*Transposing Auralities*

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Fraser Walker

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## Abstract

This exegesis seeks to investigate music's capacity to and complicity in performing acts of acoustic violence, listening to the repercussions as they reverberate from the architectural, seep through the pores of the social, and emanate into the very fabric of the cultural. Through gestures of deconstruction and defamiliarisation, the works discussed serve as templates in considering how music's hierarchical structures might be rearranged, recomposed, and reinterpreted to produce alternative listening experiences. Informed by a "non-cochlear" sonic sensibility, I endeavour to hear through modernity's ear the continuum of sound as it oscillates across thresholds of disenchantment and re-enchantment, the scientific and the mythic, facilitating a discussion towards what a sonic agency might sound like.

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## *Contents*

## Music is sound, not the other way around.

*"If you develop an ear for sounds that are musical it is like developing an ego. You begin to refuse sounds that are not musical and that way cut yourself off from a good deal of experience."*[1]

Since my involvement within certain institutional and community-based forms of musical practice, I have been grappling with an existential recontextualising of self. Let me start by admitting to having been engrossed in a valuable though arduous and somewhat cynical love-hate relationship with music and its numerous "quirks" throughout the past two decades. Music was, for lack of a better phrase, my life; it encapsulated my entire being and lived experience. I was utterly consumed by it to the point where music subconsciously became my conscious identity. It was a way of perceiving and portraying the world around me, of interacting and engaging with it and its inhabitants. After dedicating years towards an intensive and rigorous study of the piano, I had attained what some might consider witchcraft or, god forbid, a talent: fluency in the musical language.

Whether passively or actively, I began to only listen musically. The microwave beep would sound as a B natural, the anacrusis to Nardis. Bus hydraulics and engine hum would form a perfect fourth, accented by tires outlining a quarter note triplet pulse. A magpie would sing melodic cadences so tasteful as to make Charlie Parker himself jealous. Obviously sound existed outside of a musical paradigm. However, it wasn't until such sound was imbued with musical properties that it became worthy of exploration. For all of my pianistic prowess and theoretical understanding, I was sonically ignorant. What did it mean to graft anthropocentric constructs and Western sociocultural hierarchies upon non-human entities? A philosophical question I still ponder, yet one that acted as a catalyst in persuading me to question music's phenomenological, epistemological and ontological subsistence; in turn demanding that I reconsider my own.

Though I enjoyed a richly fulfilling involvement with the local music scene, I was left unsatisfied with music's capacity to communicate beyond what felt like a language obsessed with its own medium specificity. This was assuming that what I heard in my head was worth sharing at all in an oversaturated market of feelings. The emotional expressivity and aesthetic value of music appeared to take precedence over its artistic potential, its ability to engage with social, cultural, and political discourse. Make no mistake, the sensorial and structural properties of music – their evocation of profound experience – remain a significant and integral component of human-musical processes. However, their significance began to feel inflated and finite, unable to account for the complexities of an infinite human and non-human experience. The world was brimming with creative possibilities and inspiration – both beautiful and ugly – yet all I could do was write a song about it.


*Figure 1. Walker, Fraser. (2018) Sky Canvas. Live at San Fran, Wellington.*

## The Ears Don't Blink.

This sentiment, introduced by artist and theorist Seth Kim-Cohen, has been an influential and guiding principle during the recent development of my interdisciplinary art practice.[2] It has served to inform not only my creative work and research but also my relationship to and involvement with sound throughout everyday life. Unlike the eyes, where blinking acts as an autonomous mechanism to simultaneously prevent disorientation while providing a respite from visual stimulus – among other lubricatory and protective functions – the ears consider such a feat as anatomically and philosophically impossible. They are always open to the world, just as the world is always open to them. Listening then becomes a reciprocal process that engages one's responsibility to and agency with the temporal and political nature of sound. Sound permeates from within us and without us, through us and throughout us. Its capacity to shape a shared experience connects us not as objects or subjects, but as things thinging; caught not in a state of being but drawn into a process of being-with.

Kim-Cohen urges us to embrace this often-neglected precept in order to hear exigencies beyond a Western musical paradigm; adopting modalities of listening that posit meaning in registers unaccounted for by such closed-symbolic systems. Habitually obsessed with its own medium specificity, "music as a language seeks to retain its absolute proximity to itself. Any process of difference is thought to occur only within the narrowly proscribed boundaries of music-as-such."[3] Listening as a process does not occur in such a vacuum, though it has become a troublesome practice within music and the sonic arts. Kim-Cohen attempts to unhear and replace Pierre Schaeffer's *objet sonore* and John Cage's *sound-in-itself*, sonic sensibilities advocating for a "bracketing" that listens *at* sound instead of hearing worldly implications or experience in an expanded situation. There is an invitation to look not *at* or *out* the phenomenological window, but instead *about* a window that "allows for sound's interactions with linguistic, ontological, epistemological, social, and political signification."[4]

In response to Western music's perceived failure of recognising itself within an expanded situation – a feat achieved by sculpture, painting, and cinema – Kim-Cohen proposes his notion of "non-cochlear" sound. As an alternative listening modality, a non-cochlear sonic art practice induces a recontextualising of sound's agency and potential for an expanded situation, suturing the conceptual with the sonic. It entails a recognition and acknowledgement of the complex relationships that exist between sound's production and reception within the boundaries of historical, social, cultural, and political activity. Kim-Cohen admits that the term draws heavily upon Duchamp's conception of "non-retinal art", informed by postmodernist's reconsideration and rejection of aesthetic beauty, universal truths, and the emphasis on art object. The non-cochlear pursues this conceptual turn of the gallery arts, operating with a healthy amount of scepticism for the

mythical properties of sound while embracing any contradictions and tensions that might emerge. The term's prefix does not denote a negation, an erasure, or silence; the non-cochlear and cochlear intertwine without suggesting an eradication of phenomena, observing exigencies not confined to auditory experience.

Here Kim-Cohen eloquently states:

> *Non-cochlear sound* addresses sound as a conceptual, contextual construct. *Non-cochlear sound* might function in a sound-like fashion without specifically referencing or making sound, it might use sound as a vehicle for transporting ideas or materials from point A to point B, it might even make sound but only as an excuse for initiating other activities. Sound always makes meaning by interacting with other things in proximity: geographic proximity, ideological proximity, philosophical proximity. *Non-cochlear sound* is nothing more - and nothing less - than the acknowledgement of this reality. If a non-retinal visual art is liberated to ask questions that the eye alone cannot answer, then a non-cochlear sonic art appeals to exigencies out of earshot. But the eye and the ear are not denied or discarded. A conceptual sonic art would necessarily engage both the non-cochlear and the cochlear, and the constituting trace of each in the other. Sounds are allowed to keep resonating past the inner ear all the way to the brain and back.[5]

Artist and writer Salomé Voegelin shares a similar desire to accentuate the "inbetweenness" of sound and advocates for a sonic materialism which draws upon new materialist thought to describe sound as verb, asking us to hear the continuum of sound as an uncertain liminality caught in perpetual flux. Voegelin conceives of sound as a "force mediated by life, multiplying the singularity of perception into the plurality of experience; a product of interaction, sound is artefactual evidence of the situations and relationships in which such an interaction may occur."[6] This emphasis on unpredictability can often lead to vague language used to describe sound, though it is precisely this impreciseness that allows sound to interact with temporal bodies as an ambiguous stimulant free from musical signification. Though Voegelin's sonic phenomenology might seem incompatible with Kim-Cohen's sonic idealism, they both can agree that sound *matters,* that sound *is* matter. As a material, as a percept, and as a concept, sound leaks. It leaks out of the architectural, seeps through the pores of the social, and emanates into the very fabric of the cultural.

Proposed as a participatory sound experience, the series *White Noise* (2019) hears this sonic sensibility as a catalyst in considering Muzak's[7] complicity in shaping public and private auditory spaces. While exploring the listener's potential to subvert such acoustic hierarchies through performative intervention, it is imagined as a response to "sonic air conditioning" and its propensity toward states of emotional regulation and subliminal manipulation. The work aims to frame listening as a form of protest against passive lethargy; an activism encouraging the inverting of sound layers where responsibility for shaping sonic contexts is placed literally in the hands of the listener. *White Noise* takes Fluxus text scores and "happenings" as inspiration in interrogating the Western musical


*Figure 2. Walker, Fraser (2019) White Noise. Performance at Countdown, Wellington. https://vimeo.com/426089254.*

score as a semiotic absolute; it's relationship between structural and sensorial, conceptual and perceptual experience.

Muzak was not created to be listened to, instead it was manufactured to be heard; a decorative soft fog that envelops its listeners, persuading them to inhale unease while exhaling passivity.[8] It renders silence as a kind of social purgatory, accentuating a commonality shared by those breathing the same air: waiting. Waiting for a doctor's appointment, for a meal, for a friend to finish trying on clothes. It is during this time when we are at our most vulnerable, receptive to distractions and outside influences. Like music, Muzak affects. Perhaps we welcome this affection, for it serves to set the scene for a certain recreational pleasure – consumption. Muzak, itself a commodity, "determines the tone of commodity exchange. It is a fetishized object that conceals, through its very 'tone,' its relationship to money and power, its function as mediator of human relations and its functions as 'moodsetter.' Without it, or so its producers would like us to think, we may not be able to interact; may not feel safe."[9]

Hildegard Westerkamp's writings on music-as-environment reveal an inherent contradiction regarding Muzak: "the more of it there is, the less it is listened to; the more its presence suggests a musical status quo in the soundscape, the less we tend to use our own voices to make our own music. It has the power to reduce us to passive listeners and discourage us from sound making. It can, in fact, rob us of our desire to listen and make sounds."[10] Muzak penetrates regardless of socio-cultural background, assimilating various musical genres and cultures into a melting pot that promises diversity but instead boils away vitality to produce a sonic uniformity. It claims democracy, yet its adherence to "tonalism, melodic and harmonic primacy, distrust of new languages, and refusal of the abnormal"[11] suggests quasi-totalitarian implications. Music-as-environment has established itself as a dominant cultural system, engulfing us acoustically and sheltering us within an urban womb. It gives the illusion of participating in a significant cultural event, while never actually provoking the ears of those who listen.

*White Noise* (2019), a series of video works, emphasises the performative body as a quasi-visual score; a mediation and meditation through and within private and public space, allowing one to experience an intersection of passive and active modes of listening. Performers are asked to find a public space – such as a supermarket, library, café or transport - where background music is overtly present in its sonic environment. There they interpret a text score entitled *un-conch-ious*, a poetic albeit ambiguous set of instructions on how to 'play' the surrounding soundscape heard resonating within the seashell-esque cavity created when one cups their hands to their ears. The resulting sound remains inaudible to all but the individual; eluding capture and commodification as one simultaneously assumes the role of instrument, performer, and audience. As an installation, *White Noise* exists as a single channel video work documenting the recorded performances, accompanied

*un-conch-ious*

*Position yourself in a public space where music sounds as wallpaper, furniture, or air conditioning.*

*While opening your ears, close your eyes.*

*Slowly cup your hands, bringing them to your ears until you hear the roar of an ocean.*

*Let its squalls drown out the murmurings of sirens. Or don't.*

*Listen to waves of past and future travelled as they navigate from distant shores,*
*a current through surroundings channelled, to pool within eared canals.*

*Allow your body to sway in the wind, billowing, as hands conduct its ebb and flow.*

*In a single sustained sigh, drain the ocean of its sense, its depth.*

*Hold this breath for as long as you can.*

*With echoes swept away to become unreal as the shell-heard tide,*
*sound out this now arid hollow.*

*Till it resonates anew.*

*From nascence, of vessel, as instrument.*

*When ready to return home,*
*yawn.*

*Figure 3. Walker, Fraser (2019) White Noise. Text score.*

by their specific acoustic environments diffused through a quadraphonic speaker array.

The pervasive presence of music within all but the most obscure facets of quotidian life has been an area of both concern and ridicule since Muzak's conception in the 1920's. Perceived as a form of atmospheric architecture where mood and behaviour are conducted through sonic material, Muzak has since outgrown its cliché as elevator music only to become snatched up in the jaws of capitalism by global companies such as Mood Media, Spotify, and YouTube. The idiom, "soundtrack of our lives", rings with a more sinister tone when we recognise the inexhaustible playlists and poignantly targeted algorithms as an "exemplary (ab)use of background music as a manifestation of instrumentally manipulated culture deployed in the service of social control and capital gain."[12] Silence now seems to exist as a state of otherness, signalling it is more politically correct to suffocate in noise than address the vulnerability that silence invokes.

Economists Alan Bradshaw and Morris B Holbrook, in their critical consideration of consumer culture, ask: "must we have Muzak wherever we go?". By interrogating dimensions of consumer-culture theory and the manipulative capacity of background music, they reveal commercial hegemony's proclivity for "integrating consumers from above or even imposing culture from on high, rather than viewing consumer culture as something that arises from the consumers themselves."[13] While concerns for aesthetics and the art-versus-commerce debate are raised, emphasis is placed upon the ethical implementation of sound within consumerist society; namely its "intrusion on freedom and invasion of privacy" alongside its potential in "promoting a culture of "non-listening".[14] Perhaps Adorno wasn't so frivolous when he voiced unease at our loss of agency with regard to musical listening, a privilege now taken for granted.

Brandon LaBelle considers these communal spaces as "atmospheric, psychoacoustical public environments", conscripting the humble mall as a case study to illustrate how corporations "utilize a range of affective, sonorous and spatial elements to generate a production of subjectivity."[15] Though LaBelle does not deny the positive effects that Muzak may have upon say a workplace, he notes its complicity in creating a "feedback loop" within such scripted spaces where one is conditioned by an elaborate ambience designed to anticipate and mirror personal desires while simultaneously refusing any meaningful counter-play from consumers.[16] This produces a relational dynamic between body and surrounding, self and object, that reveals feedbacking "as an unsteady flow of acoustical information and exchange, rising at times in acts of secret performance and falling at others in moments of mishearing."[17]

While the war on noise pollution doesn't bear the same gravitas as nuclear weaponry or the emotional weight of animal cruelty, it remains what environmentalist Nigel Rodgers describes as a

"modern day curse" deserving of equivalent political attention.[18] Bagpipe-wielding and garbed in wizard robes, Rodgers' notorious and perhaps controversial protest group *Pipedown* was founded in response to the music industry allowing "piped music" to prosper due to dubious propaganda promoting necessity and improved customer experience. Amidst the sense of futility that *Pipedown's* responses often elicit, there remain a number of potent noise abatement protests that have provoked genuine reassessment of background music's potential harm.[19] From Muzak's nefarious presence within hospitals, to BBC's purported plans to tune out background music within its programming, it seems that just as "silence against silence can produce music, so too can noise against noise produce silence."[20]

Earlier attempts to penetrate the din of mid-Twentieth Century consumer culture were made by composer John Cage, namely a work that was never actually brought into fruition though remains an exercise in conceptualism. *Silent Prayer* (1948), comprised entirely of uninterrupted silence lasting the duration of standard "canned" music (3 to 4 minutes), was proposedly sold to the Muzak Company as a facetious gesture that critiqued musical commodification and offered listeners a short respite from forced listening. Cage, whose continued experiments in silence (*4'33"*) engaged notions of musically silencing the social, described the piece as "opening with a single idea which I will attempt to make as seductive as the colour and shape and fragrance of a flower. The ending will approach imperceptibility."[21]

Douglas Kahn notes that *Silent Prayer's* performance of silence differed from Cage's ensuing infamous *4'33"* (1952) in that it was not concerned with musicalizing worldly sounds or exploring what would later be conceptualised as "sound-in-itself". Instead, the piece "silenced the sound of a music intended as environmental; Muzak was the surrounding sound meant to be as unobtrusive to the task at hand as audience sounds at a concert. Thus, during the twentieth-century Age of Noise, the most noted promulgator of musical noise was involved in the business of noise abatement."[22] Within the post-war space that Cage inhabits, it is possible to hear echoes of Erik Satie's *furniture music* (1917) and Marcel Duchamp's *Air de Paris* (1919/1964) reverberate through and above the sound of war as it diminuendos into the clangour of militarism and commercialism that characterises an Age of Noise.

The seashell allegory manifest within *White Noise* acts as a conduit through which one might contemplate the unheard; to hear through modernity's ear a sonic world oscillating between disenchantment and re-enchantment. There is something inexpressible about such a small object trapping the sound of something so vast, and yet, as the ocean's waves collide with their vibratory selves one can't help but supplant the superstitious with the scientific. Illustrated here resides the ambivalence of modernism, what Stefan Helmreich hears through seashell sound as a "European-Atlantic-American ethno-conchology, one that unrolls from Romantic enthrallment toward a double-edged modernity that uses the language of science to disenchant at one


*Figure 4. Walker, Fraser (2020) White Noise. Performance at Mr Go's, Wellington. https://vimeo.com/428368199.*

moment and then re-enchant at another."[23] As the boundaries between mouth and ear become blurred, almost telephonic in nature, a subjectivity is imagined where one may listen to themselves listening.[24]

This seashell model reveals an encounter between the mythical and the materialistic, where the shell can be heard as an embouchure channelling voices from a communal past or as a vacant chamber resonating with located individual experience. As a child might clasp a seashell to their ear, one is met with imagined sounds of the ocean, roaring waves, and swells. One may even admit to hearing the sounds of a baby's shrill cry or the deathly silence of a castle's dungeon. *Of.* The sound *of.* Expressing the relationship between a part and a whole. The sound is but a constituent fragment torn, captured, and reproduced away from its origins. It is a past tense, a past sense, a memory. In this instance sound is all but a verb. Echoed within this cavity lie the dreams and expectations of an undeveloped ear, an ear that has yet to hear the brutality of the world residing outside of its shell.

To hear within a contemporary paradigm now seems to necessitate a relinquishment of the generative and explorative processes of sound that enable its potency as a medium for personal and social transformation. A specious capitalist realism binds private lives to public society where acts of listening become reactive instead of intuitive, an urgency to listen *for* instead of *with*. If Muzak seeks to organise space in order to retain stability, then sound's capacity to disintegrate and reconfigure such certainty reveals it as always existing in relation to while maintaining agency in how it performs with others. What agency then does an audience or a consumer have in shaping these sonic spaces, a volume without inherent boundaries where space does not necessarily contain a thing but rather is produced by the thing itself? Could one hear one's voice outside of one's own bodily and auditory conditioning?

Theorist Salomé Voegelin enlists cupped hands upon ears in order to facilitate a discussion around bringing the notion of technology onto the body. What do we really hear through this simple gesture? There is a binarism at play that Voegelin wishes us to unhear and unlearn, the paradox of sound. The more we focus in on it, attempt to understand it, label it, graft language and conventions upon it, the more we realise that sound isn't something in the conventional sense of an object. It doesn't fulfil all the criteria of such a lexicon; it isn't this or that, table or chair, hands or ears. Sound travels through; it is their relationship and their in between, what they do together. What we are trained to hear - through languages, systems, hierarches, vocabularies, and values – ultimately behaves as a technology that directly influences what and how we listen; potentially "affecting our understanding of sound, even causing us to forget sound's knowledge and discouraging a holistic sonic sensibility."[25]

This assertion, concerning the latent power dynamics inherent in our attending to sound, is introduced as a complexity embedded

*Figure 5. Young, Samson (2018) Muted Situation #22: Muted Tchaikovsky's 5th. Installation view.*

within Hong-Kong based artist Samson Young's on-going series of performance installation works entitled *Muted Situations*. Involving instructional scores that conduct various auditory scenarios, from an orchestra's rendition of Tchaikovsky's *5th Symphony* to a dancer's performance of a traditional Chinese lion dance, participants are invited to consciously "mute" the activity's dominant, sonic foreground. Through a suppression of particular sound layers and an accentuation of others, the "masked moments that take place in our everyday acoustic environment are revealed and re-prioritised; allowing for these sonic situations to be heard anew."[26] In any act of muting, something is amplified, however Young cautions us not to equate muting with silence:

> Mute is not silence. Muting is not the same as doing nothing. Rather, the act of muting is an intensely focused re-imagination and re-construction of the auditory - an aggressive energy that is the opposite of the Zen-inspired non-action in John Cage's Mute is not silence. Muting is not the same as doing nothing. Rather, the conception of silence. It involves the conscious suppression of dominant voices, as a way to uncover the unheard and the marginalised, or to make apparent certain assumptions about hearing and sounding.[27] the opposite of the Zen-inspired non-action in John Cage's conception of silence. It involves the conscious suppression of dominant voices, as a way to uncover the unheard and the marginalised, or to make apparent certain assumptions about hearing and sounding.[28]

Young's radical reframing of silence works to expand the extramusical; to disrupt audience expectations with gestures and movements that feel almost anticlimactic, ridiculous even. Contra Cage, this embodiment of silencing "draws attention to itself, suggesting that we attend precisely to the politics of that silencing along with the forms of listening it produces."[29] While aspects of phrasing, intensity, concentration, and formality are retained, the omission of projected musical notes reveals a previously unheard sonic reality censored by a hierarchical listening culture that tends to overlook the very sonic material that breathes life into its performance. Inhales, page turns, rattles, stomps, and other bodily noises now possess agency in producing a sonic reality where sound forms relationships and conjunctions that accentuate an individual identity capable of being woven into a larger social fabric.

This dichotomy can be seen (and heard) to exist within a greater sociocultural context where an oppressive European classical tradition continues to forsake non-Western composers, their presence within their own concert halls is but a murmur.[30] Young, throughout his *Muted Situations* series, interrogates this aspect of musical colonialism by appropriating and subjecting canonical works to drastic recompositions in order to question the technology of harmony as a symbol for cultural and historical progress at the detriment of marginalised voices. *Muted Situations* seeks to frame the whisper as both an act of resistance and as an effect of disempowerment; in essence, "asking the listener to consider what it means to be reduced to a whisper, to be made to whisper, for a whisper to be all that is available to you."[31]

Conceived as a response to what felt like a drastic reconfiguration of my artistic identity - both creatively and conceptually - *White Noise* seeks to locate a developing practice within broader discourses of sound, music, and the liminal uncertainty in-between. The piece functions as an important stepping-stone; teasing out certain tensions and conversations that would inform subsequent work concerned with exploring sound through a non-cochlear lens, engaging the musical in not necessarily musical ways. While *White Noise* may appear relatively light-hearted when juxtaposed with some other of my works discussed here, what is at stake within such a simple gesture reverberates throughout this exegesis as I attempt to hear the continuum of sound, interrogating relational power dynamics concealed within a musical paradigm and facilitating a discussion towards what a sonic agency might sound like.

## Unhearing the Unsung.

Since antiquity, humanity has been captivated with music's capacity to navigate and mediate the space between our temporal, phenomenological realm, and the immaterial, abstract world of the spirit. One might yearn to hear voices from afar, inviting inaudible whispers that promise visions and revelations of an invisible and unheard world beyond that of our own. It has become common practice among Western academics, musicians, and audiences alike to characterize music with what could be described as a zealous mysticism. From television and film, to books, reviews and even YouTube comments, music's ineffable and ephemeral qualities are often rigorously exalted; denoting a faith-based system and pseudo-religious idealism where the presence of a transcendental sublime is impetuously presumed as obvious rather than scrutinised.[32] These assumptions, however, stem from a long series of historical antecedents, eventually subsumed as firmly embedded cultural ideologies.

This presumed obviousness can become problematic, as it reveals a susceptibility to a seductive myth of music-as-morality and questions how certain verbal protests or silences might speak to our ingrained vulnerabilities to music's mystique.[33] As Suzanne Delehanty observes, Western music as an idea, a tradition, and – in more recent times – an entity, owes its state of nobility and position of reverence to Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras. His discovery of the correspondence between musical intervals and arithmetical ratios – a tuning system ascertained from transcribing the consonance and dissonance produced by blacksmith's forges – lead to the inception of the musical modes. These seven modes, integral to contemporary Western musical practices, were "based upon the seven known planets, whose vibration in their heavenly orbits caused, Pythagoras believed, the music of the spheres."[34]

The Pythagoreans' mystical concept of the harmony of the spheres invoked the belief that music was a gift sent from the gods; its source located above and beyond mere mortals. Imbued with the power to express the inexpressible, to describe the indescribable, music was inscribed with sacred knowledge, eliciting an obsession with unravelling the primordial substance of matter. This served to elevate music above the plastic arts, consigning them to respected skills or crafts that could only ever aspire to the condition of music aloft its privileged pantheon. For "music, with its power to reveal the hidden order of the cosmos and to affect the soul and actions of mankind, was an art of divine inspiration."[35] Many appear to be convinced that retuning one's ears, bodies, and minds to 432 Hz will realign humanity with the natural frequency of Earth; subsequently vibrating celestial bodies that then resonate through bones to divulge the mysteries of the universe while healing all ailments, worries, and responsibility.[36]

While academics, musicians, and audiences might claim immunity

to music's mystique out loud, how resistant to its temptation might they be – or in fact *want* to be? William Cheng cautions in his text, *Loving Music Till It Hurts*, that "our love of music, along with our awe at its power, can move us to talk about it in these high-minded terms".[37] Cheng asserts that this often blindly obsessive love of music, our willingness to fight for and over it, is responsible for allowing oneself "to buy into its mystique, enticing us to attribute musical performances and ideas alike with preternatural powers of revelation".[38] This notion was first introduced by Richard Taruskin in a 2007 article, entitled "The Musical Mystique", in which Taruskin admitted to the dangers, delusions, and hypocrisies that often emerge from passionate defences of classical music. These included claims of music-as-morality and the edification of "noble savages" through music; highlighting how a Western musical tradition has served and continues to serve ambitions of colonization while remaining safely hidden amongst its own rules and rituals.[39]

My ongoing work, entitled *you are the music while the music lasts* (2020-pres), attempts an unhearing and de-romanticizing of this litany as a means to develop a conscientious sonic sensibility, a sonic footprint[40]. It intends to frame and critique the musical mystique as a sociocultural mythos that perpetuates Western music as an ineffably sublime and transcendental construct, a civilizing and humanising force. By imbuing music with an aesthetic moralism, we are responsible for addressing its potential to both empower and disempower, to humanise and dehumanise, to create and destroy subjectivities. How might Western music's privileged position – its power characterised as existing in spaces both beyond and before signification and representation – inadvertently provide sanctuary from scrutiny and dissuade us from speaking to music's performance of unspeakable acts?

*You are the music while the music lasts* is an online radio station broadcasting renditions of music written by celebrated musicians, allegedly guilty – although rarely convicted – of abusive behaviour. Conceived as a response toward society's susceptibility to states of moral deafness, the work serves as a provocation to consider one's own sonic footprint; a call to recognize the inherent politics of listening and being listened to. Amongst recent interest in reducing carbon footprints and adopting alternative or sustainable diets, the ethical consumption of music has received little attention. Excuses of subjective expression and severing art from artist continue to promote listening modes of egocentric pleasure that unintentionally silence minorities while refusing to acknowledge music as an enabler of abusive power.

The station – accessed via QR code – offers sonic alternatives of canonical music as a means to reflect upon musical consumption and the problematic habit of turning a deaf ear. These sonic sentences compile entire discographies into cacophonous tracks, their duration informed by the estimated incarceration each musician evaded due to their sociocultural status. As the fidelity of sound deteriorates under treatments of extreme-time stretching,


*Figure 6. Walker, Fraser (2020) you are the music while the music lasts. QR code in public space. https://youarethemusicwhilethemusiclasts.com.*

the original music becomes a solitary, oscillating drone-like texture; unintelligible from its former self as sonic artefacts are revealed, articulated, and suspended in time.

Aleatoric in nature, *you are the music while the music lasts* is informed by generative processes that imagine time as a destructive and reconstructive force. Musical elements and their identity are stretched and squeezed beyond recognition or repair, subject to the extremities of their own medium until a sonic matter is extracted and synthesized into homogeneous digital noise. Absence is represented *through* and *of* time. Traces of individuality present themselves as peaks and troughs, the only signifier remaining a name.

Neither piece nor composition, cover nor remix, the station is a sound event that expresses duration as an object of attention, conferring materiality and tangible presence upon the passage of time. It seeks to distort our perception of linear time, of Western "musical time", which is traditionally predicated upon anticipation and apprehension. While this notion of music producing an ontologically discrete order of time – a "virtual" time – has been contested, we as composers, performers, and audiences nevertheless delineate and demarcate time *for* music.[41]

T. S. Eliot's poem, *The Dry Salvages* – from which this work draws its name – speaks to this expanse of time and timelessness while contemplating humanity's precarious lot within its perennial current. Eliot often alludes to time eluded, time that exists but was never existed *in*. He worries that technology, both as industrial innovation and theoretical systems, has severed our philosophical connection to the past. There is a reserved pessimism evident throughout the poem, underscoring the futility of trying to master both an eternal past and temporal present. Eliot shares a glimmer of hope when he suggests we might step outside of time to gain a sense of the timeless, to embrace "moments of only half- noticed grace" in which music is "heard so deeply that it is not heard at all." Moments when we are the music, while the music lasts. Located within this aphorism lies a sense of melancholy, the intersection of time and timelessness, the scientific and mythic. It serves as a gentle reminder, perhaps even a warning, of our reciprocal relationship with music as the "art of time"; a culture that we produce and sustain, which in turn produces and sustains us.

This pursuit of time – of *becoming* time – is a salient theme within the work of Japanese artist On Kawara, particularly his performance reading *One Million Years*. Two volunteers sit in a glass booth speaking into microphones, taking it in turns to recite dates progressing one million years into both past and future. Though there is a sense of the formulaic, an exercise as stimulating as it is dull, the work becomes an Adam-and-Eve-esque sculpture that commands space with sound. Writing lines on a chalk board until the message sinks in evokes a form of mantra, though this is no punishment and the message is time itself. Through an adherence to Kawara's instructions, an endurance of concise and conscious repetition, performers may enter a state of mind known as "flow".

*Figure 7. Kawara, On (1999) One Million Years. Installation view at Trafalgar Square.*

The stability and predictability afforded by governing rules provides improvisational freedom, allowing one within this trance-like state to foresee and formulate decisions simultaneously in past and future present, to step "outside" of time.

Critic Jerry Saltz illustrates his experience of the work:

> Depression turns to fury as I realize Kawara has turned me into a puppet. Read another wrong date. Something amazing happens. I decide to look up from the page and begin reciting years with my eyes closed. Start drifting. No idea how many years are passing. Hear only sound. Then sound seems to fall away. I become some sort of Indian raga, the singer and the song. Perceive cadences, rhythms, tonalities. Euphoric. Slowly come back into my body. Look at Molly while reading. She seems to be responding to something too. Feel great. For the last four minutes read perfectly, contentedly, happily, without thought, without time or worry. I like Kawara; I love art. Think about how art has long sought to vanquish time, stretch it, crawl inside it, and allay our fears that no one gets out of here alive.[42]

An inversion of this sense of time can be heard to exist within John Cage's durational piece, *As Slow as Possible*. Originally written for organ in 1987, the precise musical tempo was omitted by Cage and led to an interpretation realised by musicians at Saint Burchardi church in Halberstadt, Germany. Commencing in 2001, the performance is scheduled to last for 639 years – a duration informed by the life expectancy of the purposefully built organ. Sandbags and maintenance staff act as an organic ventilator that lets chord changes and rests occur over a span of years, with the latest note played on September 5, 2020. Time is articulated here as accented moments of isolation; linear points upon a timed continuum that capitulate to what Susan Sontag conceives as mere spectacle. Once tone inflections shift and unfamiliar timbres are introduced, evanescent awe diminuendos as the organ's drone recedes into misbegotten ambience. Ambience can be heard as a mode of passivity, offering no resistance while remaining oblivious to external influence or interjection. Though methodical and meditative, *As Slow as Possible* teeters dangerously upon the brink of "sound-in-itself"; a threshold that, once breached, has the capacity to sever sound's inherent sociality.

Now heard as an exhausted trope, the propensity for and obsession with sound-in-itself continues to pervade fields of sound art and Western music. Seth Kim-Cohen argues that sound-in-itself is coveted for its supposed mystical properties as a sonic purity; its ability to conceal source and referent, defy signification, and retain absolute proximity to itself. He suggests that it aspires to be heard as sine waves, "a pure wave without the complications of overtones, blissfully free of contextual and social problematics."[43] It is implied that this particular sound eschews undesirable complications in signal transmission, instead becoming "unencumbered by historical reference, timbre, instrumental voice, expression, connotation, or previous use."[44]

The organ's prolonged exhales sound as an eerie plead for its own

*Figure 8. Cage, John (1987) As Slow as Possible. Performance at St. Burchardi church, Germany.*

purity, lamenting prayers of remembrance to a lost future. There is something unsettling about subsequent generations literally keeping the organ alive, as if every breath were its last. It is an act of preservation embedded in ritual – religious or otherwise – that conserves certain traditions and ideologies while rigorously clinging to the score as sacred truth. *You are the music while the music lasts* defies sound-in-itself, incorporating the corruption that context and content induce. It strives to be heard as more than an ambient drone that invites introversion and seclusion in service of spirituality.

In order to tune into the broadcast, one must follow a shared link or scan one of numerous QR codes distributed online, around public spaces, and within local music venues. The sounds people are met with are not necessarily inviting, nor do they propose or pretend to be. Instead, the listener is hurled at the intersection of time and timelessness, between noise and silence. Listening, often framed as a pleasure-centric act, becomes a laborious task requiring of the listener a kind of unconventional commitment that reimagines what it means to consume music, to be consumed *by* music. It reveals a propensity for selective hearing, an auditory bias concerned with producing moral judgments based upon aesthetic value or worth. *What do I gain from listening to music*? *What does music gain from listening to me?*

In light of the #MeToo movement, how might unaltruistic attitudes and a fervid willingness to safeguard entitlement to musical pleasures unwittingly excuse abusive acts? Take for example the recent case of musical icon and self-proclaimed "Pied Piper of R&B", R Kelly. Despite facing an extensive list of disturbing accusations and charges, his music continues to be hailed as "certified bangers" at clubs, parties, and bars. I once had to explain to a friend why their comment "yeah he's done some bad shit, but god damn his music slaps" was problematic. Upon questioning them further, I was given a smirk and the response "it's just music, it's not hurting anyone."

This mentality is pervasive and diminishes the seriousness of the situation by detracting from productive conversation with personal prejudices. In a final attempt to seduce fans and appeal to their emotions, R Kelly lived up to his reputation as the Pied Piper by literally singing for his life in order to gain favour and support. The comments on this performance evince a kind of internet hive mind personality content with excusing Kelly due to his gift of a heavenly voice, even claiming that he is the real victim.[45] R Kelly is able to continue influencing and abusing his power – both the power of music and the power it affords – to seemingly hijack emotions by bypassing the rational.

We are often quick to condemn a palpable culprit – the "creator" – yet we are even quicker to disregard the "creation" and its complicity in enabling acts of abuse, bestowing power, and constructing oppressive platforms. Music's performance as an implausible accomplice shifts blame and perpetuates the same

imposed silence that the #MeToo movement was established to break. This is the *unspeakable*, the *unsung*, the Siren's song. Reified in modernity as the musical mystique, the Siren's song continues to echo from an orifice of a proverbial past to vibrate and eventually resonate within the ears of an unknown present. It deters us from interrogating our relationship with and love for music beyond a surface level interaction, a glance, a murmur. In return, music promises us knowledge beyond knowledge and the transgression of self-consciousness, what Pauline Nugent describes as the "ever-hopeless hope of breaking through the bonds of mere human possibility, a fulfilment beyond our grasp."[46]

Throughout human history and mythology, the musician's ability to charm, enchant, and bewitch their audiences remains a romantic staple within popular culture. Society tends to uphold those that create perceptibly "beautiful" art, art that "works" upon us, as gatekeepers to a third realm between that of the temporal and spiritual. They are believed to hold the key and therefore hold the truth, the knowledge, and the means of shaping and distributing such knowledge. This dangerous perception of artist as guide, as vessels or conduits through which hidden energy may ebb and flow, erroneously conflates meritocracy with ethical personhood. In seeking an escape from life's woes, one might become entangled within an unbalanced power dynamic that tenuously embraces flawed but intimate relations between the work of art, the artist, and the spectator. In a faith-based system, what we love matters, *how* we love matters even more. The musical mystique can beguile us into forgetting our place within this relationship, viewing musical performance as an effective response that exempts allegations; the curtain falling signals forgiveness while applause drowns out any voices that would object.

As William Cheng reminds us: "You're entitled to derive a sense of self, self-love, and existential awareness from your musical craft or personal playlist. So far, so good.  But the problem is we rarely stop with self-appraisal; we tend to judge other people, too."[47] Everyone can admit to loving music to a particular degree, some more-so than others. However, it can be tempting to forget that – when caught up in the fervour of a head-over-heels love for music – mistaking musicality as a precondition or prerequisite for humanity can have devastating consequences. For instance, a library in Taranaki installed permanent speakers that blasted the "serene sounds of classical music" to scare away local undesirables.[48] The so-called undesirables, referred to as "riff raff" in interviews, were unfortunately Māori and Pasifika youths only using the public space for its intended purpose. This "harmonious solution" is, in effect, an act of musical colonisation; a dehumanisation that seeks to civilise the "other's" perceived lapse in musical taste or etiquette through degradation.

This decision to employ classical music as a sonic weapon was met with varying degrees of indignation, though not for the reasons one might expect. Not disconcerted by the uncompassionate treatment of fellow humans, most commentators were instead horrified at


*Figure 9. Walker, Fraser (2020) you are the music while the music lasts. QR code. https://youarethemusicwhilethemusiclasts.com.*

the tarnishing of music's reputation as a prestigious artform. Concern was shown not for those affected by musical colonisation, but for music's dignity. This sickening response illustrates what it means to love music till it hurts, to be deaf to the suffering of others. It is curious to see how a facet such as love has failed to pervade discourses of music studies, a field seemingly engrossed with emotional expressivity and ethnographic concerns. Even in academic circles meant to engage music critically, love remains a pejorative that leaves many embarrassed and disparaged, perhaps through its suggested sentimentality and potential for vulnerability. Love also continues to justify and pardon immoral behaviour, as observed from the recent #MeToo movement's attempts at raising awareness for abuse victims. The worshipping of idols and their fan's undying adoration often mitigates histories of misconduct.

Responses to the #MeToo movement from within the music industry have yet to gain noteworthy traction, failing to garner the same amount of attention as seen in Hollywood. Ethnomusicologist Kirsten Zemke argues that these attempts have been subdued due to the insurmountable task of addressing past problematic artists and music's unashamed history of controversial behaviour. All issues of abuse, harassment, and violence simply get thrown into the "too hard-basket".[49] Others believe that large-scale change hasn't occurred due to the fragmented and competitive nature of an industry corrupted by money and dominated by men. With people literally climbing over one another in order to claim stable footing in an inflated and oversaturated market, there exists a willingness to turn a blind eye (or ear) to the development and preservation of unequal power dynamics in a predominantly male environment.[50]

In 2018 streaming stalwart and corporate powerhouse, Spotify, faced controversy when it made a rather impetuous decision to remove the music of R. Kelly and XXXTentacion from its platform. A hollow gesture in faux support of the #MeToo movement, the company neglected to establish clear intentions and were left embarrassed when it was recognised that only Black artists were removed. Not willing to compile a list that included white artists dating back over 50 years, Spotify was quick to reinstate those that it had hastily condemned and offered an apology that ultimately stated they were not prepared to assume the role of judge or jury. The company explicitly affirmed that they did not condone such hateful behaviour and instituted a policy that would allow its audiences to optionally block certain performers that they saw (and heard) as problematic. It seems that our solution to such an enigmatic problem is to deal in absolutes; we either succumb to the rise of cancel culture or are content in separating art from artist in order to ethically consume. In both cases we are absolved of responsibility and continue to benefit from the silencing of unheard voices.

*you are the music while the music lasts* attempts to occupy this void. It offers an intermediate space in which to contemplate our relationship with music and our role as instigators and perpetuators

of its culture. These sonic sentences grapple with an unrequited love for music in hopes of dispelling its mystique; asking what ethical consumption might sound like in a society where sound can be heard as commodity, music as product. The work does not claim to be a solution to the problem, nor does it present itself as justice for crimes committed. Instead, the station invokes radio's sense of social permanence and permeability to instil an earworm, a nascent sonic footprint. Music enables abuse just as much as it inspires abusive behaviour. How can we justify exalting someone for what they give *to* us, what their music does *for* us, while blatantly ignoring what they have done or what their music does to others? If music is said to be empathy incarnate, then how does such a force promote a distinct lack of empathy in those that listen. Since when did musical pleasure eclipse human compassion.

"*Love music and love people. If ever in doubt – or if forced to choose – choose people."*[51]

## A Sounding of Matter, A Matter of Sounding.

How might assumptions of music's predisposition to suffering – its potential to feel – reflect and uphold certain sociocultural ideologies? It remains obvious that, as sound, music can indeed bleed; a process of undesirable auditory spillage, seeping from one source to another. Yet it also remains plausible and not entirely absurd to envisage music as a corporeal, embodied entity capable of being torn or punctured, of having blood drawn. Although romantic, our fascination with and proclivity for metaphorically anthropomorphising musical systems, experiences, and instruments could evidence music's purported bodily performance. Compositions are dissected as if they were living forms; limbs, organs, and skin examined to reveal inner workings. Performers butcher a precious song beyond repair and recognition, just as they once imbued it with an uplifting force that caresses the heart. One might cry out in empathetic anguish upon witnessing the mistreatment of a violin, neck snapped, body broken – as if it were a sacred relic from some ancient religion.

Residual traces of music's mystique linger within these anthropomorphic sentiments. Desires for music to do more, to *be more*. This becomes apparent when influential musicians such as Esperanza Spalding allude to their role as mystical, claiming "luthiers are mystics, too, because they are creating these vessels for divine vibrations to enter the world through."[52] I love a bit of hyperbole as much as anyone, but my suspension of disbelief evaporates in the face of such comments. Spalding's response comes from a recent article that seeks to personify instruments as extra limbs in order to illustrate the bond shared with these musically prosthetic implants. It goes on to suggest that damage incurred by musical instruments isn't merely skin deep; equating the loss to that of a lover and venerating them as sacred objects "charged with so much spirit that they must be treated with reverence."[53] One should be hesitant in dismissing such statements as pure embellishment, lest they disregard an enduring history of culturally inscribed musical doctrines, reiterated for centuries.

It is noteworthy to consider the musical instrument's capacity as tool for communication, emotional expressivity, and its instrumental role in employing music as a sonic, cultural, and weaponised force. Musical instruments yearn to be seen and heard as more than just a means to an end, but do they have rights? How might these translatory devices – capable of simultaneously possessing and being possessed – invite and procure agency? Musical instruments exist as pseudo-autonomous objects situated within the cultural, conceptual, and political; to be understood as "instrumentalities in the context of human affairs."[54]

Philip Alperson notes that music is often presented and understood in a manner that accentuates the association between instrument and performer, to the point where "it is difficult to say where the instrument ends and the rest of the body begins."[55] Through this

sense the musical instrument's faculty as embodied entity is revealed, fostering an ambiguous transmutation of musical prosthesis with a living, performative body. This intimate albeit exposed relationship – an expansion of emotional, sonic, and physical boundaries – implicates the human body's organic processes, thus allowing musical instruments to transcend their reputation as lifeless mechanisms.

*From this are and do come admirable adaptions* (2020) contemplates this transcategorical nature of musical instruments. It considers them embodied entities, hearing sound as proof of animacy while recognising a transgression between boundaries of naturalness and artificiality, the living and the dead. Concerned with certain anthropomorphic tendencies, the work examines musical frisson's sense of unease – the shiver down one's spine – evoked upon witnessing acts of instrument abuse, mistreatment, or destruction. Detachment sprouts astonishment, anger to disgust, sorrow to awe, attachment eventually dwindles to indifference.

Located within these enigmatic responses are philosophical tensions that entwine human-object-divine relations, sounding an instruments' inextricability from the contexts they perform and are performed by. The work observes sacrifice as a ritualistic spectacle embedded within both secular and spiritual practices, positing musical instruments as heirlooms of great historical, sociocultural, religious, and political significance. What influence does the musical mystique have in amplifying or deflating reverence towards these instruments as embodied entities besieged?

The sacrificial performance of violence upon a musical instrument is intended to express an expansion and contraction of creative potential, a reciprocity necessary in any process of transmutation. What must be offered in order to reach the limits of expressivity, to rupture boundaries of expectation and plunge into uncharted sonicity? As a trained musician, it is encouraged to play what one hears in their head – assuming it is something worth hearing – though what of the sounds that one doesn't hear or could never hear due to a purely musical auditory conditioning?

There is a moment in John Coltrane's live 1966 album – ironically entitled *Offering* – that speaks to this transcendence of musical and instrumental constraints. Coltrane temporarily abandons his saxophone, resorting instead to vocalizing, screaming, and bellowing while beating on his chest. This gesture's interpretation has developed alongside the apocrypha surrounding Coltrane's death months later and the occult writings regarding his spiritual approach to music. From exhausting the expressive potential of his instrument to reproducing qualities of Buddhist chant, from realising an existential insufficiency of time to ingesting copious amounts of LSD, the performance continues to fascinate romantic and realist alike.

Early iterations of *from this are and do come admirable adaptations* involved visual and sonic documentation of the immolation of a

*Figure 10. Walker, Fraser (2020) from this are and do come admirable adaptations. Still from video. https://vimeo.com/530063480.*

saxophone. This process was conducted using an oxy-acetylene welder; producing an instrumental husk caught between its performative life and a state of lifelessness, beyond traditional conceptions of playability. Familiar components are melted away while new tone holes are forged, generating sounds the instrument was not previously permitted or capable of making. A similar gesture was later extended to encompass instruments of a jazz quartet, implementing various industrial procedures to perform an alchemical distillation of sound.

These extramusical sounds – "foreign matter that threatens to infect music's sanctity"[56] – were collated to create a composition accenting the often-neglected sonic material that is indispensable in shaping our temporal experience of music's performance. The rasping of breath, pattering of keys, crackling of metal, and bellowing of flames are synthesized to form what Amanda Lalonde describes as a "living-dead amalgamation of breath and metal, wood, sinew, and string."[57] For if sound is a substance that implies sentience while inspiring expression, then "what else is sound, but the voice of all moving bodies, emerging from their inner beings?"[58]

Presented as an audiovisual installation, the sound work was diffused within a building's extensive maintenance shaft, amplifying the piece as if air blown through a saxophone's bell. Audience members were invited to walk through the darkened space, hearing sound resonate throughout artificial frames and feeling the visceral vibrations of organic bodies. A persistent candle-like glow flickers from a single television, bouncing off the surrounding walls. The accompanying video work documents the instrument's transitional process as it endures acts of destruction and reconstruction. It offers the audience a protracted and magnified perspective of sacrifice, accentuating the musical instrument as a potential site of bodily and conceptual transformation. Through the removal of distinguishably human features, their explicit intervention, and locational context, attention is concentrated towards the site of a violent tool vs tool interaction. By incorporating specific cinematic language and techniques that play with perception, the musical instrument is brought in and out of focus as an architectural body being operated upon, a phantom limb. This poetic abstraction attempts to circumvent the violent gesture as a purely overt theatrical spectacle – hearing it as more than mere schadenfreude.

In any process of transformation, varying degrees of violence manifest as necessary catalysts in the occurrence of growth. Possibilities are extended through sacrifice, a give-and-take that teases reactions and interactions beyond conventional limitations. Musical instruments as embodied entities, cultural or historical artifacts, and religious icons have a tumultuous relationship with the performance of sacrificial acts. Instrument destruction has become a ritualistic gesture repeated across various artistic, musical, and socio-political movements.

Guitarist Jimi Hendrix doused his axe in lighter fluid and stroke a match, proceeding to convene with spirits in a carnal ceremony.

*Figure 11. Walker, Fraser (2020) from this are and do come admirable adaptations. Still from video. https://vimeo.com/530063480.*

Artist Nam June Paik spent 5 minutes slowly but meticulously raising a violin to his head, only to suddenly shatter it in one fell swoop. Members of the British RAF fostered a tradition of burning pianos in defiance of obligatory piano lessons, refuting claims they would improve pilots' culture, manners, and taste. These musical instruments adopt functions previously unforeseen by their makers, becoming instrumentalities in expressing that which a purely musical paradigm cannot hope to accomplish. In a world desensitised to violence, why do acts of instrument destruction continue to elicit responses of disgust, outrage, and sorrow amongst particular audiences?

Stephen Davies proposes a number of theories that address our reaction to instrument abuse; facile excuses we might employ to justify a wince, grimace, or shudder.[59] If instruments – handcrafted or mass produced – are unique objects imbued with monetary and artisanal value, then why does the destruction of inferior instruments still warrant protest? Especially when aware that no permanent damage will be inflicted, or mistreatment is only implied. If instruments function as tools channelling divine sounds, does an inappropriate or non-musical utilisation serve to degrade creative potential? Does a lack of usefulness or irreparable damage suffered by time pardon euthanasia? If instruments deserve reverence even in dust-ridden unplayable states, is it only because of the long-established tradition, repertoire, and romantic canonisation they represent? This hierarchy benefits those of a privileged musical ancestry, omitting instruments with leaner lineages such as the theremin or MPC.

Davies goes on to admit that, although these rationales help explain initial trepidations, they cannot account entirely for the residue left behind by music's mystique. Important to note is the role musical instruments play in various indigenous cultures, both as ceremonial instigators and symbolic or sacred representatives. Musical instruments in these traditional contexts often exceed intentions of mere musical production and reception that emphasise pleasure, sounding narratives not necessarily meant to be heard by foreign ears. It is not uncommon for them to be regarded as sentient characters commanding great respect, evident in Javanese culture where walking over instruments is a deplorable offense or the gamelan is blessed and given extra portions of ritual meals.[60] Davies subsequently acknowledges the cultural insensitivities that might contribute to responses of instrument abuse, offering an alternative theory by framing the musical instrument as an embodied entity, an extension with agency:

We regard musical instruments not merely as financially valuable artifacts, as carefully designed for a particular function, and as heirs to noble traditions of composition and performance, but as 'honorary persons' or, at least, as continuous with their user in virtue of their power to extrapolate the personal boundaries of the agent who employs them. As a result, we react to instrument abuse much as we do to certain forms of human injury.[61]

Alternative approaches are suggested by Matteo Ravasio, who discards Davies' *value, tool, tradition,* and *honorary persons* theories in favour of his own *artistic value* theory.[62] Ravasio argues that musical instruments demand the same respect we accord to works of art, transcending the role of tool that a paint brush or chisel might play. They can be understood as integral participants in our experience of music as a performance art; for their "expressive possibilities are the subject of our attention and of our artistic appreciation towards music."[63] As objects that simultaneously produce and are produced by music, an instrumental sacrifice may be justified in the procurement of artistic value.

Both Davies and Ravasio acknowledge that, while an instrument's intrinsic value might be informed by its status as quasi-life form, the theory requires further refinement – a fleshing out. Instances of self-inflicted harm, and scenarios in which anaesthetised patients – or fresh cadavers – are incised only serve to complicate theories of instrumental personhood. Musical instruments continue to fluctuate across ontological thresholds, mutating between limb-like extensions of performers and embodied entities performed.

A relevant sacrificial sound event can be heard within the practice of New Zealand composer, Annea Lockwood, particularly in her *Piano Transplants* series. Inspired by Cageian aleatoric principles, the works are presented as text scores that instruct performers to permanently prepare pianos through actions such as burying, burning, or drowning. These gestures frame time as a process of decay that extracts sonic simplicities, a reflection of Lockwood's interest in deconstructing prevailing obsessions with elaborate timbral experimentation. Instead, she wished to focus the listener's attention on a sound's intrinsic sonic signature; "to treat it as a miniature composition, hearing how complex and interesting its internal structure could be."[64]

In *Piano Burning,* Lockwood originally sought to capture the sound of burning in order to induce a sense of heat for a collaborative project, resorting to a defunct piano as glorified kindling. She notes the decision was purely pragmatic and not intended as political commentary on iconoclasm or the fall of bourgeois culture (both common interpretations).[65] Unlike the violent gestures of instrument destruction in the Fluxus movement, the work results in a meditative albeit melancholic social gathering existing somewhere between a funeral and beach bonfire.

There is an awkward presence of romanticised "sounds-in-themselves" in Lockwood's work, a bracketing that adheres to Pauline Oliveros' notion of "deep listening" and the "acousmatic reduction". This sensibility hears sounds-in-themselves as "deeply valuable entities, imbued with eternally rewarding sensual and experiential qualities", to be mined or excavated like ore within bedrock.[66] It often eschews outside intervention or influence, preferring to "treat sound as a material substance external to signification and discursivity"[67] revelling in presumed transcendental ineffability. Evident when hearing Lockwood speak

*Figure 12. Lockwood, Annea (1968) Piano Burning. Performance in London.*

to *Piano Burning*, her tone seems to convey hesitancy; a wary unwillingness to divulge the work's conceptual possibilities for fear of corrupting it with politics, as if speaking might dispel all hopes of magic. By letting "sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories or expression of human sentiments"[68], there lies risk for passivity to breed blissful ignorance and condone navel-gazing. In contradistinction, Seth Kim-Cohen offers "shallow listening" as an alternative by inviting us to "imagine the same volume of listening attention. But instead of condensing it within a concentrated, narrow-gauge bandwidth, shallow listening pools at the surface, spreading out to encompass adjacent concerns and influences that the tunnel vision of the deep model would exclude."[69]

Readings of Lockwood's *Piano Transplants* mention the score's explicit instructions to use a defunct piano, although the intent and motivation behind such a direction is never disclosed or questioned. It remains an assumed obviousness, a courtesy. The request – comparable to a disclaimer stating "no real pianos were harmed in the making of this artwork" – is instrumental in reassessing the work's political potential or lack thereof. What does it mean to transplant dead or dying tissue? What tensions would be introduced if a living piano were set alight instead of an effigy? *Piano Burning* – as ritual sacrifice or funerary cremation – instils certain attitudes towards instrument destruction and exposes romantic anthropomorphic tendencies discussed earlier.

Lockwood's insistence for a piano beyond repair is proof of this; a reverence that posits instruments as inherently valuable, whether as sacred objects, personified and embodied entities, or otherwise. Upon witnessing the performance, a suspension of disbelief occurs almost as if participating in a WWE event. There is no threat, no repercussions, no stakes involved; yet audiences come away feeling profoundly moved and deeply offended. This dynamic is integral to understanding the "liveness" of musical instruments and the enigmatic responses that acts of instrumental violence continue to elicit.

As the piano burns away layer by layer, once sought-after sounds-in-themselves are rendered almost inconsequential, left smouldering embers muffled by the dazzlingly beautiful flames. *Piano Burning* evinces a precarious undulation between sound event and visual spectacle, inviting an audience to meditate as a collective while silently exchanging stories around a literal campfire. Though the work suggests a cathartic, reflective experience, precisely what is being reflected upon remains uncertain. It exists in a self-imposed limbo devoid of lucid purpose, an ambience that resists being elevated above thresholds of provocation and urgency.

Christian Marclay's 1999 work, *Guitar Drag*, can be heard to burst open these thresholds with unapologetic candour, confronting its audience with a presence that refuses to be ignored. The audiovisual installation exhibits an electric guitar being

*Figure 13. Marclay, Christian (1999) Guitar Drag. Stills from video.*

methodically tied to the back of a pickup truck using rope and duct tape. An instrument cable is run to an amplifier that sits in the cargo bed, then the guitar is viciously dragged behind the vehicle as it speeds away. The ensuing sound is abrasive, disturbing, and all-consuming; much like attending a rock concert, albeit severely more confounding. Amplified distorted screeches blend with the truck's incessant guttural growl, punctuated by the sickening thud of the guitar's wooden body convulsing across grass, dirt, and asphalt.

Marclay admits the work was not intended to be a pleasant experience, instead emphasising the physical and visceral nature of sound as an intensity. *Guitar Drag* was made in response to the murder of James Byrd Jr., a black man who was ruthlessly dragged to death for three miles behind the pickup truck of white supremacists in Texas. In grafting such heinous human suffering onto an anthropomorphised inanimate body, Marclay has wilfully entangled the guitar as a metaphoric substitution in a web of complex "human-object-divine relations."[70] Eliot Bates calls this the "social life of instruments", arguing for a conception of "musical instruments as not only having some degree of agency, but even as protagonists of stories—as actors who facilitate, prevent, or mediate social interaction."[71]

*Guitar Drag* incites a perturbingly open-ended conversation, referencing performance art and rock's "shared emphasis on real-time, real world encounters between bodies and objects framed by tangible social and psychic pressures." The destructive and confrontational aesthetics incorporated in these cultural movements create conflict by introducing chance as a volatile and potentially violent force capable of "activating physical, social, and aesthetic risk." This conflict tests the corporeal and sensual boundaries of lived bodily experience, revealing tensions between the pleasure and politics of music, or as Marclay suggests, "the tension between fun and violence."[72]

In his critique of the work, Carlos Kase observes a potent reframing of event as object – ephemeral gestures made perennial – an inversion of the object-event transformations integral to Fluxus practices. Kase argues that *Guitar Drag* "presents the conversion of a historically contingent (significantly, sonic) event, rife with indeterminacies and accidents, into a frozen trace of these once, at least partially, unpredictable performative possibilities."[73] Technical details such as inferred duration, number of takes, correlation between image and sound, and multiple camera angles are "evidence of the artist's manipulation of the event in order to create a text with dramatic – not historical – unity."[74]

*Guitar Drag* is often construed as a continuous, coextensive performance; a false impression crafted by nonfiction filmmaking that implies an authentic documentation of a supposed singularity. It is an illusion of continuity and performative honesty. Indictive of Marclay's collage influenced processes, the work is a mediation and departure from conventional modes of documentative

performances, transposing Griersonian concepts of documentary as "the creative treatment of actuality."[75] In its assemblage of sonic and visual material, *Guitar Drag* implicates instruments in an attempt to illustrate the incommensurable bodily presence of violence. Countless philosophical dissonances are generated that propose an ambivalent relationship between dramatic spectacle and artistic statement, decadence and protest.

*Piano Burning* and *Guitar Drag* offer radically different interpretations of destruction as an artistic gesture and performance of bodily violence. They demonstrate distinct passive and assertive immediacies, activating musical instruments' agential potential in expressing inexpressibilities beyond conventional musical systems. Parallels might be drawn to Gustav Metzger's "auto-destructive art" which sought to reject the powers of capitalist and consumerist culture, critiquing society's destructive compulsions and lack of concern for its repercussions. Metzger's work articulated how "even mechanically-produced objects – in which he believed society was placing a dangerous level of faith – would ultimately degrade, a process over which humans would have no control."[76]

Though the instrument "does not simulate life though the mimicry of human behaviour", its ambiguity as embodied entity is made manifest through an attribution of anthropomorphic, spiritual, or temporal value.[77] Capable of interfacing with divine, sociocultural, and political processes, musical instruments' integration in human-machine affairs produces a "paradoxical living-dead status."[78] The sonic sensibilities of new materialism might hear them as living-dead things thinging.[79]

The personified uncanniness of musical instruments – their synthesising of artificial and organic performance – obscures distinctions, locating them as transcategorical vessels able to navigate between secular and spiritual realms. Informed by alchemical processes of destruction and reconstruction, where sacrifice is instrumental in transmutation, *from this are and do come admirable adaptations* seeks to hear this intersection of scientific and mythical existence. Oscillating between states of disenchantment and re-enchantment, musical instruments transgress ontological thresholds as instrumentalities in not only emulating sound's past but in hearing and performing its future. How might such attitudes towards violence inflicted upon personified, prosthetic bodies perform an instrumental role in understanding our relationship to human-musical production and reception?

## No Longer Vibing.

Music can change the world. I'm sure when Beethoven spoke those words he had nothing but good intentions, though it is these good intentions – intentions of good – that are often taken for granted. It is easy to forget about the implied or presumed "for the better" that usually follows this aphorism when viewing said world through rose-tinted glasses. Music can become an insidious synonym for righteous ideals; a universal force of good understood to ameliorate those that listen by moving bodies to emotive, conceptual, and sensorial experience.[80]

As a sonic substance, music is an instrumentality indicative of movement. Its capacity to transform, modify, and replace human initiated processes remains undisputed; whether as a tool for inspiring peaceful ambitions and activating sociocultural protests, or as a weapon in motivating courses of war and fostering hateful behaviour. Yet music's influence – as the "abstract art form par excellence" – seems to omit the presence of its own dark potentiality, inciting a purely romantic and tacit assumption that "music is inevitably personally and socially therapeutic."[81] With the advent of music's use as an instrument of torture in government inflicted acts of acoustic violence[82], such a utopian misconception has been shattered along with any hopes for a revelatory musical rapture.

Technological advances and human ingenuity stand as testament to the restorative qualities of music being reverse-engineered and abused as weaponised sound. Bodies are forced to vibrate involuntarily and unsympathetically, a violation of both anatomy and imagination that destroys subjectivities instead of rebuilding them. Kant often alluded to such freedom-depriving possibilities in his writing, referring to music as an obtrusive, formless nuisance; a "heavy perfume which gives a treat to all around whether they like it or not."[83] Adorno also shared a similar distrust in music's all-pervasive power, perturbed that Dionysian consumption might eventually degrade modern culture. He claimed music's privilege to be its weakness, that "as the most immediate expression of instinct, it both carries the greatest emancipatory potential and would be therefore the most vulnerable to distortion."[84]

Deleuze and Guattari responded to these concerns of control – of music's ungovernable sonorous energy – by presenting deterritorialisation as a positive and potent process able to translate and connect finite collective experience with an infinite universe. However, they were not ignorant to the destructive tendencies that might emerge from creative deterritorialisation, cautioning that "music has a thirst for destruction, every kind of destruction, extinction, breakage, dislocation. Is that not its potential 'fascism'?"[85]

The appropriation and sanction of music in methods of torture over the past century tends to elude media coverage. It is a

phenomenon that seldom registers on public radar, appearing in conversation as fable or folk tale. When confronted with the postulation of music's complicity in practices of torture – of music *as* violence – a curious set of reactions often occurs. One might respond with instinctive laughter at such absurdity, especially if the theme from *Barney the Dinosaur* is mentioned as was the case in a conference that Jonathan Pieslak gave on psychological warfare.[86] This initial humour can take a sickening turn, evident by the numerous forums dedicated to creating "torture playlists" inspired by the CIA's list of declassified songs used against detainees.[87]

After one recognises that music torture is no laughing matter, they might seek to justify it as a necessary measure taken in the War on Terror. This is precisely the response *Metallica* member, James Hetfield, gave when he discovered that his band's music had been employed by U.S. interrogators to break Iraqi prisoners of war. Hetfield displayed hubristic patriotism, proclaiming he felt honoured that the U.S. military were playing *Metallica* to "help us stay safe."[88] Finally, perhaps after feeling ashamed at earlier responses, one might assert that music torture is not "real" torture – or in fact music – at all. Steve Asheim, drummer from *Deicide*, refused to believe that loud music could constitute torture, boasting that if he was subject to such interrogation techniques he'd simply retort "is this all you got? Come on!"[89]

While not all reactions to inhumane violence are void of compassion, these particular attitudes evince music torture's paradox as an unimaginable imaginability. Misconstrued presumptions are usually formed based upon personal experiences of music as auditory irritant, discomforting loudness, or aesthetically tasteless. Such memories of pain and pleasure are evoked in an attempt to empathise with prisoners, though might the "very circulation of torture's metaphors signal a faulty imagination of torture's realities?"[90] These truly horrifying realities of music torture are inextricable from the violent context from which they sound, intensities lost in translation and diluted by language.

For music – when exerted as a deafening and imposing sonic force – "pricks the skin, pummels the bone, penetrates the viscera, and unhinges the mind. It can discombobulate, traumatize, and humiliate. It breaks down subjectivity, rendering prisoners unable to hear themselves think. Vibrations, while invisible, do leave visible marks on their victims: twitches and tremors, the aftershocks of injury echoing in flesh."[91] The physiological and psychological aspects of listening – once an agential process – are seized as a mechanism in weaponisation, leaving the ear and its vibrating body vulnerable to dominance through coercion and control.

Responding to acoustic violence, *No-Touch Disco* (2020) attempts to investigate the potential harm of certain musical activities and social practices in reflecting and facilitating the "illogical logic of music torture."[92] How might society's glorification of loudness and

*Figure 14. Walker, Fraser (2020) No-Touch Disco. Still from video.*

establishments for audiovisual hedonism inadvertently perpetuate pernicious dispositions that simulate the "black ecstasy"[93] exercised at global black sites? This sinister inversion of club experience exploits music's transportive capacity, sonically transposing pleasure with pain, collectivity with isolation, and presence with absence. Listeners are violently pulled into a sonic sensibility that hears agency as threshold, becoming both a tortured instrument and an instrument of torture, bodies played against their will.

*No-Touch Disco* seeks to deconstruct the dynamic between a music box and its activator, examining sound's latent corruption as it accompanies a dancer spinning precariously around empowerment and disempowerment. Creative features intrinsic to dance and music – rhythm, form, improvisation – become tensions stretched, reimagined as violent possibilities where noise and silence perform as expectation and uncertainty weaponised. By implicating autonomy in musical entrainment – imposed or otherwise – music now operates on a spectrum of extremes; one's subjectivity is either sacrificed willingly or taken with and through sonic force.

The work, culminating as a multichannel audiovisual installation, was made in collaboration with Wellington-based dancer and choreographer, Taylor-Jane Smith. The visual element, presented as multiple static CCTV-esque perspectives, follows Taylor traversing a labyrinthine staircase, dancing sporadically from screen to screen. Her choreography was entirely improvised and incorporated unfamiliar, almost grotesque motions – spasms, contortions, leaps, staggering – as an abstraction of traditional dance. At one moment she would be laboriously crawling up steps only to disappear off screen, reappearing across the room sliding down a banister or rolling past an alcove.

These movements were informed by sounds generated from contact microphones attached to the staircase and fed to Taylor via wireless headphones. The vibrations from Taylor's interactions with the steps, banisters, and floor were synthesised live by myself using a technique known as "no-input mixing"[94]. Harnessing the intentionally internalised feedback loop of a mixing console to create unpredictable and volatile noise, Taylor acted as an input within the signal chain. She became an embodiment of the sonic feedback loop which she both influenced and was influenced by. This interplay of unconventional dance and erratic sonic score led to Taylor and me performing a rather peculiar game of musical statues, dictated by all-consuming noise and punctuated with deafening silence. The soundscape of the staircase – including Taylor's breathing and bodily verbalisations – was captured as an Ambisonic recording and diffused within the space using speakers. A single pair of headphones, playing the harsh noise heard by Taylor, bled into the installation; allowing the audience to voluntarily experience an isolated or collective listening.

Noise does not accompany; it swallows, burrows, and grasps. The body becomes but a host as it takes possession of ears, sense, and time. Actions become reactions to noise's penetrating demands,

*Figure 15. Walker, Fraser (2020) No-Touch Disco. Still from video.*

commanding space of body and mind, excluding all other sensorial possibilities while usurping flesh and bone. Salomé Voegelin imagines noise as a pinning verticality, where "the vertical pull of noise intensifies listening's solitary experience" by disintegrating meaning and intersubjectivity[95]. In this confronting isolation, noise acts to manufacture an unrelenting present where one exists in unbound liminality. Unable to contribute to the sonic environment, verbal communication is eradicated as noise severs the cord to the social, producing "a euphoria, an ecstasy of freedom in the besieged but autonomous body."[96]

Silence can then be heard as a reclamation of sociality and subjectivity, a horizontal sweeping that sutures the fragmented and heavy nature of vertical noise. For Voegelin, silence is a generative and inclusive process that – in its horizontality – accentuates bodily relations to and within a sonic lifeworld. In its capacity to reflect upon the listener their own auditory experience, silence is not a recess of noise nor "the absence of sound but the beginning of listening."[97]

In describing both noise and silence, Voegelin notes that noise's distinctive power does not lie in its purported loudness but in its exclusivity. The security that silence once offered is tainted by noise, condemning one to a state of perpetual awareness and unpredictability where the ear is never allowed to blink, a "locality of hearing rather than the future of listening."[98] This conception of noise's "vertical downpour" and silence's "horizontal expanse" shares similarities with Steven Friedson's formulation of sonically "being-there" and "being-away". Friedson's investigation into African trance – specifically the Vodu shrines of the black Atlantic – and American torture reveals a shocking relationship that shares musical performance as ritual sacrifice.

While such contexts might seem irreconcilable, Friedson observes conflating elements of possession and agency that intersect at "the boundaries of musical experience and in doing so refract each other in a mirrored play, a ring dance of being-away and being-there."[99] One is life affirming, the other life diminishing. One encourages collectivity, while the other enforces isolation. Both are sacrificial, though one is fundamentally more sacred than the other.

For Friedson, being-away entails a "letting go of the tension of consciousness", as experienced in the spirit possession of Vodu devotees who literally dance the gods into existence.[100] The excess energy produced in such a euphoric ritual is channelled through a shrine member – a voluntary sacrifice – who offers their body as a vessel to the divine. This temporary state of trance, induced by music and dance, emplaces bodily existence somewhere between the temporal and spiritual, contributing to the empowerment of community and musical gathering. The process can also be witnessed in more mundane settings, where one might enter flow state while driving or fall into a lucid reverie.

Musicologist Luis-Manuel Garcia notes how "being-away" often permeates EDM scenes and rave culture, where music is not so

*Figure 16. Diavasti, Anastasia (2017) Puce Mary/Frederikke Hoffmeier. Live noise performance at Sound Acts, Athens.*

much heard but viscerally felt. Garcia recognises a fascination and obsession with the tactility of "bass pressure"; the insistently loud low frequencies where "sonic affect becomes haptically manifest as force and movement" upon participating bodies.[101] Willingly surrendering to the beat provides "a sonic experience of force and coalescing solidity that both references and responds to the socio-cultural circumstances of their production."[102] Being-away always involves consent and collective enthusiasm. Though it is a form of escape, one has autonomy over where and when the "away" is escaped to and from.

In contrast, "being-there" can be understood as an "antiritual ritual where, instead of bringing people together into a shared experience, musical experiences are meant to isolate individuals, to instill regression."[103] Time ceases to exist as past or future, instead exacting a present so heavy that it holds the listener hostage to their own listening. There is no escape, no alleviating "away". Sonic torture weaponises this experience in an imposed ritual initiation of sensory deprivation that sacrifices an unwilling tribute in the name of "debility, dependence, and dread."[104] It is through this exclusivity – noise's vertical downpour – that music bombards prisoners into learned helplessness, confiscating both body and mind. In these auditory situations involving music, one might hear and misinterpret music torture's loudness as simply "sheer sound" or "music-as-such".

Seminal musicologist Suzanne Cusick has argued against this problematic misconception, concerned that such misnomers fail to implicate music's elusive mystique. Cusick has acknowledged contradictions introduced when attempting to investigate music torture through the lens of musicology, where the violent acts are understood as matters of vibration or materiality and not necessarily musical:

> Whether the sounds used in detention camps functioned as music or not, among the most horrifying aspects of these practices is the degradation of the thing we call "music." . . . The thing we have revered for an ineffability to which we attribute moral and ethical value is revealed as morally and ethically neutral— as just another tool in human beings' blood- stained hands. This feels like the stripping away of a soul from a body, and therefore like some kind of violent, violating death. It is, therefore, as horrifying *for us* as it is for its obviously intended victims (though not as painful), tearing away parts of the collective subjectivity— the culture— we have for so long taken for granted, and subsumed under the heading of "Western values."[105]

Andrew Chung asserts that the restrictions of musicological analysis may leave ajar "a conceptual trapdoor that can inadvertently allow music-as-such to escape prosecution by substituting sonic materiality as a scapegoat."[106] Musical meaning, form, and structure seem inconsequential when subjected to sound at ear-piercing and body-breaking volume. However, it is these apparently innocuous traits inherent to musical sound – melody, harmony,

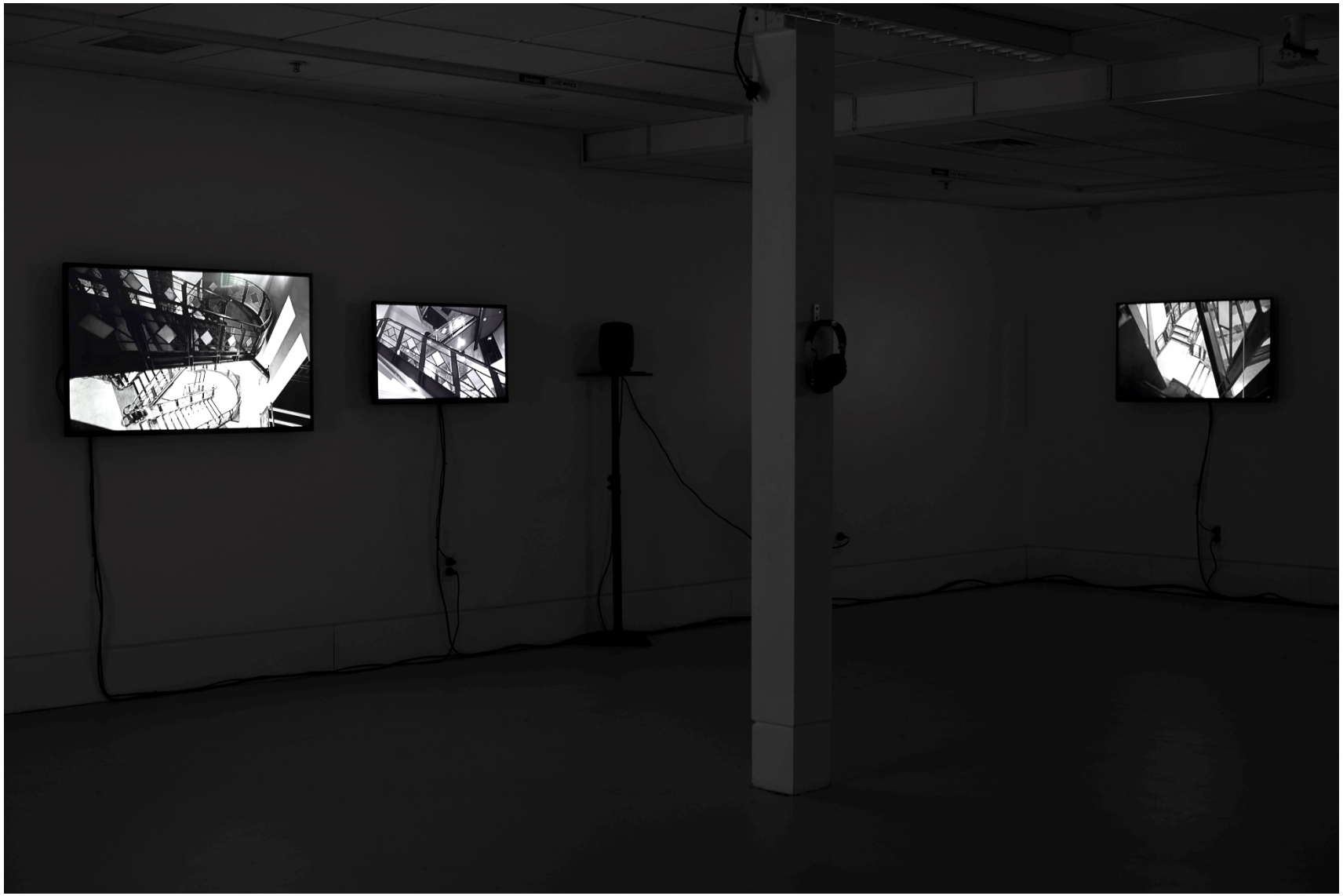

*Figure 17. Walker, Fraser (2020) No-Touch Disco. Still from video.*

rhythm, and lyrical content – that allowed the U.S. government to sanction the use of music torture under the euphemism "torture lite".[107] Sonic loudness is only part of the equation.

The often sexually explicit lyrics of Christina Aguilera's music were used to threaten the sensibilities of devoted Muslim prisoners, a form of gender coercion that enforces cultural "othering".[108] Metal music is administered precisely for its heavy "blast beats" that confine one to the moment, filling "up rhythmic space and leaving no alternative" through relentless repetition.[109] Forced participation in music making exhibits a disturbing reverse engineering of music therapy, where one is degraded and humiliated beyond repair as they sing their lungs out till exhaustion.[110] Such psychological violence has come to be known as "no-touch" torture, where bodies are controlled from a dissimulating distance that absolves all blame.[111] There is no physical evidence, no bruise; yet the manipulation of perception and destruction of subjectivity inflicted remains a reverberated wound that even time can't heal.

Turning to a specifically non-musical occurrence of acoustic violence, the work of Lawrence Abu Hamdan examines the intersection of sound and politics, how voices are distributed and ears damaged. Abu Hamdan describes himself as a "private ear", one who isn't necessarily interested in the medium of sound itself, but an investigator of the political, social, and cultural narratives that might be extracted from sonic experience. A particular body of work, entitled *Earwitness Theatre* (2019), was created in response to an acoustic investigation into the sonic conditioning of Syrian prison, Saydnaya. *Saydnaya (the missing 19db)* (2017) considers, in contrast to the sensory deprivation of music torture, the violent function of silence designed to restrict and suppress bodily movement, speech, and breathing.

Abu Hamdan sought to measure the pressure of deafening silence exerted upon prisoner's bodies, working with detainee's acoustic memories to produce testimony regarding the inner workings of Saydnaya. A threshold of audibility was determined using oral and aural processes of whispering, articulating that "the border between whisper and speech is concurrently the border between life and death."[112] The physical and phycological silence endured within Saydnaya serves to amplify bodily violence, resulting in recurring detrimental effects on survivor's acts of speech and hearing.

Later works, *Earwitness Inventory* (2018) and *After Sfx* (2018), seek to address the distinct and perplexing lack of language for describing sounds and sonic experience. The works compile Abu Hamdan's personal sound effects library, a collection of 95 custom made and sourced objects derived from the witness descriptions of sounds heard when imprisoned at Saydnaya. They draw attention to society's preference for and reliance upon visual stimulus and objects when discussing acoustic phenomenon. Objects tend to act as sonic signifiers or mnemonic devices to which sounds are

*Figure 18. Abu Hamdan, Lawrence (2017) Earwitness Theatre installation view, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane.*

tethered. Separating our experience of violent sound from cinema becomes nearly impossible, where object and sound remain conjoined to the violent incident within the acoustic imagination.

Through an amalgamation of human voice, sonic recollection, and architecture, Abu Hamdan is able to solicit the sounds emerging from Saydnaya's silence, developing a language for survivor's acoustic memories and providing earwitness accounts of the otherwise unheard violence. This collection of foley instruments serves as incriminating evidence in a sonic trial of silence, signifying "a language that we do not yet speak, a language of and between objects."[113] Abu Hamdan's practice expresses an intriguing intersection between art, science, and law. Within these various modes of truth production, sound's inability to be contained – its "leakage" – acts as a datum in pushing the boundaries of what constitutes testimony and speech.

Informed by these conceptions and sensorial aesthetics of noise and silence, my work *No-Touch Disco* attempts to consider sound's capacity in fragmenting subjectivity and bodily agency. It draws inspiration from the cultural phenomenon of silent discos and their curious performance of agency that evinces a kind of collective isolation, what Michael Bull defines as "accompanied solitude."[114] This convergence of public and private auditory experience dissects being-away and being-there, where "aurality acts as a meeting point between exterior/physical and interior/perceptual worlds."[115] The work acknowledges that musical entrainment exists as both a voluntary and involuntary experience. However, under duress – a ballerina spinning to the sounds of its own music box – it is a threshold of consent that blurs pain and pleasure, isolation and collectivity. While music's transportive potential is corrupted and abused by the violence of torture, the very same physio-aural-haptic experiences of immersion are willingly sought by audiences of rock, metal, and noise music.

David Novak, in his study of Japanese noise music, describes the experience of witnessing a live noise performance:

> At the beginning of a good Noise show, he said, the volume "just sucks all the air out of the room," leaving the listener suspended in sound: "You can feel your whole body react [he snapped his body back as if suddenly startled] when they start – the sound fills your mind completely and you can't think. At first you're just shrinking back, until you overcome that and let it go, and then you're in it and you're just being blown away."[116]

Michael Heller refers to this experience as "listener collapse", occurring when "loud sound dissolves the ability to distinguish between interior and exterior worlds, especially in regard to sound and self."[117] In these sites, sound is no longer heard as impalpable or detached, instead confronting bodily processes and disrupting conventional modes of musical experience through corporeal intensity. One is no longer listening *to* or *at* sound, but *with* noise.

Taylor and I were interested in exploring these attributes inherent to noise – its physical and visceral embodiment of movement – in shaping and being shaped by dance. While dancing, Taylor became an agential input within the signal chain of a feedback loop, a subjectivity both producing and produced by noise. The staircase served not only as a partner or instrument, but as a mediator in negotiating the experience of being-there and being-away. Taylor observed that her only concepts of time were feelings of crushing fatigue or liberating spurts of energy from working with and against the staircase. In "becoming noise", she lost all recollection of *how* and perception of *when* she had reached a certain position or assumed a certain stance, revealing an improvised endurance that abstracts time and place. Noise can be heard to enact a flattening of perceptual binaries "in the overlapping and repetitive feedback between 'noise' and 'music', 'local' and 'global', 'old and 'new', that generates new modes of musical and social experience"[118]

## At the Edge of a Musical Precipice

*"Sound art is best conceived thusly: not as a medium, not as a category founded on common materials, but as a passage between discourses, as unclaimed territory between interpretive domains, as the murmur of meaning produced by unexpected shifts in what is taken for granted."*[119]

This MFA has been a journey of self-discovery; a pilgrimage to reinvent my creative practice and develop a confident critical voice through circumnavigating the tempestuous periphery of music and sound discourses. It has been my ambition to negotiate this often-paradoxical space – where music and sound embrace, intersect, and diverge from one another – by addressing the musical in not necessarily musical ways. This exegesis has served not only as a documentation of the thoughts and processes integral to such an endeavour, but as a personal reminder of where I came from and where I might be headed. It is my attempt at learning to hear anew.

At this point it feels appropriate to acknowledge the important role music has played in shaping my experience as a human, a musician, an artist, a composer, and a teacher. I once believed that I would never take my hands off the keys of the piano, for fear of the silence that would surely follow, the relationships I would surely lose. Since childhood my identity has been intertwined with music, though it wasn't until recently that I had to take a step back and listen to what was becoming an unhealthy and complicated relationship. Upon reassuring my beloved music that "it's not you, it's me", the certainty and stability music once provided – along with its romantic narratives – gradually begun to evaporate, leaving behind a residue of uncertainty that was both frightening and liberating.

It is this residue, however, that offered an opportunity to unhear my previous auditory conditioning, to explore alternative listening sensibilities that recognize the materiality of sound, its capacity as verb, as an in-between, as a vessel for social, cultural, and political transformation. It is not an abandonment of my past, but rather an adoption of potential futures; a reconsideration of what it means to play music, to be musical, to listen musically. To hear my lived experience not only as "humanly organised sound", but as "soundly organised humanity."[120]

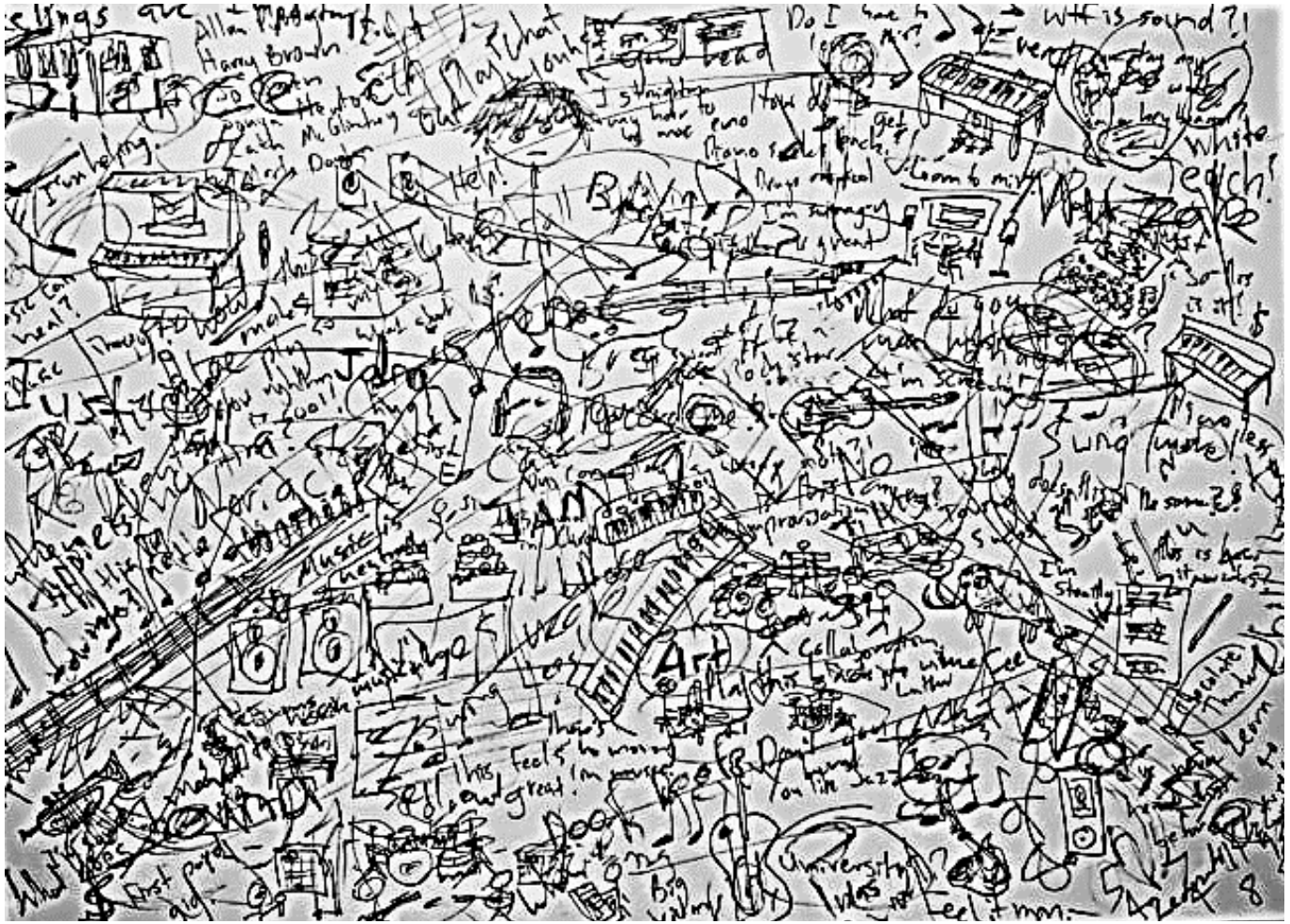


*Figure 19. Walker, Fraser (2021) Mind Map.*

# Notes

[1] The House of Hidden Knowledge. "John Cage Interviewed by Jonathan Cott (1963)" *YouTube* video, 50:26. July 30, 2017.
[2] Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2009), 18-20.
[3] Ibid, 98-99.
[4] Ibid, 17.
[5] Seth Kim-Cohen, "Non-Cochlear Sound," accessed February 17, 2020, http://www.kim-cohen.com/Non-Cochlear%20Sound.html.
[6] Salomé Voegelin, *The Political Possibility of Sound: Fragments of Listening* (New York; London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 61-63.
[7] Muzak here is employed generally to refer to various forms of programmed music including Muzak, Mood Music, Spotify, YouTube, and store playlists.
[8] Ronald M. Radano, "Interpreting Muzak: Speculations on Musical Experience in Everyday Life," *American Music* 7, no. 4 (1989). Lorraine Plourde, "Sonic air-conditioning: muzak as affect management for office workers in Japan," *The Senses and Society* 12, no. 1 (2017).
[9] Hildegard Westerkamp, "Listening and Soundmaking: A Study of Music-as-Environment," in *Sound by Artists*, ed. Dan Lander and Micah Lexier (Toronto; Banff: Art Metropole and Walter Phillips Gallery, 1990), 227.
[10] Ibid, 228.
[11] Ibid, 228.
[12] Alan Bradshaw and Morris B. Holbrook, "Must we have Muzak wherever we go? A critical consideration of the consumer culture," *Consumption Market and Culture* 11, no. 1 (March 2008): 26.
[13] Ibid, 26.
[14] Ibid, 27.
[15] Brandon LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (New York; London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 105-107.
[16] Ibid, 106.
[17] Ibid, 106.
[18] Janet Watts, "No thank you for the Muzak," *The Guardian*, last modified December 1, 1999, accessed September 23, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/society/1999/dec/01/guardiansocietysupplement2.
[19] Press Association, "Marks and Spencer to turn off music in stores following customer feedback," *The Guardian*, last modified June 1, 2016, accessed 18 April, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/jun/01/ms-to-turn-off-music-in-stores-following-customer-feedback. Matt Hancock, "Stop stressful pop music 'noise' being pumped into hospitals, campaigners demand," *The Telegraph*, last modified August 3, 2020, accessed May 3, 2021, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/08/02/stop-stressful-pop-music-noise-pumped-hospitals-campaigners/.
[20] Douglas Kahn, "John Cage: Silence and Silencing," *The Musical Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (1997): 577.
[21] Ibid, 571.
[22] Ibid, 576.
[23] Stefan Helmreich, "Seashell Sound," *Cabinet* 48 (2012): 24.
[24] Ibid, 28.
[25] Salomé Voegelin, host, "Technologies of Listening: Roundtable," Auralities (podcast), 16 October 2019, http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/gallery/audio/technologies-of-listening-roundtable.
[26] James Parker and Joel Stern, *Eavesdropping: A Reader* (Melbourne: Liquid Architecture, 2019), 158-159.
[27] Samson Young, "Muted Situation #22: Muted Tchaikovsky's 5th," accessed 25 October 2020, https://www.thismusicisfalse.com/mutedtchaikovsky/#:~:text=On%20the%20process%20of%20muting,John%20Cage's%20conception%20of%20silence.
[28] Samson Young, "Muted Situation #22: Muted Tchaikovsky's 5th," accessed 25 October 2020, https://www.thismusicisfalse.com/mutedtchaikovsky/#:~:text=On%20the%20process%20of%20muting,John%20Cage's%20conception%20of%20silence.
[29] James Parker and Joel Stern, *Eavesdropping: A Reader* (Melbourne: Liquid Architecture, 2019), 168-169.
[30] See, for example, Henry Flynt's manifesto regarding Stockhausen's aversion and treatment of jazz (a black) music. Henry Flynt, "Picket Stockhausen Concert!"

*Music Cornell*, last modified September 8, 1964, accessed May 17, 2021, http://id3419.securedata.net/artnotart/fluxus/hflynt-actionagainst.html.

[31] Ibid, 161.

[32] Judy Lochhead notes that "in recent music studies the once moribund concepts of the sublime and its twin, the ineffable, have been resuscitated under the banner of postmodern thought, which in a sin-gle stroke claims them as both new and universal." Lochhead argues that "while various other scholarly domains have debated the conceptual value of these aesthetic concepts, such a debate is missing in music studies. This lack is "dangerous" to the extent it masks a regressive longing for an absolute—an absolute that, under the flag of the unpresentable, harbors a hidden and nostalgic return to repressive binaries of gender." Judy Lochhead, "The Sublime, the Ineffable, and Other Dangerous Aesthetics," *Woman and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 12 (2008).

[33] William Cheng discusses the issues of conflating music-loving with morality, cautioning that presuming music's "goodness" as obvious can itself pose problems. William Cheng, *Loving Music Till It Hurts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 35-39.

[34] Suzanne Delehanty, "Soundings," in *Sound by Artists*, ed. Dan Lander and Micah Lexier (Toronto; Banff: Art Metropole and Walter Phillips Gallery, 1990), 23-24.

[35] Ibid, 23.

[36] The 432 Hz theory remains a pop-culture conspiracy phenomenon, believed to be the "true" tuning of the earth due to "pure math". It has been suggested by many musicians, including XXXTentacion and Spiritual So, that the current 440 Hz tuning is infact brainwashing humanity. See Adam Neely. "A = 432Hz." *YouTube* video, 11:45. July 25, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKTZ151yLnk&ab_channel=AdamNeely

[37] William Cheng, *Loving Music Till It Hurts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 16-18.

[38] Ibid, 24-25.

[39] Richard Taruskin, *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 164-165.

[40] A sonic footprint takes inspiration from recent developments regarding clean living, reducing carbon emissions, and adopting sustainable diets. It simply indicates a sonic sensibility that is mindful of music's consumption, how it is produced and recieved within various sociocultural and political contexts. It acknowledges one's role in enabling noise pollution, while being mindful and empathetic towards those sharing a sonic environment. Adopting a sonic fooprint entails being aware of when to listen, when to protest, when to speak for those who are silenced, and when not to. Sound is heard as a medium capable of harm, offence, and violence. A sonic footprint does not consume blindly, or in this case, deafly.

[41] Philip Alperson, "Musical Time and Music as an Art of Time," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38, no. 4 (1980): 407-410.

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