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## German Lounge Vol. 1

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**Abstract.** The article addresses themes related to the musical work *German Lounge Vol. 1: Midnight Clock*, by Daphine Jardin, where a personal and local formulation of the aesthetically hauntological is sought. The music is basically a low transposed 24 hour time stretched haunted version of the Well-Tempered Clavier Vol. 1, by Johann Sebastian Bach. (1) Retells and thus fictionalizes childhood and adolescence experiences connected to piano practice and family home environment. (2) Questions the place of the classic in a culture that can be deemed mine, in the light of a fragment by Adorno on participating in a tradition. (3) Presents the concept of the hauntological as according to Mark Fisher, in his article *What is Hauntology?* (4) Elaborates a phantasmagoria from these earlier points. (5) Confirms the importance of time scales in this context and introduces the vocabulary provided by Curtis Roads to address such cases. (6) Concludes with a list of elements elaborated upon on the text and the musical work.

**Keywords:** hauntology, post-modernism, ambient music, J.S. Bach, sound installation

### 1.

As a child, did I listen to Bach? Evidence of a humanist upbringing would make me conclude affirmatively. Of course there were vinyl records, some concerts and cantatas. Not only from the *Masters of Music* album series, but also the Brandenburg concerts with Trevor Pinnock and The English Concert. However, the greatest influence would be exerted by the piano. Although of apocryphal attribution and filled with improbable rococo, Anna Madalegna's little book would foster a love for counterpoint and the short piece format. From that, progress would be ensured with the 2 and 3 part inventions and sinfonias, alongside Bela Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*, so as to consolidate a critical disposition: music is also made at home, through these small intellectually condensed incursions of co-dependent entangled melodic lines. Europe had produced these precious gems of instruction which, once cultivated, would flourish here and there, daily and for the delight of the spirit, or else, in the midst of a social occasion whatsoever, entertaining those present, or placed in opposition to the barbarism of the television cult, the loud and indolent speech, and hedonistic entertainment in general.

So that an enemy was already outlined. For since when would television come to take position as the most prominent furniture in the living room of a cultured family? The sound system had already been moved upstairs - as an infant, sat on a suitable cushion on a carpeted mezzanine, I'd look in the direction of the turntable and after twenty to thirty minutes of quietude and introspection, ask my mother to change the side of the LP. Would an even greater concession be allowed? Letting a restless and noisy blinking screen, coupled with low-resolution speakers, dominate the lower floor? When the piano sounds, the television switches off - or so I wished. Certainly a practicing child is not a treat. But will not the arduous efforts of a routine of preparation lead to the palaces of wisdom? Those who do not share the commitment to do so should not only understand the trials and failings, but also support them, encouraging: the compensations will be hereafter collected, some patient years along. There, do please foresee, the *Art of Fugue Contrapunctus I*, Webern's variations, the thirty-second of Beethoven.

Negotiations: when performing, TV is turned off; when practicing the pieces, it is muted; when studying parts of them, the volume is turned down. During meals, truce, i.e., neither one nor the other: the meal is the deal. And I promise to stay away from the adjustable chair and behave myself when movies that you want to mindfully watch or especially relevant news and documentaries are broadcast. So, no clusters and deliberate bumps, blasts and clunks. 煩い! my grandfather would say. Noises against *noise*; then revenge shall befall: Book's 2 prelude in C minor but one hand is playing in a slightly faster tempo than the other. Schubert's third musical moment played substituting b flat for b natural *martelatto*, to the horror of those who cook next room, perhaps then incited to feel the morbidity of the long scarf in its propensity to coil in the wheel, strangling the victim.

But would it be possible, immersed in an environment of distractions, to hear Bach's preludes and fugues as more than one of them, albeit of a higher strain? Decline of the family reunion: now remains only coexistence. Dwelling is split by the disappearance of the performance ritual. One does not stop anymore for a moment of explicit communion: "I would like to perform a fugue and discuss an idea. It has occurred to me that maybe there isn't right-handed or left-handed people, but that it is all just a matter of what is on the right, towards the treble, and on the left, towards the bass, and that this is precisely the case here, in the 10th piece of book 1, E minor, beginning with an arpeggio followed by a chromatic fall, dramatized by the alternation with the tonic in the high, as if the rightmost finger were momentarily trapped... Would not the musical practice be also a hand skills

leveling force?" And many years later I'd follow the advice of the right-handed percussionist said to brush his teeth with his left. However, no, everything now follows flowing continually, though continually fragmented, zapping from one announcement to another, filled with interruptions and the comings and goings of disjointed chores in varied speeds, erratic attention spans and overwhelming spontaneity.

A higher distraction... Higher in what sense? In the meantime, alongside mental and disciplinary challenges and finally physiological difficulties, wouldn't I have gradually perceived that the distinction between high and low culture was dissolving? Not by artsy encounters, like when flipping a comic-booklet and reciting "*fecha a janela, Joãozinho ou seremos comidos pelos... tubarões voadores*",<sup>1</sup> but with a Metallica CD and then k7 punk compilations and chewed MTV music-video VHSs, recorded at inconvenient hours. Thus, through adolescence and involvement in culture and the corresponding desire to be welcomed, to enjoy the benefits of the social. If *Enter Sandman* was as noisy as *Le Marteau Sans Maître*, which, according to the shopkeeper, was as radical as Coleman's *Free Jazz*, it wouldn't nevertheless require a focused attention in order to complete its elements; the availability that would fabricate the unity of experience. On the contrary, it seemed to impose itself by way of distortion and its densely masking presence and not to require any constancy of listening, neither cushions nor coziness. As the TV, it worked as another element of intrusion.

## 2.

When I invoke the rightful place of the classics and exhibit it, even proudly, I present a canon whose foundation has become fragile. The foundation of the canonical became somewhat ghostly. Not so much that it was ever surely solid, but that idea of solidity had before been provided by the state of culture. And not as now, when we uphold the idea that the idea of solidity had flee from it, that this solidity has been lost in an alternative timeline, which we can access only as mere traits. Certainly there are lists of things to be listened to, compiling the "essential". But in the pulverization resulting from the practice of individually constructing these, and from different constructions in which the selection criteria are made explicit, or at least made thematic, defining subgroups in which a scope is obtained, the monuments of culture have in themselves a monumental that is vacuous. They must put themselves explicitly to individual or curatorial evaluation but cannot do so

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<sup>1</sup> "close the window, Johnny, or we will be eaten by the... flying sharks".

without invoking the shadow of a story that has already ended; the story of a historical direction encompassing them. Without raising the suspicion of a residual centrism, of teleological infiltration. And the suspicion of a resilient implied, implicitness, suggests a blockage of the possibility of an explicit criterion of inclusion. Thus, puts them in the situation of a guaranteed but also prevented inclusion.

To be within tradition used to mean: to experience the work of art as something sanctioned, valid: to participate through it in all the reactions of those who had seen it previously. Once this falls away, the work is exposed in its nakedness and fallibility. The plot, from a ritual, becomes idiocy, the music, from a canon of significant figures, flat and stale. It is really no longer so beautiful. From this mass-culture draws its right of adaptation. The weakness of all traditional culture outside its tradition provides the pretext for improving, and so barbarically mutilating it. (Adorno, 2005: 223)

Even outside tradition, the piano pieces played at home remain, in their musical layer, with enough of their own. In this music, the inner structure calls for concentration; the sonority calls for silence; the difficulty, a controlled commitment. As a requested event or casual occasion in the midst of everyday life, they survive in their beauty, and are even appreciated. But if, as Adorno suggests, their beauty, as established within tradition, is impaired, they also rarely stand out from the constant flow of fragmented uninterrupted stimuli. Their inner voicing intelligibility need the appropriate focused attitude on the listener part, so as to keep their voices as contrapuntal lines and not as parts of sound aggregates or notes of chords. Sometimes they do capture our attention, incidentally, forcing our cognition to assemble the juxtaposed notes into lines, and to separate the aggregates into voices. The feeling of structure then arises, amidst the sounds of everyday life, whether merely noisy, communicative or emotive.

Perhaps, now evaluating, there wouldn't be, even in the little informal concerts and pauses for attentive listening, more than the force of the ritual only in its present aspect. Perhaps we had never been in the tradition. "Those who had seen it previously"... projections of projections. Still, was not this retrospective hesitation enough? Perhaps we participated in the tradition, perhaps we shared the experience of the one recognized by those who heard it before, perhaps we possessed a canon of meaningful formulations bequeathed to all mankind. We the marginalized, the hesitant consolidators of the universal.

### 3.

In an article on *hauntology*, Mark Fisher says that critics (including himself), had associated the term with music projects such as those by Philip Jeck, Burial, and the Ghost Box label, for making works that were not merely ghostly in their atmosphere, but which also confronted a cultural deadlock: that of an absent future. In 2005 it seemed clear to him that electronic music could no longer provide sounds that would be taken as futuristic. Contrary to its historical course, electronic music seemed at large taken by inertia and retrospection, and presented no innovative movements. Thus it would stand in the position of being haunted not so much by the past, but by the futures that the past projected, which it formerly sought to anticipate. Culturally, “the disappearance of the future meant the deterioration of a whole mode of social imagination: the capacity to conceive of a world radically different from the one in which we currently live” (Fisher, 2012: 16). Trapped in a present without prospective imagination, the different worlds we project are those future ones, from our past, seen with postmodern detachment, consolidated worlds of unfulfilled futures. Futures that connote an established set of concepts, effects and associations. Futuristic as one or a series of styles. Thus not the name given to that absence of defined style which enables reactions of surprise and expectation regarding the future.

When the future of an age no longer conditions their expectations and motivates cultural production, it seems that the vacant space is occupied by an imagery of another kind, haunted. Hauntological music would express the relationship with a culture that lost its sense of the future and plunged into the mode of nostalgia, nostalgic for the existence of possible futures. And if in nostalgia our inability to represent our current experience drives us to apply past models and structures to our constructions, nostalgia for the possibility of a future leads us to formulate imprisoned times and situations that yearn for their lost and non-actualized futures. There is, in the hauntological, a relation between what is no longer and what is not yet, which leads to two different, though intertwined directions: what is no more, to the traumatic ‘compulsion to repeat’, a structure that repeats, a fatal pattern. What has not yet happened, to what is already effective, though virtually, as an attractor, an anticipation or prediction of behavior.

A hauntological music promotes anachronisms, encounters with a broken time; it points to the difficulty of establishing the present without a thrust from the future. A present too contaminated by the past and its expectations of both its future and its re-actualization.

#### 4.

It might be opportune to re-listen to Bach, but withdrawing him from the scope of focused listening, instead packaging it as furniture music. The piano, in fact, when not practiced upon, is not itself a decorative furniture? I know that today, on its top, there are cycling trophies, books on economics, public health pamphlets... and above reproductions of paintings: Nicolas de Staël, Georges Seurat. Its keys are still all ivory; its tuning low, half of a tone; it has more than a hundred years. Its wooden case is of a noble brown, yet not pompous; its arabesques are discreet. Even as a musical instrument, it is still a piece of furniture. Noticed, it brings back memories: when we would stop a bit to play and sing Cole Porter songs (not because we wouldn't sing MPB<sup>2</sup>, but that it was sang accompanied by the guitar). But then, this music, can it be decorative? Music during which we engage in our domestic chores, without major disturbances. Music we hear while reading a beautiful short story, maybe Cortázar's *El Perseguidor*, for example. Music of a certain elegance and complexity, but that stays under the radar; that can be soft and comforting, even if a bit disturbing. And also, music that, when noticed, is almost what it used to be and thus evokes its original formulation. Music that would get us into its endless mood, while affording the remembrance of when that transformed piece still had a beginning and an end.

But how could this be possible for these compositions praised for raising the need to pay attention, to follow lines, to learn variation games and 'problem solving' procedures? First, the contrapuntal austerity must give way to a proper listening mode of our spectacle society, approaching the corny and sentimental, of a cinematic-emotional inclination, of an orchestral atmosphere properly appropriated by cinema. Then, the transformation into something slow must guarantee that the music will stay in the background, as background music, not eliciting the structural listening mode and asking for an understanding of the trajectories in time of the structures contained. Also, the purity of a song that is sometimes understood as the "pure relation of the musical" must be broken, functionalizing the whole, instrumentalizing it in some way.

However, since these transformations cannot be readily accepted, there will be some tension. A *hiss*, sharp background noise usually present in cassette tapes, is added as a false mark of a past, against the timelessness of what is classic. Here, it is important to stress: this timelessness is precisely

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<sup>2</sup> "Música Popular Brasileira" (brazilian popular music); that is, mainly *bossa nova* and affinities.



that of the placement in a historical line in which each interpretation at the piano of the work is a re-actualization, the canonical being precisely that which is always capable of being present. It is, therefore, the name of a temporal category. Already with this transformation, our present's mark is given by the way in which it accustomed itself to falsify other times, reproducing them, appropriating their traits and employing them evocatively, without the typical naivety of that which happens to express its time by having ignored being part of it.

There will be also a certain refusal of the properly maudlin, materialized in serious bass lines and a melancholy that permeates, alongside a certain complexity that resists, even in the blurring of the voices, in the transformation of the co-dependent into the simultaneous, of the lines into blocks, of the entangled conceptions into cramped sonority. So the music made to fill the background and for relaxation, this lounge music, the room's ambience, is filled with an air less of white sofa, than of red curtain, like in some film by David Lynch. Something dark. But not dark as in *dark jazz*, restrained-relaxed, somberly detached. Far away from *donwtempo* or *chill out*, music just to relax at a party. Unless it is a sinister end of party, turned eternal celebration, where the music proceeds, virtually endless: that the whole set of pieces lasts 24 hours suggests that perhaps, in its repetition, we are trapped on the same day; that this day itself is what is repeating. But as this day varies in its repetition, what it will shatter in this curse will be present time itself, then presented as a nightmarish version of the end of the story.

In terms of fixed form, the prelude and fugue with their formula and intrinsic challenges gives way to a variant of the popular youtube conceptual art practice, the *800% slower*, which involves merely application - making something 8 times slower, making something last 8 times more. In addition, as one day has 24 hours and the first of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* set has 48 pieces in 24 pairs of the type prelude-fugue, now temporarily stretched, each pair will last one hour. So that the musical structural scheme will be maintained: each tonality will still define the harmonic field of each pair; and each pair will occupy one hour. Starting at C major at midnight, the chromatic order continues. From one hour to two o'clock, we will be under the tone of C minor. From two to three, C sharp Major, and then on, so that the set could also function as a precarious kind of clock.

The family home, whose temporality was given before as a series of interruptions and events, in a continuous present that would lead to the future, sees itself immersed in a kind of eerie cyclical present, a place tainted by the past, or rather by a projection from the past. In a way, the revenge of a

sound that was no longer being played and attentively listened to, now pervasive; a sound who sees in its lack of connection to a progressive line of culture an opportunity to freeze time.

Then, there will be, from the almost-tacky expressiveness of the notes, a timbristic elaboration that includes the activation of overdrive, of irregular distortion linked to the intensity level and curve of each sound-note. This irregular expressive addition should tempt the listener to turn his attention to that which should only be background, and seek to establish the possibility of an alternating state for the music, gravitating from background to foreground, back and forth. At the same time, from time to time spectral shadows (high notes of the harmonic spectrum) appear and disappear, trying to seduce us in their feebleness, as they need focus to be audibly detached and identified.

## 5.

One of my adolescent piano study idiosyncrasies consisted in trying to play a piece as slowly as possible. The favorite targets were the fugues of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. The main idea was that, by playing in this too slow a pace, the apprehension of the motifs and phrases would be so difficult that it would only be possible for those with a prior knowledge of the pieces. The consistency of the interpretation would then be evaluated through the intellectual comparison of the local, the perceived note, with the global, the internalized score.

Curtis Roads, in the celebrated beginning of the book *Microsound*, provides a vocabulary to address these perceptual boundaries.

3. **Macro** The time scale of overall musical architecture or form, measured in minutes or hours, or in extreme cases, days.
4. **Meso** Divisions of form. Groupings of sound objects into hierarchies of phrase structures of various sizes, measured in minutes or seconds.
5. **Sound object** A basic unit of musical structure, generalizing the traditional concept of note to include complex and mutating sound events on a time scale ranging from a fraction of a second to several seconds. (Roads, 2012: 3)

[And] As sound passes from one time scale to another it crosses perceptual boundaries. It seems to change quality. This is because human perception processes each time scale differently. (...) In some cases the borders between time scales are demarcated clearly; ambiguous zones surround others. (idem: 4)

What the juvenile wit sought was to make the slow performing tempo to cause a disturbance of the order of the temporal scale: structures thought for the meso-temporal scale would have their tissues too elongated and worn, because the notes, which should clearly present themselves on the scale of the sound object, would be spaced out so as to approach the meso scale. Consequently, the structures of the meso scales would also approach, albeit in this case less, the macro temporal scale. The difference here is that what is local, the relations of phrases and longer motives, would have its apprehension tending to be governed by an intellection of the global (of the macro scale), whereas the almost immediacy of the notes and short motives, would have their apprehension functioning in two moments: (i) the attack of the note, in its appropriate time scale; (ii) the postponement that would follow from the lag of the next attack, coupled with the expectation of its occurrence earlier than it would. Each note would then count as a gesture consisting of attack, decay, silence and expectation - a kind of improper one note phrase.

In the transformed Bach, as each note extends to the next, the continuous sound threatens framing the music as in the drone genre, but that does not take full effect. And this is because it is still possible, in the boundary between the temporal scales of the sound object and meso, and from each note, to infer their position in the piece's set of notes and make hypotheses about what will follow. Contrary to music plainly motionless, this slow constancy of articulation enables the extraction of information in each iteration, allowing one to follow intellectually the sequence. That is, it will still be possible to follow phrases and locate yourself formally while listening. For those who know the original pieces, this version retains the possibility of apprehension of structural aspects and allows the determination, not as imprecisely as it might initially seem, of clock time. The organic consistency of the original pieces, all of them constructing a sense of beginning, middle and end, theme and variation, is subordinated in this transformation to a temporal conduction in which the deduction of what piece is playing informs which half hour of the day one is and in which the relative note positions indicate a certain specific range of clock time. The slowness severs the relationship of structured consistency between part and whole. However, this breakup is partial. This partiality is characteristic of a transition that remains frontier based, which neither desires to lose nor gain their listener's attention.

## 6.

In Daphne Jardin's *German Lounge Vol. 1: Midnight Clock*, a hauntological rendition of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier Volume 1*, according

to the complex of factors exposed here, is put into practice. The rendition involves a series of themes, which sometimes configure themselves as a series of transformations or displacements, other times as question-like ideas, to be solved in some way. The list of these are below.

1.1 Music played at home, music performed → Music reproduced at home, music heard. 1.2 Prevailing of counterpoint; co-dependent voices → Harmonic predominance; aggregates. 1.3 TV as enemy; piano against TV → Piano sound made television tailored, cinematic, intrusive. 1.4 Musically fractured day, music as one of many events → Whole day immersed in music. 1.5 TV as ubiquitous presence → Music as constant presence. 1.6 Exercise as something that involves making progress, that as a result will bear fruit → Cyclical flowing of music; stagnant conception of the experience. 1.7 Music adulterated as revenge. 1.8 Meetings for the purpose of listening and debate (music as subject and instigator of subjects) → Experience of sound environment (music as an architectural filter). 1.9 Independent hands; physicality linked to musical register → Octave down transposition and acoustic shadows (blurring the acuity of the whole); non-physicalism of the electronic. 1.10 Porosity that impels concentration, attentive posture → Density that dispenses attention, distortion that fills the acoustic space indistinctly.

2.1 Music in its autonomy → Music in its possible functionality. 2.2 Participation in a tradition → Anachronism of an experimental music that laments the dismissal of the classics. 2.3 Music presented appropriately, unaltered → Music vilified, 'improved'. 2.4 Modernism suspended → Suspension of modernism affirmed, nostalgically. 2.5 Difficulty of interpretive practice, condensed in some tense moments of performance → Ease of playback; difficulty lies in not interrupting it, let it play to the end. 2.6 Seizure of attention by the melodic lines movements and intricate polyphony → Seizure of attention by timbre eruptions and recognitive evocations (remembrance of the source music). 2.7 Hesitant stance of participation in tradition → Melancholic acceptance of the condition of marginality.

3.1 Electronic music no longer as avant-garde: attempt to pertain to already codified practices, to a defined genre: hauntology. 3.2 Future of the past / temporal curse: the ghost of belonging to tradition, to high culture. 3.3 Lack of future: constant retrieval of and elaboration from tradition, from the canon. 3.4 Nostalgia: family environment, piano, Bach, future as a composer. 3.5 Compulsion to repeat: the practice of playing here and there some preludes and fugues, every day a bit → playing (reproducing) them all sequentially, occupying thus the whole day. 3.6 Influence of what hadn't

taken place: tradition, of dubious concreteness, that still insists, as a presentiment. 3.7 Disappearance of the present: day that is repeated indefinitely; curse of reviving the same day.

4.1 Chamber music → Furniture music. 4.2 Structural listening → Listening inclined to the emotional and the occasional. 4.3 Tempos well paced → Dragged tempos. 4.4 Classical timelessness (constant re-actualizing) → Placement of a coded historical sound mark (simulacrum of the past). 4.5 Intellectual, sunny atmosphere → dark atmosphere. 4.6 Fixed form: prelude and fugue; pieces are composed → Fixed form: “800% slower”; processes are applied. 4.7 Organic progression → Mechanical, clockwise progression. 4.8 Place tainted by time: the house as an eerie environment.

5.1 Very slow tempo = Time Stretch. 5.2 Well-structured time scales → Blurred boundaries between time scales.

The approach sought here was that in-between the possibility of leaving a musical work in the background, not focusing on it, and the placement of certain traps that make interesting to pay attention to the music. Following an hour of music is not much, and following 24 hours, although uncomfortable, is feasible. The objective sought would be the imprisonment of the listener in an ambiguous temporality. To incorporate tensions that are not solved or at least, to incorporate the possibility of alternating approaches to the music, suggested by itself. Thus, one will seek a tension proper to boundaries, to the passage between modes of listening and apprehension. To portals through which the living communicate with the unlife. And cast a curse that strikes those who, like me, happen to nourish a special attachment to a hesitant form of a tradition proper to a damaged life.

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