

How Furniture Feels

“Furniture music completes ones property; it’s new; it doesn’t upset customs; it isn’t tiring; it’s French; it won’t wear out; it *isn’t* boring.”

- Erik Satie

Some music is created in order to be ignored. Some music is banished to the empty insides of an elevator shaft, or the quiet melody of a sterile gallery. A layering of simple sounds softly pressing itself into a moment, like the lingering feeling of three fingers against the small of a naked back as he reaches across to turn off the alarm. Days later, surrounded in a dark room dream daze, the aftertaste of skin remains. A brief consideration of ghost fingers. A desire to remain in an impression, to dabble in an echo of a memory.

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Depending on the composition, this music can produce different effects upon listeners. When employed with a simple melody and whimsical undertones, it slows down the pace in which people walk and converse. Hardly noticeable under the muffle of conversation and traffic, this branch of music is often employed on loop in malls so shoppers in front of store windows can mull over products created in the hopes of being purchased.

Walking through a shopping center with headphones clamped over ears defeats the careful planning of music etiquette. Shutting it out before it even has the chance to be forgotten.

Originally, it was called ‘furniture’ music; no more than an object placed in a room. A lopsided table where weary elbows rest before moving on. A worn carpet, sneaking up between the bases of toes, curling around the hardened flesh of heels.

An accretion of notes mimicking conversations, weaving between the syllables of mouths, begging at the heels of passerby’s to be listened to. A barking music, blending into the background of more urgent concerns.

Furniture is never allowed to leave a mark, though sometimes it manages to. A long scar in wooden floorboards from the stubborn legs of a couch, or paint chips in the side of a wall from a mattress moving in. asking to be remembered.

The bottom side of a hierarchy of sounds, the gutters of a page. It's a shame how hundreds of words blur into books when only a handful are remembered. That noise is necessary for silence.

Closure is the process that occurs between the spaces in a comic book where the mind sees part of an object, fills in the gap, and transforms it into a continuous reality, creating an alternate space for new stories unwritten.

Furniture writing: a small print designed to be overlooked. Skimming eyes jumble layers of words, only aware the aftertaste of a novel, making it swallow spit in the back of throats.

Somehow, someone dreamed of an offshoot of music, a future of overlooked noise performed by the ignorance of ears that do nothing more than occupy a space. An offshoot of touch, conserved in layers of comforters, performed by the clumsy ignorance of bodies that do nothing more than occupy a bed.

It was a furniture kiss he placed on my eyelids in the dark. A light atmospheric press on my skin. Furniture fingers that slid down my back as he fell asleep. Moments meant to be forgotten, pushed to the margins of a centerpiece of a more concrete touch. But later, this is the residue I remember, the fingertip splatters I allow my body to carry with me.

I often think of carrying around a magnifying glass with me, so I can watch the world pass by in small print.

In this magnified state, I can pay attention to the background blur slipping behind me, skim the ripples of a plush couch to feel the furniture pop forward. I can hear a voice break the container of a throat, a slow molasses drip catching in ear buckets before it ceases to hum, a low rattle in its wake.

Three days later, those three fingers against my back are all I can remember. Wondering if any of it had been real, blurring down a nights worth of touch to a half second finger graze.

Taking this furniture memory as a proof that this blurry footnote moment existed.

On the debut of furniture music, Satie delivered a warning before the intermission where it played, relaying the audience instructions to ignore. Ignore the musicians cleverly hidden in the corners of the room, alone in their solitude as they fingered notes against strings, tapped their thumbs against the keys on a piano, blew air through a narrow bronze tube.

Despite his instructions, some ears were not perfectly tuned to notes of forgetting. Upon hearing the sounds strumming from the auditorium, the ears made a mad dash for their seats despite Satie's loud yells that they were performing the experiment miserably wrong.

Closure is the process that occurs when a mind makes a jump between cleanly laid out facts, the frantic working of a brain in order to have an uninterrupted narrative. Fragments are clunky, awkward things that are often disregarded or brushed to the side in an attempt to seamlessly blend them into a woven tapestry story, tied together with punctuation.

How frightening white space can be.

As demonstrated by this opening, learning to ignore requires training. 1920 ears, conditioned to attentively listen to music, were not able to ignore the sounds filling the auditorium, much to the dismay of the avant-garde artists that created it. Sometimes, art falls flat on its face, unable to carry out the purpose for which it was created.

Some days, I wonder if no one would remember I existed were it not for the residue of lavender in the bathroom after showering, or the occasional strawberry yogurt crusted spoon residing in the sink.

Between the bones of a ribcage, there is a different overlooked noise. A silence that buds between bones, a cavern that echoes long after a voice ceases to hum, the ligaments finish rattling. A low rumble of empty, expanding in stretched hours of unconscious, pressing against the

I always carry the ghosts of fingertips on my skin.

No more than furniture music, designed to subtly shape an atmosphere. A melody of beats, aligned with a mission in mind. Playing softly in a background cacophony, filtering delicate messages into the ears that travel through a room.

Growing up, in car rides I was often so quiet that adults would forget I was there, slipping into conversation young ears are not meant to hear, or forgetting me in a car somewhere as they roamed about their days. After, they would joke about how their eyes were trained to look right over me, mistaking my five-year-old outline for a different shade of brown leather chair.

For a long time, I did not have a birth certificate. Somewhere in a move I made from New York to Massachusetts after both my parents died, it was misplaced. An orphan with no documentation, being passed through slippery hands of loose family members. A furniture child, brushed to cobweb corners of hallways that were not mine, with no papers to prove I was a living, breathing, heart-beating thing.

After an incident in which I fear I committed some offense, he refused to look at me in a crowded group. Let his eyes pass over my figure, keeping his hands still by his side. Two hours of ignoring my now covered body, sitting three people away from me. A bubble began to form in the base of my throat, a longing to tell him how much worse this silence is, how furniture I feel. How a flicker of anger through his face would be better than sweeping cold eyes, reducing me to a dreary painting that he wanders past.

After decades of training, this millennium has ushered in new ears tuned to the art of ignoring. Fingerprints that paint in impression hues, leaving rushed kaleidoscope splatter across skin. Overproduced beats, bigger than the lyrics blurring behind them. Now, it takes three or more times of hearing a song for it to become more than a straining sound. Driving on long car rides, music that plays over cracked radios is easy to tune out. Songs that are not meant to be ignored, created by mainstream artists who sing for a living. Sometimes, art falls flat on its face, unable to carry out the purpose for which it was created.

Since then, I have embarked on a quiet mission to try to prove my existence.

If an afterthought child sits, furniture light in a chair, will she be able to adopt its patterns, to morph her skin into the exact color and pattern scheme of what is behind her?

In black and white days, entire neighborhoods crowded around wooden static boxes to listen to music. Friday nights were family record spins, classy dress affairs, cocktails and smooth blues. I am told that this is a decaying art, now blaring too loud in packed drunk clubs where bodies are pressed against each other, seeping sweat into the dance floor below.

Now, elevators devoid of music are eerily lonely places. Restaurants without a humming lullaby magnify the metal clicking of forks and knives. Malls without a jingle are too sterile for my taste.

From a young age, I learned how to touch in a way that left the least impact on an object, leaving few ripples in the footprints that I left behind. I learned how to keep my fingerprints unnoticed, merely a furniture graze because few things were mine to mark, and few things were rough enough to survive the crater wake of orphan hands. This is a residue that carries: an unwillingness to create ripples. Touching other people's skin is the hardest for me, weary of creating craters by leaving marks with contaminated fingers.

If I am to ever disappear, to fade away into background shuffle, take these words as proof that I haunted these streets, that my fingers skimmed these surfaces, that my flailing exhale filled this air.