a renegotiated relationship between collective and individual modes of experiencing music can be conceptualized with help of Spinoza’s distinction between two kinds of affections: actions and passions. After scrutinizing the interface of hardware like Apple’s Ipod and online services like Spotify, the article proceeds by discussing three musical practices which can all be understood as responses to the superabundance of musical recordings: (1) the ascetic practice of “No Music Day”; (2) the revival of cassette culture; (3) the “bass materialism” associated with the music known as dubstep. While none of these approaches provide any solution to the problem of abundance, they can still be understood as attempts to cultivate a “postdigital sensibility”. The article tries to conceptualize the postdigital in a way that transcends the narrower notion of “post-digital aesthetics” that has recently been gaining popularity. Finally, it is argued that such a sensibility has a political significance in its potential to subvert the contemporary processes of commodification.

**Keywords:** Abundance, affect, digitization, interface, liveness, media, materiality, music.

## Introduction: The Age of Abundance

We seem to be approaching a point in time, when any individual will be able to listen to any piece of music, at any place and at any time. Napster marked out the beginning of this trajectory, popularizing the MP3 format and the very idea of abolishing the phonogram as a material carrier in music distribution. With the subsequent success of Apple's Ipod, the habit of obsessively collecting music began to spread from the fringe to the mainstream (Reynolds 2011: 95, 113–121). But soon enough, the practice of collecting a personal music archive was to become redundant, at least for a mainstream audience, as online services like Spotify were promising instant access to the entire history of recorded music (Andersson Schwarz 2013). Today, that kind of musical superabundance is widely recognized as being irreversible.

Since the mid-00s, however, the idea of infinite access has also led to concerns about a waning of affect. How is it possible, under conditions of limitlessness, for music to matter? According to Simon Reynolds, author of *Retromania* (2011), popular music has become “addicted to its own past” exactly because this past has now become instantly accessible to individual listening. He is not the only contemporary writer that has been claiming – curiously using money as a metaphor for music – that digitization is leading to a kind of hyper-inflation (Drummond 2008; Fleischer 2009; Reynolds 2011).

On the other hand, the strengthened significance of live performances in the music economy of the 00s has been widely interpreted as the expression of a desire for a music that is more collective, exclusive or “real” (Reynolds 2011: 123–124). But musical “liveness”, as we are used to know it, is itself an historical product of the expanded use of recorded music during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Auslander 1999; Fleischer 2012). The contemporary superabundance of musical recordings should therefore be a reason to rethink the very concept of “live music”, and to question the traditional identification of liveness with stage performances. In any case, the concerns over a possible waning of affect are related to the role of music in everyday life, and cannot simply be met with a proposal to attend more concerts.

This article will present three examples of self-reflexive musical practices that have been emerging around the mid-00s, in very different contexts but with somewhat similar motivations. I will argue that these practices aim at the cultivation of a musical sensibility which may be properly termed *postdigital*.<sup>1</sup> My hypothesis is that the everyday experience of a digital superabundance has contributed to a recent interest in forms of music which are *not* available to any individual, anytime and everywhere. I propose that these postdigital practices should not be taken as just a nostalgic reaction against the use of digital media, but could rather be understood as belonging to a politics of affect.

## Abstract Ideas and Common Notions

“The capacity for being affected” is a pivotal concept in Spinoza’s *Ethics*, as read by Gilles Deleuze (1988) and subsequent theorists of affect (Massumi 2002; Thrift 2004). This kind of Spinozist philosophy provides one way to better define what is possibly at issue: the waning of musical affect.

A central point made by Spinoza is that thinking and doing are inseparable (Thrift 2004: 59–64). Every thought and every feeling is also a physical movement, “if only a knitting of the brows, a pursing of the lips, or a quickening of heartbeat”, in the words of Brian Massumi (2002: 139–140). What happens when we are confronted with so much music – in the form of digital recordings available to us – that it exceeds our capacity for being affected by all of it? According to Deleuze, that kind of situation will result in what Spinoza termed an “abstract idea”, as opposed to a “common notion”. The definition of abstract ideas may include all kinds of classes, species and kinds, as well as quantifications in general, as quantification relies on the ability to count objects as members of classes (Deleuze 1988: 44–48).

When we select music based on information about its genre, or when we rely on software to provide us with musical recommendations (cf. Spotify 2013), it may be said that we let abstract ideas guide our listening. In these situations, “we no longer seek to understand the relations that enter into composition; we only retain an extrinsic *sign*, a variable perceptible characteristic that strikes our imagination, and that we set up as an essential trait while disregarding the others” (Deleuze 1988: 45).

But there are other ways of being affected by music. According to Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza, the abstract ideas can be contrasted to “common notions”, which express a capacity for being affected which unites two or more bodies. Common notions are created by affects of “joy”, defined by Spinoza as an increase of the power to act, resulting from the encounter with another body (Deleuze 1988: 44–58, 114–121). Spinoza provides a twofold definition of the body; first, a body is a certain set of relations between speeds and slownesses; second, it has a certain capacity for affecting and being affected. This is interpreted by Deleuze in the broadest possible way: a body can be anything: an animal body, a collective body or a body of sounds (Deleuze 1988: 123, 127; cf. Goodman 2009: 99–101).

As long as it sounds, music will always put bodies in motion. But this does not mean that sound, at any volume, is sufficient to produce common notions that unite the affected bodies. The question is whether music takes place in a setting where it does not simply move other bodies, but moves them in a way that will increase their ability to act.

Affects, according to Spinoza, are either *passions* or *actions*. Passions are of the more indirect kind and can either be passions of *sadness* (meaning that one’s

power of acting is decreased) or *joy* (when the power of acting is increased by the creation of common notions). Actions, on the other hand, immediately express the affecting body (Deleuze 1988: 27-28, 50-51).

Within this framework, it is easy to find everyday examples of musical action:

*A rhythm puts my legs into dance. A beautiful chord causes a shivering sensation that erects the hair on my arms. Switching to another playlist improves my workout. My gaze is caught in fascination of a virtuoso. I turn in the door to a bar because I can't stand the loud music. I start to cry, to laugh, to sing along. I shut my mouth in reverence.*

All these actions are bodily movements which do not necessarily involve any conscious reflection by the human subject. Theorists like Brian Massumi (2002) and Nigel Thrift (2004) have argued for a more careful understanding of how actions are initiated within the space of “pure sensation” which precedes conscious decisions. One famous clinical experiment has indicated that consciousness has a “half-second delay”; Massumi and Thrift has pointed out how will this seems to fit with a Spinozist understanding of affect. However, as pointed out by Ruth Leys (2011), the very set-up of that experiment is presupposing a strict division between body and mind. Locating affect in the “half-second delay” might ultimately be far too reductive. The understanding of affect as bodily movement need not be made dependent on any exact timing of the pre-cognitive realm. The point of using Spinozist theory cannot be to explain the working of a singular brain. More relevant in this context is Spinoza’s refusal to consider the individual apart from her affective connections with other bodies (Spindler 2009: 15–19). The individual problem of confronting a digital superabundance is transformed to a collective problem of how to form common notions, reducing the dependence on abstract ideas.

Still, we tend to imagine that it is our “personal taste” that makes certain music more appealing to us. According to Deleuze’ reading of Spinoza, this illusion of individual freedom is characteristic for the faculty of human consciousness. Ignorant of causes, “consciousness can believe itself free, attributing to the mind an imaginary power over the body, although it does not even know what a body can do” (Deleuze 1988: 60; cf. Spindler 2009: 23).

## **Shuffling and Skipping, Searching and Socializing**

As I am writing these words, I am sitting in the library with headphones on, listening from music coming from my Ipod. It currently contains 9011 songs – “song” being the generic term used by Apple for a unit of music – each one stored as a MP3 file, together filling up the Ipod’s hard disk of 80 gigabyte. Apple’s software informs me that the total playing time would be 35 days, 4 hours, 49 minutes and 38 seconds. There is not the slightest chance that I will ever listen to

all those songs. Many of the MP3 files in my personal music archive will remain unactualized until they disappear (either because I delete them with a software command, or because of the hardware failure which is foredoomed to happen sooner or later).

A listening session like this does not usually begin with me deciding what music I want to hear. It rather begins at my Ipod's main menu, where I typically select "shuffle songs". My thumb then rapidly slides rightwards to the "forward" button, beginning to skip from one song to the next, maybe a dozen times, until the shuffling produces some kind of sensation which is joyful enough to halt my thumb movement. At that point, the listening session is allowed to begin and my attention is directed away from the Ipod, towards the other screen on which I am writing these words.

In this process of initial skipping, sound is secondary to sight. It is not uncommon for me to skip forward 2–3 times within one second. While doing this, I stare at the Ipod's small screen which is showing textual metadata – song title, album title, artist name – alongside a quadratic picture. Needless to say, the quadratic picture represents the remediated "album cover" – a mode of visually representing music which seems to survive the album format.

This means that my orientation in the shuffle mode is guided by affects which are textual rather than sonic. Indeed, there are also cases when I do judge the song by its sound before deciding to skip it, and then my judgement is based on its first few seconds of sound. (Judging a song by its "intro" tends to be the prime way of navigating on the Ipod Shuffle, a cheaper model with no screen and less storage, released by Apple in 2005.)

Besides me in the library, my friend is also listening to music through headphones, but these are not connected to a separate music device but to her computer. The music is "streamed" over the internet by Spotify – the most hyped music service so far in this decade. Spotify's software gives her instant on-demand access to much more music than I have stored in my Ipod: millions and millions of songs. The interface of streaming services like Spotify is based on the same categories of metadata as in the Ipod's interface, but mode of navigation is different. Spotify does not offer a function to shuffle all music available; indeed, the very idea of such disordered listening seems terrifying. There is also no way to browse through an alphabetical list of all available artists, or not even all artists within one genre, because in any case the list would be unworkably long. Shuffling and browsing are modes of navigation that will only work when the size of the archive is limited. Instead, Spotify's interface has been built around the search engine. Text must be entered into the empty search box, before any music will play. In other words, music listening is made dependent on a conscious reflection on the part of the listener, who is forced to ask herself: "what music do I want to listen to right now?"

The fiction of individual taste must be upheld, if instant access to “all music ever” is to be offered. According to this fiction, the individual first knows what music she wants to listen to, before really listening. But this does not leave any space for curiosity. Spotify has obviously recognized this problem and is working hard to find a solution which makes music listening more “social” (Constine 2012; Spotify 2013; Andersson Schwarz 2013: 149–154). Spotify’s attempts to design for curiosity seems to be centered around the sharing of playlists between friends, combined with the use of experts curating playlists for different “moods”. But the question returns: how to know which playlist to listen to? The “social” way to navigate in the musical superabundance depends on “abstract ideas” about the affinity of taste between separate individuals, or about the current mood of oneself.

The shuffle feature, the search box and the sharing of playlists can all very feasible ways of dealing with too much music. These are all functions characterized by the centrality of text (and image) rather than sound. Selections are guided by textual markers like artist names, song titles and genre codes. In other words, the abundance of available music is managed by an abundance of “abstract ideas” – very different from “common notions” in the Spinozist sense.

The next section of this article will investigate three examples of contemporary musical practice, which can be understood as different attempts to resist the predominant mode of digital music consumption.

## **No Music Day: The Recalibration of the Senses**

The first example practice is of a quite limited kind, and it can be described as a participatory art performance. “No Music Day” was proclaimed for the first time in 2005 by artist Bill Drummond, former frontman of the British pop group The KLF. In the book *The 17* (2008) he gives a personal account for the background: a growing feeling of emptiness in relation to the recorded music which digital media has made infinitely available, coupled with a determination to not end up in any kind of nostalgia. According to Bill Drummond, the cultivation of new sensibilities can still draw some lessons from how music was organized before the age of recorded sound:

Most of this music was conceived to be heard at certain times, on specific occasions or at preordained sites, be it marching into war, the crowning of a new monarch, creating moments of spiritual uplift, celebrating a wedding or a Saturday night knees-up. Much of its power came from its alignment with time and place. None of it was conceived for repeated performance wherever and whenever the consumer might want.

(Drummond 2008: 21–22)

One morning in spring 2003, Bill Drummond recalls himself as coming to the drastic conclusion that “it’s over”, that “recorded music has run its course”

(Drummond 2008: 22). That became the starting point for a series of musical performances – not in the sense of performing music for an audience of listeners, but to set up situations aiming at a new sensibility for music. This culminated with the proposal of a “No Music Day” as a collective event in which anyone can take part just by choosing to avoid music for 24 hours. For example, BBC Radio Scotland has observed it by not broadcasting any music for one day, instead giving space for discussions about music and its future. The date of November 21 was chosen by Drummond because it is the day before the traditional celebration of music’s patron saint St. Cecilia. After practicing a kind of musical “fasting” for one day, the participator is supposed to come back to music with a renewed sensibility (Drummond 2008: 240–244).

Participants of No Music Day have been noting a heightened awareness of place, partly as a result of the fact that many urban environments which are filled with background music are becoming temporary no-go areas. Also, personal listening habits might be revealed as place-specific, as silence becomes more frustrating in certain places which are associated with constant music listening. As a day without music progresses, a participant describes refrains circulating inside her head, with rhythms channeled into small movements of bodily parts. And after midnight, when No Music Day is over, a deliciously awkward question arises: how to re-enter the stream of everyday music listening? It will probably not seem too attractive to just let MP3’s play on shuffle. Especially when observed in a group, No Music Day has the potential to become an exercise in ethics (Fleischer 2009: 23–30).

### **Cassette Culture: The Materiality of Media**

Since the mid-00s, cassette tapes has made a remarkable comeback as a distribution medium for underground music. This can easily be interpreted in terms of a postdigital sensibility, following some recent discussions about cassette culture in music magazines like *The Wire* and *Pitchfork* (Keenan 2008; Hogan 2010; Brown 2011) and within cultural studies (Moss 2009; Eley 2011; Skågeby 2011).

The inevitable question in all these discussions is whether the new cassette culture is “just nostalgia” for a pre-digital age, which some of the involved musicians are even too young to remember. Without denying the presence of a nostalgic element, I want to point out some reasons to rather understand the new cassette culture as a postdigital phenomenon, i.e. a timely response to the specific problem of digital superabundance. From this viewpoint, the contemporary “cassette underground” is to be carefully distinguished from some earlier uses of the same medium, which I will now discuss briefly.

In the first half of the 00s, the depicted cassette tape became a very popular symbol, representing music fandom in general but also piracy or file-sharing. It is

significant that the picture of a cassette tape was placed at the centre of the logotype for The Pirate Bay, the large Swedish file-sharing site which was founded in 2003. The period of 2000–2005 also marked the peak of a wave of mix tape nostalgia in popular culture. One significant example is Nick Hornby's novel *High Fidelity* (1995) and the film adaptation which appeared in 2000 and became an instant hit. Another one is Thurston Moore's collection of stories, published as *Mix Tape: The Art of Cassette Culture* (2004). Central to this nostalgia was the idea of personal communication between two individuals, or with one's "former self". The mix tape was supposed to be a unique combination of prefabricated songs (Jansen 2009; Hogan 2010; Eley 2011).

Soon enough, the sharing of playlists became a standard feature in online music services. As the sharing of digital playlist remediated the "social" side of the mixtape, the mixtape nostalgia began to fade after the mid-00s. But at the very same time, another kind of cassette culture began to grow with the proliferation of cassette labels, reviving a do-it-yourself tradition associated with punk rock and electronic noise music.

For underground music scenes of the 1980s, the cassette tape was a preferred medium mainly because it was cheap. The circulation of home-recorded cassettes through mail allowed musicians to escape the distribution channels controlled by the record industry (Eley 2011). After the internet, the same problem does no longer exist. Any musician can now circulate recordings at practically no cost. Cassette tapes might still be cheap, but not free, and they are definitely not as fast and frictionless as digital distribution.

Friction and slowness are properties of the material medium which can now be used as a means to cultivate a kind of intimacy as a social context for music, in a time when many music enthusiasts seem to lament the loss of institutions like record stores. The emphasis on materiality in cassette culture offers a way to obstruct the widespread tendency towards "consumption without digestion". One central feature of the cassette tape, as it appears today, is the impossibility to "skip" or "shuffle" between tracks (Hogan 2010; Skågeby 2011).

After using the "fast forward" button on a cassette player, or switching from side A to side B, the listener is typically thrown into the middle of a recording. This can be contrasted with the typical pattern of listening via Ipod or Spotify, where the first seconds of each track is getting disproportionate weight for the listener's judgement of music (Brown 2011). The centrality of textual metadata in digital interfaces also finds an antithesis in the cassette player's lack of a screen. Music on a cassette is not stored as individual tracks and it is not found by entering text in a search box.

After interviewing the operators of some contemporary cassette labels in Sweden, Jörgen Skågeby concludes:

A common theme was a resistance towards "unlimited access" and "ubiquitous abundance" of music. In the eyes of the respondents ubiquity rendered music

“meaningless”. The defiance was partly a deliberate act against the perceived conventions of music listening, but also as a way to “be part of a scene”. By superposing a social context on the abundance of available music a functional limit to both music listening and distribution created meaning for the respondents. The cassette was described as having a larger capability of conveying intention and effort, something that respondents interpreted as a sign of human investment. Music online was “just there”, without any significant social context.

(Skågeby 2011)

Cassette releases might allow music to circulate below the radar of professional critics (Keenan 2008). But generally, this medium is today combined with a parallel circulation of the same recording in a digital format. Exactly because the material object is no longer necessary for distribution, “these objects become a gesture of support”, according to Cecil Moss (2009). Cassette tapes may establish a tangible connection between musicians and listeners, with the look and feel of the packaging being a vital part (Moss 2009; Skågeby 2011; NMFHU 2011a).

For some enthusiasts within this cassette underground, it is important to underscore that the materiality is not an end but merely a means. The point is that music, in order to matter, must take place in some kind of live setting, according to the Swedish music collective NMFHU (an abbreviation meaning “New music for sustainable development”). The use of “old” analog media can then be seen as merely a tactics to stimulate a thinking beyond the “individualized and anonymous” tendency of the internet (NMFHU 2011a; NMFHU 2011b).

### **Bass Materialism: The Becoming-tactile of Music**

The quest for a postdigital sensibility can also be pursued in yet another direction: downwards in the frequency spectrum, towards sonic sensations that are no longer strictly audible, but tactile. Within electronic dance music of the 00s, the most characteristic innovation came to be recognized as a musical style, *dubstep*. The driving force in this innovation was an extraordinary fascination with sub-bass sound.

Dubstep, however, did not begin so much as a musical style or genre, but rather as a *practice*, centered around a few clubs in southern London. Fundamental to the practice of dubstep was the presence of very large speakers, capable of producing strong sub-bass sounds of such a low frequency that it is barely heard with the ears but rather felt with the whole body. The motto of DMZ – probably the most important club during the formative years of dubstep – was suggestive indeed: “meditate on bass weight” (Clark 2006; Wilson 2006; Muggs 2012).

This culture of “high volume and low frequency” is far from new. Rather, it can be traced right back to Jamaica, where the practice of “dub” emerged around 1970. However, the international breakthrough of dubstep that began in 2006 may suggest a relation to the state of musical superabundance. To put it simply, the

tactile dimension of sub-bass can *not* be experienced through earphones or even individually.

In a study of Jamaican sound system culture, Julian Henriques writes: “With the sound system bodies are placed inside sound, whereas with earphone listening it’s the opposite, sound is placed inside bodies” (Henriques 2011: xvi). Furthermore, low frequency sounds have the material characteristic of taking more space than sounds of higher frequency. In other words, sub-bass doesn’t really respect material architecture and in most settings the listening cannot be individualized. It can even be thought as a way to force the creation of place-specific collectivity. That line of thought goes through Steve Goodman’s *Sonic Warfare*, an explicitly Spinozist attempt to theorize sound as affect. A central concept of that book is “bass materialism”, defined as “the collective construction of vibrational ecologies concentrated on low frequencies where sound overlaps tactility” (Goodman 2009:196). While that definition may seem rather abstract, it can be concretized by considering Steve Goodman’s personal role in the development of dubstep. Besides his role as a cultural theorist, he is not only an artist under the name Kode9, but also runs the record label Hyperdub which was pivotal to the development of dubstep.

If bass materialism as a practice “has proved contagious to the mutation of electronic music in the past forty years” (Goodman 2009: 27–28), it has not really been theorized until the recent writings of Henriques and Goodman. Their writing is permeated by a postdigital sensibility which could hardly be thinkable without recourse to an everyday experience of digital superabundance. Goodman has suggested that music must now, in order to matter, actively evade the general tendency of “web 2.0”, which is “that everything essentially becomes a text” (Kode9 2009). It is significant how these theorists seem to avoid the noun *music*, in favour of the adjective *sonic* and the verb *sounding* (Goodman 2009; Henriques 2011). Bass materialism, according to Goodman, is not so much about aesthetics as it is about politics. In an interview he tries to formulate the driving force of his own musical practice:

this power of rhythmic sound to build affective collectivities underneath any kind of social collectivities. People getting together, brought together by nothing else but an affect, by a set of rhythmic sensations, [...] Not necessarily pleasure, I’m not talking about hedonism here.

(Kode9 2009)

Affective collectivities do not need any shared beliefs to remain together, according to Kode9, but are “based on movement of the body, [...] moving together in time, and temporarily occupying space, in a way that can dissolve but come back together somewhere else” (Kode9 2009).

As bodies are put in movement by music, common notions are created. The creation of common notions need not be mediated by textual signifiers, nor by any self-conscious definition of personal preferences. The case of sub-bass vibrations

affecting dancing bodies may be understood as an example of the kind of politics advocated by Nigel Thrift: “a microbiopolitics of the subliminal, much of which operates in the half-second delay between action and cognition” (Thrift 2004:71).

There are dangers in such an approach, which are merely hinted at by Goodman and Thrift. No guarantees are given about the emancipatory content of this “microbiopolitics”. The submission to low-frequency sound could as well create very authoritarian situations. While these authors do indeed contribute to the conceptualization of postdigital sensibility, downplaying the role of conscious reflection, this should not be taken as a reason to quit asking critical questions: Who controls the sound system?

### **Conclusion: The Politics of Affective Collectivity**

While common notions are produced by an increase in the power to act, termed “joy” by Spinoza, this is not necessarily the same thing as to maximize the individual experience of pleasure. That point is made by Kode9, as quoted above, as well as by Nigel Thrift who calls for “a navigation of feeling which goes beyond the simple romanticism of somehow maximising individual emotions”. According to Thrift, the politics of affect “needs to be placed within a set of disciplinary exercises”, also including “various forms of channeling and ‘repression’” (Thrift 2004: 68).

The latter could be a description of a practice like No Music Day, and it also resonates with the contemporary cassette culture discussed above. However, one question remains: what is the *aim* of such a politics?

Nigel Thrift’s attempt at outlining a politics of affect has been charged with “cryptonormativism”, as he implicitly affirms certain political norms, such as the value of democracy or “emotional liberty” (Barnett 2008; cf. Leys 2011). The problem posed in this article has been somewhat different: how to develop a postdigital sensibility, which will increase the body’s capacity to be affected by music? However, it cannot be denied that there are political implications in the attempts to establish alternative forms of musical practice.

None of the three practices discussed in this articles should be understood as a solution to the problem of digital superabundance. Such a premature conclusion seem to point towards three different pitfalls: a cult of silence, of exclusivity, or of loudness. But if the practices are rather understood as exercises for cultivating a postdigital sensibility, they may take part in a wider renegotiation of the relationship between collective and individual modes of experiencing music, and of the meaning of “liveness”.

To a certain degree, the relationship between collective and individual experiences corresponds to Spinoza’s distinction between two kinds of affections: *actions* and *passions*. Action is when music is expressed directly by the affected body. The most obvious example would be dancing, but there are innumerable

examples of music putting bodies in movement in much more subtle ways, as mentioned above when introducing the concept of action.

On the other hand, we call it a passion when our body is affected by music by “involving it indirectly in our state” (Deleuze 1988: 50–51). Here we can typically think about how our (individual) listening to a tune that pleases us will form a memory of the music, which will make us able to recognize it in another setting, and raise our ability to dance to it.

In the Spinozist theory of affect, passions play an indispensable but subordinate role, ultimately being in the service of the actions. It is possible to use this relationship as a model to rethink the relation between the individual music listening collective experiences. Listening to music in isolation would then appear not as an act of final consumption, but rather as a means to an end, i.e. a way to prepare for the collectivization of musical experience.

In order to know what music we want to hear, in any given moment, we will probably need to *both* digital algorithms *and* a sensibility for postdigital presence. The former seems well suited for the everyday experience of individual listening, but the latter may be the key to creating “common notions”, which will strengthen the capacity of bodies to be affected by music. The postdigital sensibility may be understood as a way to bring collective experience into the individualized experience.

The contemporary tendency towards an infinite and immediate access to all recorded music urges us to ask whether our ability to be affected by music may actually be weakened by the need to choose every piece of music for ourselves. The development of a postdigital sensibility entails a politics of affect, insofar it is about breaking the dependence on abstract ideas – a dependence which feeds into the contemporary attention economy.

Music should not be thought as a thing or as digital “content”, but as something which must *take place* and *take time* in order to matter. While neither space nor time is immune to commodification, a postdigital sensibility still implies a questioning of the commodity form, because it is a questioning of the individual subject which is supposed to be a sovereign consumer with an “encyclopedic knowledge of commodities” (Marx 1867/1962: 50). In a state of digital superabundance, it becomes obvious that no individual is able to develop such a knowledge without the help of others. In the lack of practices capable of forming common notions, the individual will have to rely on abstract ideas. The burgeoning business of music recommendation systems, involving both sophisticated algorithms and expert curation, could be understood as an attempt to commodify the void created by the lost materiality of music. Streaming music services are now stepping up their efforts to provide listeners with “the right music for every mood and moment. The perfect songs for your workout, your night in, or your journey to work.” (Spotify 2012; cf. Harvey 2014) The commodification of music takes on a new level of intensity. In the light of such

developments, the quest for a post-digital sensibility may be understood as an act of resistance, based on the refusal to let music be subsumed under pre-defined activities or “moods”.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> My use of the term “postdigital” was defined in 2009, when I published a short book in Swedish titled *The Postdigital Manifesto* (Fleischer 2009; for a translated excerpt see Fleischer 2013). The same questions that I ask in this article were already presented six years ago in the opening sections of that book. I will also revisit some of the practical examples that I approached there. Since 2012, there has been a distinct increase in the use of the term “postdigital”, primarily within the “media art” circles of Europe (Ludovico 2012; Sierra 2012; Cramer 2012b; Cramer 2013a; Cramer 2013b; Cox 2013; Transmediale 2013). The term is still lacking a commonly agreed definition. Sometimes, “postdigital” is a label attached to a certain kind of art or aesthetics. In other cases it is more loosely defined as a perspective or approach, while certain observers are even announcing a postdigital age, condition or paradigm. In this context, the term is often attributed to Kim Cascone (2002) who used it to denote an “aesthetics of failure”, audible in much of the electronic glitch music produced at that time. According to Cascone's analysis, a postdigital aesthetics is emerging when artists are no longer fascinated by the novelty of digital media. While I follow the general direction set out by that analysis, my intention is to broaden the scope, focusing not so much on the aesthetic strategies of individual artists, but on the potential emergence of a *postdigital sensibility*, and how this sensibility relates to an everyday experience of *digital abundance*.

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