Resonances: Noise and Contemporary Music

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Listening Aside: An Aesthetics of Distraction in Contemporary Music

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In this chapter, we discuss distraction as a key aesthetic vector – both witting and unwitting – of contemporary concert music, and moreover one that places the tangibility of the latter in a persistent feedback relation with broader cultural shifts in listening practices that are regularly attributed to the proliferation of recorded music.[1] To this end, we begin by characterizing the concert music paradigm as a 'concentration machine', which serves as a synecdoche for music whose experience is organized around the perception of its internal formal relations. From here, we argue that one way to narrate post-1945 music is by locating its reflexivity in this field of concentration as a tendency to collapse this formal concentration into the content proper of music. A corollary to this, we argue, is that by insisting on the protocols of concentration, composers as varied as Cage and Lachenmann mobilize a catachrestic materiality of music that involuntarily (and paradoxically) teaches us to be bored and to listen away from music. In this boredom, we conclude, a listener's *inattention is forcefully directed towards the affective content of music*, a situation exemplified in composer Martin Arnold's *Burrow Out; Burrow In; Burrow Music* (1995). In short, we suggest that *Burrow Music* retains the alibi of music as an object of attention that coincides with concert music's idealized materiality, while also palpating a broader cultural tendency – amplified by recording technologies – to listen to the side of music.

The Machine in the Ghost: music as concentration machine

A predicate of this essay is that concert music has at least the potential to *matter*. Indeed, this is the case in two – co-implicated – senses: first, the argument at hand depends on concert music bearing the capacity to be involved in the generation of something like a musical materiality, which is to say some sort of object of study. In short, the deterritorializing vectors of an aesthetics of distraction depend on a territorializing movement within music itself, not as the opposite of distracted listening but rather as that which ensures the specificity of any instance of distraction. Put simply, the distraction that we find in the music of Canadian composer Martin Arnold is to be found *there* specifically – in its relation to a particular idea of music as a something-to-be-listened-to – and this specificity offers broader insights into listening more generally for precisely this reason (i.e. its 'innovation' – a hesitant term – is *material*, rather than simply perspectival).

This material mattering conditions our argument throughout, but at this stage it is perhaps more pressing to focus on the second sense of the term 'matter'. If we are to make an argument about listening that starts from concert music, it is necessary for the latter to bear some relation to the former. This assumption is not as obvious as it may seem to those deeply invested in the concert tradition. In addition to the almost total absence of contemporary concert music from the largest economies of music (radio, digital music sales, advertising), even when it is found in these settings it exists precisely in the absence of exactly that which defines it, namely the set of rituals, affordances and listening practices performed in and by the concert hall. That is, it is entirely reasonable to suggest that on the rare occasion that one hears a contemporary work for string quartet on the radio (for example), one is not actually hearing a version of something conceived for the concert hall and subsequently transposed to a new setting, but rather something that is 'recording native'. Indeed, one of the reasons that musical synthesizers haven't entirely liquidated musical practices of analogue instruments is that many of the former's promises – total performance control, virtually unlimited virtuosity, nuanced timbral modifications, and the general absence of 'noise' – are achieved in advance through recording techniques. In sum, it is at least arguable that the concert hall exerts its greatest influence today as an alibi for something like musical authenticity rather than as a literal space. In this sense, concert music relies heavily on a sense of its own virtuality, its reality as an abstraction.

At the same time, it is precisely this virtuality that suggests that the relevance of concert music is not quite as anachronistic as those many music lovers who have never set foot inside a concert hall proper might presume. It's not that concert music has special significance because it is 'high art',

or that it exerts hidden influence as some kind of musical Rosetta Stone; instead, the concert paradigm positions concert music as a synecdoche for music in general, i.e. 'concert music' stands in for the construction of a musical object that is taken to be separate from the listening subject, and by corollary, a subject who engages this object through direct and focused attention. This is to say that music conceived of as an object of attention remains active in contemporary listening, but the summons – whether achieved through social pressure, education, or regimes of taste – no longer dominates audition.

If this much is true, then (paradoxically) it follows that to listen to a piece of music, to listen to the set of relations for which the idea of the concert performance stands in, is simultaneously to listen away from specific elements that co-construct the performance as something that one may engage (or not) as an object of attention.[2] Concert conditions are an enchantment ritual, a procedure for conjuring daemons of sound. This ritual requires spells to dampen the affectivity of the body's non-aural senses, and spells to turn attention away from the rebarbative din of everyday life. To realize this form of musical superstition demands that the participant listen away from the 'accompanying circumstances of the concert institution that contradicts its idea' (Heister, 1992, 51). That is, to realize music as an autonomous activity – an activity wholly separated from the heterogeneous interests of life's clamorous desires and strident demands – one has to actively exercise a practice that 'excludes or annuls the "un-artistic"', or more reasonably, 'makes it relative' (Heister, 1992, 51). The concert ritual does this, of course, through its well-developed ideological summons that invokes the fiction of aesthetic autonomy. However, the ritual is aided by a spatial layout that not only enforces a separation between the site of music's production and its consumption, but also cultivates competing forms of self-consciousness. On stage the musician's sense of self is mediated by acts that compose her as a performer and empower her as an hieratic figure of attention. The listener, on the other hand, is delivered a self through scripted performances of non-acting – namely, acts of shutting-up and staying still that establish him as an appendant. This formulary for *listening to* the liturgical spectacle is also a formulary for *listening away* from the noise of necessity, away from the racket of socio-economic complexities that both underwrites the concert's autonomy and contradicts its ideals.

Put more simply, concert music matters because its suppositions lend crucial insight into the means through which the act of listening that constitutes music as a sonic event distinct from sound, noise, or even speech, entails an act of *not* listening; or, more accurately, a distracted listening that is figured as non-listening. In short, both concert music and background sounds (including backgrounded music) share the same sense: listening.[3] In its concerted mode listening is not hearing the 'ambient din', while in its more distributed mode what is listened-away-to (what is not being heard)

is the 'musicky' bit. Concert music and background sounds are privative aspects of the same sense of listening, which is why, for example, one can do virtually anything on a concert stage (or even in the proximity of the stage) and 'concert music' will still result, provided that the protocols which satisfy the ritual and its routines are all (or mostly) present and properly executed.

Indeed, this is how – apart from its historical importance – Cage's *4'33"* matters: its deterritorialization of music's concentration techniques, premediated by precisely the 'structural listening' that it is mobilized against, reveals the virtuality of music. That is, *4'33"* (and the myriad pieces that follow from it, directly or obliquely) relies not only on the performative dimension of concentration as an assemblage of behaviours and dispositions, but specifically on concentration as a coupling technique whereby the 'specifically aesthetic [formal] potential' of sound becomes the 'distinctive characteristic of music's realization' (Heister, 1992, 53). This reliance on concentration and the recognition of such aesthetic elements as 'form' or 'structure' perceived *via* the variations that play across and as certain objects, phenomena and processes, is telling of a thoroughgoing mediation that undermines music's apparent actuality. In contrast to a painting whose object status is expressive of a dualism between its actual materials through which manifests its virtual image, music makes no such actual/virtual distinction. As sociologist Antione Hennion points out, whereas the materiality of visual works of art retain a relative stability that secures debate around its idea (its virtuality), 'Music is in the reverse situation: its object is elusive; social interpretations just take it as the expression of a social group (ethnic trance, rock concert), aesthetic studies as a nonverbal language of immediacy. Music has nothing but mediations to show: instruments, musicians, scores, stages, records' (Hennion, 2003, 83). This is to suggest that music is the expression of certain mediations such that its reality wholly coincides with the activity of its medial couplings. Music is thus a completely virtual reality that acquires a material profile through the concentration – assembly – of those processes and ideas that posit its mattering.[4]

This heightened virtuality of music is perhaps most clear when we consider the relation between music and sound. We could say that in musical discourses sound is often associated with a chaotic matter against which music is expressed as a principle of mastery. Music in this model is taken to be made from sounds, and thus constitutes a claim to evolutionary superordination (as evidenced, for example, in the meaning we might attach to the observation that monkeys cannot hear music). However, this opposition entails the continuous displacement of sound from the scene of music proper, for when sound is described within musical discourses it becomes a substitution for the music on whose behalf it supposedly speaks. Or inversely, when and where sound is represented within the discursive

economy of music is precisely the site of its erasure. As a result, sound is that which can never be sounded as music proper but whose exclusion from that propriety is music's enabling condition. But the inverse is not true; music is not sound's enabling condition. We may say, then, that music only hears sound in catachresis, that is, in sounds that function improperly, musical figures that are not music, for example, as when one listens to a canonical work and notices the inadvertent harmonies of partials emitted from an overpressed bow, or the rhythmic squeaks of fingers on a fingerboard.

To the extent that music only hears sound as errors within its rhetoric, this catachrestic nature is captured precisely by the music of composer Helmut Lachenmann, whose soi-disant *musique concrète instrumentale* professes to haunt and co-opt the musical material-semiotics from which sound is excluded.[5] Lachenmann's work is apposite to this discourse because it stands in for a tendency in contemporary composition to regard music as a practice that combines the raw dynamism of performance with the actual materials and forces of instruments. For example, whereby serialism is understood as an approach oriented towards the abstractions of pitch class as a primary site of manipulation, Lachenmann shifts attention towards instruments themselves as sites that locate energetic processes. In this there is an explicit movement away from the parametrical formalism of serial composition towards an approach that attends to sound as a dynamic matter.

Indeed, we can understand each sub-term of *musique concrète instrumentale* as a functioning under erasure. Firstly, his compositions are 'music' insofar as their performance executes a negation of their performance as music. Lachenmann likes to think of his work in the form of the question that solicits the reversibility of dialectical reasoning: 'If it is not music, I would say it is a situation of perception, which provokes you to wonder, "What is music?"'(Lachenmann in Steenhuisen, 2004, 11). As such, his music is decidedly an occasion that is not what it is. Secondly, his work is 'concrete' or 'real' to the extent that it marshals and harnesses certain physical and kinetic processes in the construction of sonic events. But this sonic ontology arises from an understanding of sound whose materiality is precisely what is contested. It is for this reason that Lachenmann has not simply produced electronic compositions: he is working with the 'energetic aspect of sounds' because 'even the most exciting sounds are no longer exciting when projected through a loudspeaker' (Lachenmann in Steenhuisen, 2004, 9). Finally, Lachenmann's work is typically 'instrumental' in that it tends to be scored for ensembles of (relatively traditional) instruments. However, these instruments are not used in a way that their sounds can be taken independent of their own materiality (i.e. they are not used instrumentally); the instruments themselves, rather than the tones that they produce, are mined in a way as to invent a living materiality of the orchestra.

These considerations combine to perform a materiality of music that is catachrestic in the sense that the sound/music (or noise/music) opposition it assumes complicates itself through the inclusion of 'excluded' sounds, sounds that cannot function within music's rhetoric; they cannot be musical *per se*. To the extent that music itself is constructed in opposition to sound, Lachenmann's (and Cage's) approach deconstructs it. Rather than opposing, revolutionizing, or correcting music's oversights or exclusivity, this deconstructive reflexivity is available to show how extramusical elements are simultaneously essential to music. In both Cage and Lachenmann (whose practices are in many respects anathema to one another, and whose combined influence is almost impossible to overstate), we understand that that which guarantees a piece of music as 'music' – namely, the exclusion of sound as such – simultaneously precludes it from its self-causation, its aseity.

That music is subject to deconstruction is not particularly remarkable, and has already been amply remarked on and demonstrated in any case. What is worth noting here, though, is the mechanism that links Cage's and Lachenmann's work, since their practices would appear to be so opposed. That is, if music is always under erasure, its fiction as a sonic matter nevertheless persists through the alibi that music and sound coincide – they are made of the same stuff. However, by keeping the listener's attention oriented towards the sweeping rhetoric that the practice of music is, both composers unwittingly reiterate this alibi of coincidence. Their performance of music's deconstruction through traditional concert conditions effectively obscures the genetic difference that underwrites music and sound. And despite how their praxes diverge, Cage's and Lachenmann's accounts – being as they are dialectically expressed – ultimately converge in a kind of second-order listening that may be described as another form of attention wherein one attends to one's self-attending: hyper-attention. Taken this way, what was initially described as the movement of form into content can instead be thought of as an expansion of the attentional field to include the activity of attention itself, which, by virtue of attention's always being supplemented by inattention, is also to include the impossibility of attention's full attention.

What this all amounts to, then, is understanding the concert ritual itself as a kind of technology, one whose several parts together function as a concentration machine to actualize the idea (virtuality) of music as a pure aesthetic object. Or said differently, concentration is the invariant effect of music realized in its mode of being something relative to which all manner of sounds can be folded into, obscured, and/or recombined without threatening its constitution. In both its actual and conceptual space, virtually anything can be added, altered, or removed from this machine without threatening the idea that it expresses – everything perhaps except concentration itself. In short, concerted music and the virtual musicality immanent

to every actual instance of it can feint and bob, disappoint or mislead one's attention in any number of ways so long as attention is concentrated. As such, when listening itself is distracted from its attentive obligations, the musicality that supposedly inheres in any object of concentration – any sound – risks becoming what is not it.

But what happens when there is nothing to impinge upon this concentration? If concentration entails listening away from certain sounds, noises and activities in order to realize music as something-to-be-listened-to, which in turn realizes these sounds, noises and activities as elements of distraction, then what results when there is no 'outside' element to draw attention away from its expressions of concentration? That is, what constitutes 'music' if nothing can be listened away from; if, in short, nothing distracts?

The Ghost in the Machine in the Ghost: reflexive (in)attention

Logically it follows from the question posed above that 'everything' is music. But as we've argued, music (not only, but especially, in its concert(ed) form) is only possible when *not* everything is music. At issue here is not just the sense of music's mattering but the matter of inattention – distraction – as it relates to concentrated listening.

Consider, then, Martin Arnold's *Burrow Music*, a one-hour ten-minute acoustic piece in two movements composed to be listened to as a recording.[6] Like the anonymous and nondescript music you might hear at a cocktail lounge drifting quietly in the background, *Burrow Music* aimlessly meanders with seeming indifference to whether it's being listened to or not. This is not to say that there is no sense or character to *Burrow Music*, but rather that its occasion of listening is conducted otherwise and away from the facts that typically organize musical audition. The *faits accomplis* of musical listening here are intentionally deficient in order to promote a form of listening that delights in the elaboration of local details without concern for the latter's structural implications or formal significance. Oddly, to listen in this way is also to listen away from the rhetorical force that music circulates in its insistence on comprehension (in the broadest possible sense) over mere apprehension. In this mode of listening it is the appearing itself – the *appearancing* of the music – that matters; the fact of things happening is sufficiently interesting and amusing, independent of what happens or even why and how they happen.

To a large extent, the listener's powers of concentration have to be considered here, specifically insofar as they have been altered by contemporary culture's varieties of corybantic distraction that encourage a form of continuous partial attention.[7] This means that *Burrow Music* (a composition

that assumes many of the attentional conceits of concert music) concerns the way music-to-be-listened-to indirectly engages the kind of penumbral audition that characterizes how backgrounded music is heard and how the latter, operationalized under the sign of the former, converts the perceptual aberrations (noises) of subliminal listening into aesthetic 'wonders' that transfigure the image of music-to-be-listened-to into something grotesque, something weird.

If Arnold's music is able to leverage the listening techniques that are called forth in realizing music as a dimension of the background, this is in large part because the backgrounding music has become habitual since the advent of recording technologies. Indeed, the conventional musical mode of realization – one that elevates certain structures shared by all musical phenomena to the level of autonomy – has been in decline since sounds became something that could be recorded and effectively re-presented. While it is undeniable that the concert(ed) mode of realization informs the address of recorded music, insofar as the latter is typically presented in a way that asks the listener to take what is playbacked as an object of attention, it's also clear that recorded music has produced its own set of affordances and protocols that skew the matter of music as something-to-be-listened-to.

For Arnold (and for this essay) the most significant of these reconfigured affordances is the way recorded music, unlike concert music, gives tacit permission to ignore music. This is not to say that music as a something-to-be-listened-to disappears from the listener's purview, but rather that its imperative does. The sense of summons that pressures all occasions of audition, a sense the concert hall isolates and raises to an aesthetic level, does not have the same force in recorded music owing to the technical and social economies that are specific to recordings.[8]

Arnold explicitly places a lien on this condition in *Burrow Music*, which he describes as taking its impetus from his observation that his 'fundamental experience of listening to music was through recording' (Arnold, 1995, 18). To the extent that recorded music does not simply represent but in fact reconfigures the order of its constitutive mediations, to express this fundamental experience of music-as-it-is-recorded *Burrow Music* is sensitive not only to the way it will sound and be heard as projected from a stereo, but how 'production techniques are significant, distinct, and active contributors to the resultant recorded music' (Arnold, 1995, 18). In short, *Burrow Music* takes the mediations introduced by recording technology and recording techniques as an essential part of recorded music's potential. Beyond traditional elements such as 'pitches, rhythms, textures and sonorities (and their histories outside of the piece)' (Arnold, 1995, 27) are ambient elements that Arnold believes are 'latently audible' in the final recording. Things such as

the dimensions of the room (including sills; ledges; outcroppings; trim; smooth or angled corners); all the materials involved in the walls

(plaster/stipple/paper/kind of paint); the amount of furnishing…and the placement, shapes, and material make-up of the furnishing; the floor surface and covering; the number of windows, the number of curtains, and the number of curtains drawn or not; the difference between the street noise from the third floor, the second floor, and the ground floor, (Arnold, 1995, 7)

as well as the kind of microphone used; the placement of said microphone relative to an instrument; the amount of gain applied to the microphone; and, as legions of informed and not-so-informed musicians will attest to, whether these sounds are recorded in a digital or analogue format. For Arnold, 'how a piece is recorded is a part of the music, as much as all the other aspects of interpretation – dynamics, phrasing, articulation, *rubato*, etc.' (Arnold, 1995, 18).

In order to understand how this is accomplished in *Burrow Music*, a more detailed description of the work is in order. Basically, one can hear *Burrow Music* as a timbrally rich, extremely long, and very weird work of slow-moving modal counterpoint. The first movement (at sixty-eight minutes) is the longer of the two, and is essentially composed of three-part modal counterpoint with an accompanying punctuating line that activates (opens/closes) a gated tape part on which is recorded an improvised organ and string performance (both instruments being played by the composer). Each of the voices is recorded separately and independently of one another on a cassette four-track recorder, and throughout the piece, the melodic lines are performed at different times by one of twelve different instruments,[9] each of which have been recorded in different ambient spaces using different recording techniques to create, in a sense, a second and third order counterpoint based on instrument timbre and ambient resonance. The strategies that Arnold uses for ordering the parameters of pitch and rhythm are many and multilayered and require too much space to detail here in depth, except perhaps to note that much of the material was generated using different applications of Danish composer Per Nørgård's 'Infinity Series', a recursive algorithm with fractal-like properties whose self-similar 'wavelengths' or 'refractions' are audibly related to the originary series that gives its constantly expanding row the semblance of hierarchical order.[10]

The second movement, which times at forty-two minutes, is a representation of the same scored material that comprises the first movement. However, for this movement a MIDI-realization of the score is made and recorded to cassettes that are then listened to through headphones by performers who either whistle or hum along with one of the three principal melodic lines. Additionally, the MIDI-recording of the score is gated (turned on and off) and projected through speakers by a signal that comes from the microphone into which the performer whistles/hums. What's heard on the recording then is an extremely murky blend of whistling, humming and

MIDI pianos. As Arnold writes: 'This movement celebrates the non-expert pastime of humming and whistling-along and all the sonic anomalies that go with this activity' (Arnold, 1995, 13).

Aside from his underlying taste for medieval polyphony, Scottish Piobaireachd, 70s Prog Rock, and jazz-lounge, Arnold cites an interest in experimental film and video, particularly those reflexive works that 'take on some kind of investigation into various aspects of various kinds of apparatus set in motion for the[ir] production and consumption' (Arnold, 1995, 20). Though citing the work of Michael Snow, Ernie Gehr and Peter Gidal as influential, it is film-maker/theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha whose work Arnold feels particularly indebted to. In Trinh, Arnold discerns what he calls a 'non-demonstrative' approach, where the 'unsettling [of] various conventions and preconditionings' are present in such a way that their 'subversions are not lucid enough or consistent enough or pervasive enough or dramatic enough to take on another [alien] authority' (Arnold, 1995, 20). The expressive ambiguity Arnold sees in Trinh's *Naked Spaces* (1985), for example, parallels his desire for *Burrow Music* to both exploit and subvert conventions while never presuming mastery or control of his creative strategies or the effects that they condition.

Like Trinh, Arnold seeks to keep the affects – the abstract but perceivable force of change immanent to and expressive of an experiential modification – of convention and subversion in play without isolating or classifying which artistic effect belongs to which affect. Arnold describes this as 'a condition where the dialectic line that can be cut between the two disappears and they become unknowable as categories' (Arnold, 1995, 27). Describing his ideal reception of *Burrow Music* and the kind of experience he aims to cultivate in listening to the work, Arnold explains:

> I want the array of elements that make up my hybrid material to be as capable of being (mis)apprehended as all context and content […] I want a situation in which any given element in any given moment might seem familiar (and maybe beautiful or sentimental or comfortable) but in which there is *no real sense of what is going on*; no solid indication or even implication of what my agenda or intent as a composer might be. (Arnold, 1995, 27)

In short, *Burrow Music* aims at a reflexivity that avoids the quotation marks that so often cling to the term; Arnold is less interested in a kind of attentional navel-gazing than he is in perverting the navel-gazing that has always-already taken place as the ground of (in)attention.

But much of what Arnold describes in *Burrow Music* are its internal formal details. While details such as the unusually long duration, the otiose melodic drifts, and a veritable absence of dynamic variety are necessary elements that help *Burrow Music* sidestep the expectations that mediate the

way a listener takes account of a musical event, these alone are not suffi-
cient conditions to render 'the strangeness of its existence so disorienting'
(Arnold, 1995, 100). If they were, one should expect *Burrow Music* to
relinquish some of its unsettling effects with successive hearings. Its being
recorded would presumably give the listener a degree of control that would
countervail *Burrow Music*'s troubling affect by giving one the opportunity
to develop the kind of attention that evolves from multiple listenings, an
attention presumably informed by the totality of its repetitions.

But the fact is that as many times as one listens to *Burrow Music*, and as
well as the objectives of the piece can be understood, it remains enormously
difficult to grasp what's going on in the work at any given moment. This
suggests that the capacity to listen plays a key role in determining what
Arnold says is *Burrow Music*'s 'insidiously disorienting instability' (Arnold,
1995, 101). Thus, while treating the mediations of audio technology in a
way that addresses how 'production techniques are significant, distinct, and
active contributors to the resultant recorded music' (Arnold, 1995, 18), it
should also be considered how listening to recorded music affects the way
one attends to music. This is again to insist that attention – to or away –
actively contributes to the way music sounds, to the resultant experienced
music. Arnold is right that 'there is nothing neutral about the recording
process' (Arnold, 1995, 18), but there is also nothing neutral about the
circumstances of listening, and certainly there is nothing neutral about what
sound technology has done to these circumstances. Simon Frith puts it this
way: 'As we have taken power over music on records, as they have become
ubiquitous […] so the musical work has ceased to command respectful,
structural attention' (Frith, 1996, 242). As a consequence, he contends
that 'All music is more often heard now in fragments than completely' and
'because *all* our experiences of time are now fragmented and multilinear,
fragmented music is also realistic music' (Frith, 1996, 242, 243).

Production techniques are therefore not only active contributors to the
way music is heard through recordings, but active contributors to the way
even non-recorded music is heard. For the majority of the population of
industrialized cultures whose primary experience of music is circumscribed
to that of listening (to recordings), the peculiarities of recording's media-
tions are no longer exceptional. Thus, in addition to affecting what is or is
not audible, as, say, the way a microphone position alters the amount of
perceived finger noise made when playing a guitar, recordings have taught
us how to listen in moments as well as indifferently, and thereby to orient
'the listener's attention to "sound"' such that 'perception of the sound is
more important than consideration of the "composition" as an entity in
and of itself' (Hosokawa in Frith, 1996, 243). Pausing, turning down,
rewinding, skipping ahead, stopping a song in the middle of playback,
and simply forgetting about it are behaviours that develop around the
way recordings allow one to affect recorded musical sounds. But these

behaviours also adjust the importance of the music downwards so that they become something grasped or appropriated unconsciously and no longer something to be taken as catachrestic figures.

In this way, *Burrow Music*'s 'insidiously disorienting instability' is as much a function of how recorded music and a media-rich environment – an environment that it helps create – invite us to listen distractedly. What this means is that part of *Burrow Music*'s strangeness derives from the fact that a highly mechanized information-saturated culture of hybrid bio-petrol-geo-electric-social networks already teaches its subjects how to listen 'rhizomatically', how 'any point [of listening] can be connected to anything other, and must be'; how an act of listening 'may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but [...] will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 7, 9). Because listening to music through recordings is central to contemporary culture at large, its members already pay a certain inattention to music in general. The parts that one tunes in and out of when listening to *Burrow Music* never survey the piece and so never compose an image of the work that would dominate hearing and organize its expressions into signifying regularities. Or in Deleuze and Guattari's language, *Burrow Music* has no face to 'define zones of frequency or probability, [to] delimit a field that neutralizes in advance any expressions or connections unamenable to the appropriate significations' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 168). In a sense, *Burrow Music* borrows from distraction its ramifying capacity and its cognitive sleights, and transposes these into a stationary context (the context of listening through headphones) to perform a 'fractal deformation', a process in which listening lives on bites of what Paul Mann defines as 'increasingly fragmented gestures, features, images, that never add up, never amount to a whole body' (Mann, 1999, 154), or, a face.

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As Walter Benjamin notes, habits that develop around the way an individual uses things (or the way things mediate one's use of them) impinge on how these things figure into one's perception and influence the significance they can have.[11] So as well as affording a separation of performer and audience, recordings encourage us to regard music as something that can be wilfully tuned in and out of: the sound of music becomes something alternately neglected or cherished according to a nebulous set of continuously shifting priorities that are becoming increasingly multiple and superficial. Additionally, and coupled with the fact that recorded music's ubiquity makes this almost universal, the scission between performing and listening spaces gives musical sounds an impropriety that allows them to circulate limitlessly as impersonal environmental qualities that one learns to listen away from. Or, like architecture, which is rarely perceived apart from

the lived economy of its spatial array, music (especially as it has become increasingly omnipresent) serves as a felt background from which one's attention can be detached and given rein to drift towards more obscure perceptions and sublimated tropes.

Put differently, 'attention' is no longer captured by a conscious subjective agent, but is expanded to include the various affective registers in which autonomic couplings constantly form, morph, modulate and break. That is, the habitual reception of musical sounds is an effect of the way music has, largely as a consequence of its mechanized mediatization, become an agentless feature of the environment such that it comes to be heard the way streetcars and lawnmowers outside of one's house are heard – always to the side of another activity. In thus becoming a ubiquitous part of everyday life, music loses some of its formal significance while enhancing what Ian Cross calls its 'floating intentionality', a drifting aboutness that refers to the way music 'can be thought of as gathering meaning from the contexts within which it happens and in turn contributing meaning to those contexts' (Cross, 2005, 30). If much of contemporary music listens attentively to the paradoxes that result from the way that music bespeaks its fictive self – to the fissures of its folded materiality – Arnold's music suggests that things might be otherwise if we listen away instead. In this, the matter of music might matter anew, but only insofar as this way of mattering can never matter as such.

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