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# Giving / Taking Notice

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# Giving / Taking Notice

Dylan Robinson

We might say that naming aspects of positionality is about noticing our noticing and noticing how we notice. The work of positionality—as the work we do to reflect on our habits and biases of noticing—is undertaken with the hope of moving us toward different, non-normative forms of noticing. In *noticing otherwise*, we learn to see, hear, and sense the police orders (Rancière 2004) that structure how we perceive, orders that are often not felt through an authoritative sense of restriction but instead as sense's smoothing out of sensate abrasion. Noticing otherwise involves more than attending to the punctum's singular prick or glancing awry. Giving and taking notice, together, are practices that hold potential to shift the normative time and terms of attention.

The term *notice* can have a quotidian or low-stakes quality to it ("I noticed something on my walk to the park"). Micro- and small-scale noticings are of great importance in coming to understand how structures of settler colonialism subtend everyday actions, from small talk and greetings to the ordinary infrastructure of sidewalks and city parks, and to the predictable routines of lunch and the daily news (Love 2016). But there is also a high-stakes version of noticing. In its use as a noun, the word serves in formal and legal contexts as a statement conveying information or warning. I open my mailbox and am met with a letter from Revenue Canada, a *notice of assessment* that details the amount of income tax I owe. Additionally, we "give our notice" as a formal statement, for example as a letter or email about terminating a contract or our current employment. We "put someone on notice" or "serve notice" as a way to give warning about something (often with more severe consequences). To receive these kinds of notice are often a sign that you have not been living up to expectations or fulfilling basic responsibilities.

This essay—drawing from and extending my previous work on settler colonialism and perception—takes up both the lower- and higher-stakes conceptions of notice and noticing. In the lower-stakes version of this term, I argue that decolonization involves calling attention to the ways in which we notice not just settler colonialism's events as instances of historical and contemporary injustices against Indigenous people, but how settler colonialism's structures pervade everyday life. Our ways of noticing settler colonial structures are guided by and foreclosed on by the normative expression of positionality at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. In this context, what I call *critical listening positionality* emerges when we increase our awareness of what and how we hear, in relation with structures of white supremacy, heteronormativity, classism, ableism and settler colonialism (in non-discrete, intersectional ways), and then letting such awareness lead toward practices of sensing otherwise. This essay and my previous writing draw on one sense of the term "noticing" by experimenting with forms of writing and address that seek to intervene within normative Western epistemologies, serving notice to academic and discipline-specific structures that enact epistemic violence toward Indigenous sense. I give my notice to those who enforce and perpetuate the normative categories of what deserves noticing by way of the ear, by way of what

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music schools and curricula call "ear training." Through its structural refusal, my writing finds forms of serving notice to the hegemony of ear training's intervallic knowing, chordal fact, cadential certainty, and the teleological familiar in functional harmony. As just one among many normative forms of understanding music, ear training has remained largely unnoticed by music scholars and teachers as effecting a normative orientation toward how we might come to know music. Even the fact that the ear itself has remained the primary site for training listening remains largely unnoticed. Consider this essay, then, another addition to a growing stack of notices of assessment on music training's audism.

In 1977 Deaf scholar Tom Humphries coined the term "audism" to refer to "the notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear" (1977, 12). More recently, Jonathan Sterne and Zoe De Luca have emphasized how the concept can also refer to "the ethnocentrism of those who hear, often characterized by an assumption that everyone hears in the same way" (2019, 303). My essay here seeks to extend some of my previous work on listening positionality (*Hungry Listening*, 2020) toward understanding in greater detail its potential not as a category of identity, but as a constellation of improvised practices. If, as I have previously argued, positionality is best understood as a state, how might this state be recognized in its momentary flux? Further, how might we let such recognition open up new practices of listening improvisation that do not fixate on positionality and instead move us beyond the legacy of listening's "settlement" to allow more agile and connective practices of Indigenous listening resurgence? The improvisatory existence and future of listening positionally here call us not to merely acknowledge our values as a trigger-warning for others, or for zero-sum consistency between word and action, but as an ongoing return to self-accountability: what are the frames through which I see, hear, feel the world now, and now, and now. Indeed, to follow such shifting moments of positionality requires writing that is equally agile and relational. In order to test out such a practice, I will offer an example of my own listening positionality in relation to the recording "Round Dance," by Cree-Mennonite cellist Cris Derksen on their album *Orchestral Powwow*.

## On Positionality

To begin this work on improvising through listening positionality, it is important to define not just its scope and history, but to retrace some critique about its limitations in practice. As first defined by philosopher Linda Alcoff in 1988, the term positionality refers to "the location from which one speaks." By "location," Alcoff doesn't mean the physical location that one occupies, but the individual articulation of intersections between race, gender, class, ability, sexuality, and cultural background. Importantly, positionality calls us to name the inherited aspects of our identities and acknowledge how our habits, abilities and biases are guided by social positions that are always in relationship with the context of naming. This is to say, positionality is always context-specific in recognition of the fact that one's position quite literally changes alongside its context of expression. As someone who is xwélmexw (that is, as a Stó:lō person whose mother's family is from Skwah) and as xwelítem (mixed white settler), my habits and my capacities for perception are guided by recombinant intersections between these and other axes of my positionality. But how they guide my perception is dependent on my relations with others in the space. Whether this is with my immediate family, or with my daughter, or gathered with folks in an online meeting space, my positionality is felt and articulated differently in relationship to those I am gathered with, the reason for gathering, and the very rooms we are gathered in. As Alcoff notes, positionality is "relative to a constantly shifting context, to a situation that includes a network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, [and] cultural and political institutions and ideologies" (Alcoff 1988, 433).

This shifting context also applies to the perception and articulation of artwork. A reflexive examination of positionality not only helps us gain greater precision around the ways in which we see art, read literature, or hear music, but how we might contend with perceptual habit and bias toward specific works. Following Alcoff's caution that "location and positionality should not be conceived as one-dimensional or static, but as multiple and with varying degrees of mobility" (Alcoff 1991, 16), approaches to intersectional positionality provide stratified nuance to unmarked practices of close reading. And yet, despite positionality's potential to open toward decolonial, feminist, queer and "otherwise" practices of reading, listening, and seeing, its typical appearance today is limited to the caveat that graces the opening pages of an essay or takes up space in the opening words of various gatherings. In Canada, the mass uptake of "positionality caveats" can be understood as a settler colonial standardization of protocol used by northwest coast Indigenous communities that serve non-Indigenous institutions as a form of risk management. The institutionalization of positionality—including land acknowledgments—bureaucratizes Indigenous protocol and in doing so evacuates the very reason such protocol exists: to situate ourselves in relation to the people (kin or adversary), nonhuman others (including the lands, waters, and animals), and reason(s) for gathering. Land acknowledgments (as settler positionality caveats) have become static forms of awareness-raising, ones that would seem to confirm Brian Massumi's critique of positionality's investment in cultural stasis:

> Is the body as linked to a particular subject position anything more than a local embodiment of ideology? Where has the potential for change gone? How does a body perform its way out of a definitional framework that is not only responsible for its very "construction," but seems to prescript every possible signifying and counter-signifying move as a selection from a repertoire of possible permutations on a limited set of pre-determined terms? How can the grid itself change? . . . The aim of the positionality model was to open a window on local resistance in the name of change. But the problem of change returned, with a vengeance. Because every body subject was so determinately local, it was boxed into its site on the culture map. Grid-lock. . . . The idea of positionality begins by subtracting movement from the picture. This catches the body in cultural freeze-frame. The point of explanatory departure is a pinpointing, a zeropoint of stasis. When positioning of any kind comes a determining first, movement comes a problematic second. After all is signified and sited, there is the nagging problem of how to add movement back into the picture. But adding movement to stasis is about as easy as multiplying a number by zero and getting a positive product. Of course, a body occupying one position on the grid might succeed in making a move to occupy another position. (Massumi 2002, 3)

Massumi identifies positionality here as a "grid-lock," "cultural freeze-frame," "zero-point of stasis," and "boxed into its site on the culture map." His critique characterizes positionality as a moment of enunciation that leaves the subject without movement. Indeed, from Massumi's metaphors, it would seem as if he were directly evoking Linda Alcoff, who notes that a reductionist critique of positionality's supposed essentialism "might, for example, reduce evaluation to a political assessment of the speaker's location where that location is seen as an insurmountable essence that fixes one, as if one's feet are superglued to a spot on the sidewalk" (Alcoff 1991, 16). And yet Massumi's critique is substantiated by the form that positionality has most often come to embody, as the brief acknowledgment one gives before a presentation or event. Written prior to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Massumi's words have become prescient in relation to the standardization of Indigenous protocols across Canada as land acknowledgment checklists. In such

instances, identity has indeed become locked into a grid of institutional propriety, functioning as a mere caveat that allows one to proceed and, above all, does not engage with why such declarations of positionality hold importance. And yet, given how Alcoff originally envisioned positionality as having "varying degrees of mobility," I argue that we might realign positionality with practices and perceptual states in relational movement rather than writing it off entirely as an irredeemably compromised practice that "fixes" identity (and thought) in its moment of enunciation.

While positionality's ubiquity within many academic fields renders it unremarkable or even passé, this has not been the case for music scholarship.[1] Even when music scholars focus explicitly on musical representations of race, gender, sexuality and ability—or examine scores, performances, and recordings whose whiteness, heteronormativity, and classist and ableist values go unmarked—they tend to avoid explicitly articulating how their individual positionality guides their listening, analyses, and writing about their subjects. Such "explicit articulation" here acknowledges that our positionality unavoidably guides not just what detail we perceive, but how we render that detail of knowing into words, sentences. My understanding is that a significant amount of music scholarship avoids this focus because of the central value of "generalizability" that music scholars—and scholars more generally—feel our work should strive for. The fear is that to speak from the position of an individual, with a specific listening positionality that is ungeneralizable, would compromise this principle, despite the ways in which the singularity of the individual holds import for thinking together apart. Yet because music scholarship (particularly musicology and music theory) continues to be haunted by its history of legitimization as a rigorous scientific field of study, it invested much more heavily in a positivism that, even when not explicit, continues to marginalize certain kinds of scholarship including that which takes individualized experiences of affect and the sensory impact of sound as a focus. Generalizability also works against reflection on the movement between techniques of mobility and agility of listening attention while proscribing a listening ideal that is often more related to audiation than singular listening experience. We need to look no further than the repetition of "the listener" in music scholarship to see this principle in action. Moreover, current forms of "ear training" would understand practices of listening in movement across a singular listening experience a lack in need of remedy. Forms of peripatetic listening, listening oscillation, and movement through intersectional listening positionality are more likely to be dismissed as part of a distracted listening experience than understood as choices in the distribution of attention.[2] This view of distracted and uncivilized attention characterizes the history of corral and focus Indigenous listening by missionaries and other settlers as a technique to assimilate Indigenous listening practices to settler colonial forms of focused attention.

## Listening Fixity, Settlement and Extraction

In 1837 Anna Jameson, in her travel narrative *Sketches in Canada, and Rambles among the Red Men,* recounts the words of Ojibway missionary Charlotte Johnston: "She says all the Indians are passionately fond of music and that it is a very effective means of interesting and fixing their attention" (Jameson 1852, 255). "Fixing Indians' attention" is in fact an accurate way to characterize the sensory paradigm shift that early missionaries across Canada sought to effect.[3] "Fixing," in the sense Jameson uses it, refers to keeping Indigenous peoples' focus on the word of God rather than on their own cultural practices. As Jameson notes of Charlotte Johnston, wife of William McMurray, an Anglican missionary and Indian Agent based in Sault Ste. Marie from 1830 to 1838, Johnston was able to convert the Indians by leading them in hymns with "her good voice and correct ear" (255).

In comparison with Charlotte Johnson's missionized ears, it is the Indians' "*in*correct ears" and lack of focused attention that keeps them from their civilization:

> The difficulty is to keep them together for any time sufficient to make a permanent impression: their wild, restless habits prevail; and even their necessities interfere against the efforts of their teachers; they go off to their winter hunting-rounds for weeks together, and when they return, the task of instruction has to begin again. (Jameson 1852, 256)

This settler colonial reading of an Indigenous lack of attention in missionary accounts understands Indigenous forms of attention to the world as "wild, restless habits" rather than purposeful attentional agility through Indigenous mobility and proprioception. To missionaries, these wild, restless habits were a detriment to the new temporality of learning and living civilized lives. Missionaries thus recognized that new ways of focusing attention were needed. Hymn singing became one of these, with hymns translated into Indigenous languages, where the homophonic ideal of voices moving together was a corrective to the unruly voices of Indigenous people.

It is impossible to say what exactly Jameson's reference to the Indians' "necessities" means and how such necessities interfere with focused instruction. What is clear is that these necessities, along with other "wild, restless habits," were inimical to the new attentional order settlers sought to impose. Additional limitations on Indigenous mobility were imposed by the Canadian government's Indian Act and Residential Schools, both of which curtailed Indigenous mobility and relationality with the lands of which we are stewards. Like the movement of Indigenous people in relation to the changing seasons and locations for sustenance, Indigenous attentional mobility has always been understood as the inability to remain focused on labour, like the undisciplined impulse toward "our necessities" that Jameson euphemistically describes. Settlers also perceived this lack as the inability to civilize our lands through Western agriculture and to attend to aesthetics through mobile forms of attention. Yet Indigenous folks have understood the agility of attention as a technique that brings things into relationship, for example through a reflective oscillation between land and our nonhuman relations, between the skies and waters. Within the Western attentional economy of focus, such mobility historically presented as savage.

For many Coast Salish Indigenous communities, xwélalà:m (spelled variously in different downriver and Island dialects) is one form of relational listening mobility. xwélalà:m—a word English is best able to name imprecisely as naming "listening *or* witnessing"—has always been a practice of noticing, of precisely documenting our history in collective memory in the longhouse. Through xwélalà:m, attention is given not only to the content of the oratory that is shared, but its temporal relationship with previous words offered (ey kws hakwelestset te siwes te siyolexwalh). xwélalà:m—listening-witnessing—means noticing the affect and atmosphere of what is shared in relation to the words, movement, sounds that fill the space. It entails giving our attention to the ways that dances, songs, and stories bring life to the work at hand. xwélalà:m, listening-witnessing means understanding our songs as law, medicine, and historical documentation and yet still songs. To understand Indigenous songs as music alone is to participate in epistemic violence against how our songs exist *simultaneously* yú:wqwlha (as beautiful things) *and* as law, medicine, and historical documentation. To understand songs as music alone is also to make our songs and the life carried by them into a categorizable knowledge resource. Indeed, we might ask a more foundational question here regarding the extent to which forms of analysis and scholarship more generally are predicated on an extraction and accumulation of knowledge as resource.

This accumulation of knowledge as resource is what I term *hungry listening*, as one practice of settler colonial perception among many, a practice of perception guided by extracting resources. I derive the phrase hungry listening from two contrasting forms of perception contained in the Halq'eméylem words for "settler" and "listening." The first of these words is xwelítem, which commonly means "settler." The second word, xwélalà:m, which I've already described, is the word we use for listening and also the specific form of sensory perception practised in the longhouse and oriented toward the precision of documenting the feel of history and that which is shared. The term xwelítem comes from the history of settlement in S'olh temexw. In the mid-1800s, thousands of prospectors arrived in our lands, driven by gold fever, but also literally starving. The word xwelítem thus not only means "settler" but also "starving person." It is used not only as a historical descriptor but as a way to describe non-Indigenous folks today. I use this term as well, and not merely to name a category of people but as a way to name the continuance of starvation as a state that guides settler colonial perception. Importantly, forms of hungry listening are not limited to the experience of white settlers alone; they have been equally internalized by Indigenous people, myself included.

This extractive desire of hungry listening manifests in multiple ways, some of which are:

- a hunger for what Eve Tuck calls "damage centered" narratives of Indigenous trauma and loss;
- a hunger for affective forms of familiarity and resolution sometimes associated with what I call reconciliation's feelings;
- a desire to pinpoint a range of sonic certainties, a desire that can foreclose on listening as a speculative practice of wonder and imagination, which can manifest through formal music training (ear training, analysis) and interpretive concert material (preconcert talks, programs); and
- listening that seeks to gain information as a resource—the collection of Indigenous fact that elides Indigenous epistemologies of listening as practices of law, medicine, and historical documentation.

In sum, hungry listening satiates through categorical familiarity (that operates through feeling the satisfaction of identification and recognition), but also through certainty (to feel pleasure from finding the "fit" of content within a predetermined framework). Hungry listening is hungry for the felt confirmations of square pegs in square holes, for the satisfactory fit as sound knowledge slides into its appropriate place. Forms of hungry listening often satiate through the consumption of affective certainty or what I call "sensory veracity" (Robinson 2012), where the intensity of affective experience leads listeners to identify their response as a transformative marker of the work's social or political truth. The intensity of affect when experiencing socially and politically oriented performance can here allow for a conflation of affect with efficacy. Audiences are persuaded, or more accurately feel, that something has happened; a moment (or more) of something ineffable felt as "reconciliation" has been witnessed *because* our affective response is irreducible and as such does not lie.

Gaining an increasing awareness of the listening norms, habits, and biases we employ thus does not mean fixing our attention on any one aspect of positionality; it does not mean becoming hypervigilant or fixated on our listening norms. Instead, it demands that we seek other practices of listening relation, of becoming intermittently "attendant to" our positionality, for example as a low background hum. At moments, perhaps we tune into this hum and then let it recede again into the

background. In order to begin to understand what constitutes this "hum," we need to spend time with the timbral qualities that constitute it; we need to gain awareness of the strata positionality is constituted by. We must spend time in the process of listening to the layers of our positionality, naming their combinations and recombinations, renaming them, reflecting on them, but not to contain them, to put them in a box on the shelf or under the bed. As Pauline Oliveros has undertaken through deep listening exercises, perhaps we might find different ways to notice the hum, sustain it, and return to through audiation. Ultimately it means affirming and perhaps (re-) learning to listen through wonder and exploring different forms and shapes for listening otherwise.

## Forms and Shapes for Listening Otherwise

If we are to approach something that might be called decolonizing listening, one way we might begin is by readmitting the movement of wonder, of noticing what else (other than music and sound) we are listening to. What kind of subjectivity, what kind of life, what kind of alterity is this? This kind of listening is perhaps challenging to practise, as it is a listening that does not seek to know but instead pinpoints knowability's coordinates. It deters analogy as the colonization of alterity. Decolonizing listening requires expanding listening practices of wonder over prejudgment, cataloguing, and identification. In remaining attentive to listening as a practice of wonder, I'm reminded of Emanual Levinas' writing on the face-to-face encounter with the other, an encounter with irreducible alterity that is grappled with through its inability to be fully named, categorized, or known. Rethinking settler ontologies of listening and proposing decolonial approaches to listening means finding ways to listen that leave ourselves uncertain as to what kind of life we are in relationship with. Given the ways that Indigenous songs in particular carry life, bring life, and are alive in as many forms as there are Indigenous communities, decolonial listening practices might bring us into closer relation with such song-life. This life of song is always in relationship with the life of our lands and waters, but also not reducible or analogous to it. The life of our songs is not of the same order as human life—while the beat of the drum may be conflated with the heartbeat of a human, this anthropocentrism conscripts the drum to being alive only to the extent that humans are alive. To listen through a decolonial ethics of wonder avoids the question "what is this like?" for the question "what *is* this?" as a productive event of nonrecognition. As an example of writing about such an event of nonrecognition—to test out a different shape of listening—I turn to Cree-Mennonite Cellist Cris Derksen's work "Round Dance" from the album *Orchestral Powwow*. I'd like you to turn to listen to this recording as well. Please find it and play it. Read the response below as you are listening to the music.

## Sqwalewel

I know this round dance
I've listened to this round dance many times
I know I wouldn't know a round dance to hear one
I wouldn't know this one
except that it's called *Round Dance*
on the track list

I know this round dance
as much as I've been in a round dance
as much as my first time

in a round dance, dancing
in Idle No More, in a mall
where I looked like a mooniyaw,
stumbling along

I know this round dance
little enough that I wrote,
that I cited—
        relied on the words of a scholar, a friend—
who wrote:
"round dance songs are courting songs, with all of the vulnerabilities those entail."

*Stop reading, listen*

*Start reading*

It's good to remember
te síwes
my aunty said—
        after telling her about my new job as a professor—
"What will you teach?"
"Indigenous music," I said
"How can you teach other peoples' music?"
she said
"How can you know it?"

As a xwélmexw who writes about music
I can't hear the courting or the vulnerability in this dance
I can't hear what English knows
as courting and vulnerability
I don't know how to hear them,
or whether I could ever hear them,
without lived relationship to *Nitaskinan*,
without feeling the life of Atikamekw-Cree land

I can't hear the courting
neither can I hear Cree kinds of courting—
        nôcihitowin—
I can't hear the vulnerabilities through the strings
through this epic screen
through which I cannot hear *Nitaskinan*
the land

I can't hear what the song sings to,
what it sings toward.
I can't hear what the singers sing to,
what they sing toward.

what I can hear of the sound
the sound of the cello, brass and percussion
leaves me anxious.
This striving sound, taking space
leaves me less room to listen.

I know my listening—
shwexwélmexw xwélalà:m—
struggles against the swelling affect
of strings and wood
of brass and wind

my listening
síweltsel, ears-pricked
by the sound of the Drum,
cushioned and held by cello and brass,
rising, then pulling away

I know my listening—
shxweitemelh xwélalà:m—
its listening privilege
carries a discipline of repetition
of Stravinsky, Lachemann,
Clementi, Sciarrino on repeat

I know this listening privilege
makes it hard for me to hear

I know my listening
wants to hear more,
to hear different complexities,
sharp interventions.

My listening privilege wants more
More than the powwow drum moving just slightly out of sync
My desire to hear rough aggregate,
as if rough aggregate carried a radical politics
that orchestral cascades and swells cannot

*What do you hear of your listening?*

Wandering away from this desire
I hear Derksen's cello,
alongside a second voice, keening,
a singer from the Northern Style Powwow Drum group *Northern Voice*
I hear a singer

I write "I hear a singer from Wemotaci lands, Northern Quebec

singing in Atikamekw,
in Cree."
In fact, I don't hear this, I read it.

These voices (whatever I hear)
displace me
draw me in,
I'm placed alongside powwow temporality
alongside this sense
sometimes used as a mark and measure,
that measures "Indigenous knowing"

then
I'm reminded of a gathering
I'm reminded of a room
and a Nish poet speaking about powwow
I'm reminded of Anishinaabe kwe and Haudenosaunee laughter
overflowing the room,
spilling

In that room, with that laughter
My listening had no way finding
through the crass poetics
of powwow grounds

*How are you finding your way?*

I need also to say
that the *first* thing I really heard—
        felt-knew sqwalewel—
was a moment
of pulling away, then pushing up
against "Indian time"—
        "Indian time" written twice just like this
        with scare quotes,
        then removed, then replaced—
I felt something like a resistance that didn't re-centre resistance
I heard not resistance but an awkwardness of relation
I felt the sense of

"I'd rather not"

## Improvising Positionality through Imposition and Impasse

How then might we begin to listen otherwise? How do we not just acknowledge the various forms of audism—be it hungry listening, heteronormative listening, or other normative forms of listening—we have unconsciously come to employ? Developing practices of critical listening

positionality, I argue, requires that we as listeners increase our awareness of how race, class, gender, ability, cultural background, and sexuality guide our listening capacities, habits, and biases. It is here that I have been confronted most by individuals asking (at times demanding) a clear program, a checklist, to implement better listening positionality. "How do I decolonize my listening to a Beethoven piano sonata?" I've been asked. "How do I avoid hungry listening to a song by Jeremy Dutcher?" I've been asked. My response, as frustrating as it might be, is that I cannot tell you. For me to give you or anyone a five-step program for decolonial listening would elide the essential process of gaining clarity around your individual listening habits and biases. Indeed, it is this very process, as I will examine next, that establishes the subfrequency of positionality that might haunt active listening, urging it toward the otherwise of normative sense. It would be impossible for me to provide anyone with a program for critical listening positionality, given that listening positionality is unique to the individual: your listening habits, norms, and biases are not the same as mine.

What I offer are instead some starting points for process. For example, understanding the ways in which settler colonialism affects your listening might entail detailing moments of hungry listening in your life; it may require that you spend time noticing how and when your listening is a practice of extracting and accumulating resources. You might choose to do some work around ontological reorientation: what do you believe you are listening to when you listen to it? Given that Indigenous songs exist as legal orders, as medicine, and as historical documents that serve as the equivalent to books, how then might you listen to them nonaesthetically? How might you wonder about their existence as an expression of law, health, and epistemology? You may also decide that it is time to actively dislocate the fixity and goal-oriented teleology of listening with more flexible listening practices. How do you re-situate listening as a relational action that occurs not merely between listener and listened-to, but between the strata of positionality, the material conditions of listening (the place where we listen, the medium we listen to), and the materialities of the sound event itself?

Given that these layers of positionality are numerous and always shifting and aligning in different ways, this process for gaining a listening awareness without allowing such an awareness to compete with or overwhelm our capacity to listen to the music or sound event itself is challenging. How do we balance between noticing sound and noticing our listening? To what extent might we orchestrate such stratified positional listening toward intersectional antiracist, decolonial, queer, and feminist listening practices in ways that do not lead counterproductively to potential incapacitation through perceptual overload? Focusing primarily on such layers of positionality may result in an over-vigilance that threatens to elide our relationship with the very music and sound we seek to understand. It may inadvertently recast listening as hypervigilant attention, or what Eve Sedgewick has called "paranoid" forms of reading, where critical attention seeks to foreclose all possibility of "bad surprises."

## Noticing Taking Notice

So perhaps instead we experiment with ways of noticing how our positionality guides our attention. For example, once we have a sense of the ways in which we take notice (our habits and capacities of noticing), we might then develop exercises in oscillation, where we move between the layers of sound and positionality, as ways to improvise noticing. Having the presence of mind to reflect on such movement between layers of positionality in the moment of listening might be a tall order, but no more so than growing awareness of structural recognition through Western ear training. Finding processes for oscillating between layers of listening positionality is not limited to the listener.

Strategies for listening otherwise might also be activated by interventions in the unmarked rituals of music performance and forms of composition themselves. The program note, the darkened auditorium with singular focus on the stage, the preconcert talk—all of these concert rituals can effectively be challenged in ways that open up new layers of listening. Intervening in the space of the concert hall also means intervening in the particular kind of normative focus that such spaces assert. Whether the white cube of the gallery, the proscenium stage–concert hall, the outdoor festival stage, or the black box, each site urges us to think and listen to music in particular ways that may not be conducive to the kinds of listening otherwise we might hope to advance. What happens when we change these sites of listening to include intimate spaces of one-on-one listening, spaces in relation with the land, spaces where audience members are not bound by the kinds of attention these spaces assert? Strategies for de- and re-formatting concert norms afford the potential to question how venues for performance structure hungry listening.

Can we make choices to shift our listening positionality as one would improvise through extended technique of an instrument, by varying a rhythm, or through shifting the balance or volume of our voice alongside others? How feasible is it to learn the craft of listening as a flexible, improvisatory practice in which one shifts between listening registers of gender, culture, sexuality, especially given that it is impossible to simply apply listening filters that are not our "own" (for example, like applying iPhone camera filters)?

While improvisers work/play with sound material, with rhythm, with timbre, it's less typical to improvise with one's forms of perception. If we link of listening as an improvisation, what are the materials we are working with? Can we, for instance, think of an alertness to positionality as the "material" that we improvise with? It is possible to consider, for example, a feminist listening background punctuated by bursts of decolonial listening. It is easier to say than do. To have a "burst" of decolonial listening sounds lovely, but how do I do that? What is possible in thinking of listening through improvisational parameters of time and tempo? Surely such improvisatory listening choices must also be made in the moment of relationship to the listened-to partner, music and sound. Yet perhaps this orientation toward learning techniques for orchestrating and controlling positionality merely turns the same system of listening mastery (listening domination) that is at the heart of Western music training toward mastering listening freedom.

Perhaps instead what we need are merely techniques for noticing how we are listening already to allow the improvisation of listening positionality not to be hindered by self-monitoring (and the attendant shame and guilt that results in settler self-monitoring paralysis). In classes I have taught on listening positionality, I have often asked students to create a list of how they understand and feel the various aspects of their positionality. This is frequently challenging work for students to undertake. It often makes them feel vulnerable. Through their coursework, they come to learn that art is not as transparent as they might first assume, but rarely do they have the opportunity to engage in the same level of detailed analysis of their own positionality, ability, privilege, and habit. In many cases, these positionality lists turn toward stereotypes, over-identifying, and essentialisms. Yet rather than trying to weed out these kinds of fraught naming, I encourage it, along with other, less legible forms of identification ("If music isn't sexuality, for most of us it is psychically right next door." Cusick 1994, 71). Our lists are not made in order to comprehensively define a matrix of all the possible intersections of positionality, nor are they used as maps upon which students cross-reference a one-to-one relationship between a moment of listening and an axis point of positionality, as per Massumi's critique. Instead, this list gets added to, refined, returned to, glanced at, and neglected. We seek to find ways of noticing listening positionality without giving it the ultimate

authority to determine or name our experiences. We seek to name structures for that which goes unmarked, but only inasmuch as this naming might serve as a background hum. Perhaps sometimes we learn to feel our listening positionality reaching toward something, perhaps we learn to feel it recoiling, perhaps we learn to feel its curiosities and wonder. More simply, perhaps we learn to notice our noticings.

## Notes

1. By "music scholarship," I am referring primarily to the fields of musicology, ethnomusicology, and music theory rather than work loosely grouped within the area of sound studies, although I am not saying that sound studies scholarship should be excluded from this critique.

2. This is not to say that forms of peripatetic listening, listening oscillation, and movement through intersectional listening positionality are innate. We need to actively develop various kinds of listening retraining and practise them to the same extent as Western ear training is practised in music education. Further, such skills should not seek to replace Western ear training but to bring it into relationship with other listening practices.

3. The following section is drawn from my book *Hungry Listening* (University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

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