

INSTAL¹⁰

Collective Manifesto - Attempt Number 1

To exemplify his conviction that nothing in the world¹ is as expendable as the idea of the individual², Barry has arranged to try and de-individualise the Arika talks at INSTAL 10, Here's how...

All of the following text is copied from other people's writing; amended only for consistency, to make it apply to music, or scripted to falsely present an individual, authorial voice. That Barry couldn't resist the proprietary notion of self-expression is part of the play <-> problem.

Barry pre-recorded and played back these 'talks', openly trying to pass off them off as his own, to the Glasgow Open School last week, pointing out the falseness of what he was trying at the time. After a little time, they recorded their own collective conversation and responses to 'his' 'talk'.

Rather than any individual, subjective talk by Barry at INSTAL, this secondary, collective recording (a group subjectivity?) will be played instead.

As such, the following text is simply meant to allow you (should you want) to have something akin to the information Glasgow Open School responded to. We don't want to hide any part of the process. In fact: We hope you might continue it.

¹ Which could include art.

² Who could be an artist.

Talk: A
Duration: 16 mins
Title: Do you believe in ghosts?

0.

A disclaimer.

I have tried, at all times, to avoid presenting here anything that might seem like an original thought.

To make this clear, in an admittedly clunky manner, (whilst also insisting that we always include the act of communication in the content of communication itself, since the meaning of each act of communication is also to reflexively assert that it is an act of communication); the following words (and the ideas they represent), have been assembled by me, but you should not necessarily attribute them to me.

I'm going to try make it sound like they're coming to me as if by inspiration. I may also pass them off to you conversationally as my own. But let's be clear: these are other people's thoughts, who in turn we could argue with about the provenance of such thoughts.

1.

Preface: Music is about more than just music.

We don't mean this in some lazy way. Not only is music that is easily identified as being, say, political in it's content, about more than just music. Any music that claims only to be interested in beauty, or in things that are only musical, is still making an ideological statement - just we never talk about it.

And so, we could say that all music makes an extra-musical claim. Or maybe it's the other way round. Maybe all music comes from some non-musical idea or concept.

2.

The situation. Or: (experimental) music is not by definition political in a good way.

All experimental music that we hear today sets itself up as being somehow against the status quo, as being somehow implicitly political in this supposedly oppositional stance towards the mainstream. In fact, as far as we can tell, almost all experimental music is enacted in exactly the way that is dictated to us by the status quo and dominant ideology of our day: be unique, express yourself, realize your potentials, refine your taste, cultivate a sense of distinction, individuate yourself: from sexual pleasures to social success to expressing your

unique vision via your music/ kitchen/ t-shirt collection - all of this is how we are supposed to act, in general as good consumers, but also through music. It's not oppositional, it's just an accelerated form of consumerism.

So: given their shared credo you could say, without a hint of irony: capitalists are good noise musicians. They're also good improvisers. Could we convince you that improvisers are similarly good capitalists?

How has this sorry state of affairs come about?

3.

What's at the core of music (and is it worth salvaging)?

Radical and experimental artforms have always come about as the product of some rich, radicalised and complex event within a social, political and philosophical situation. Pick an example and think it through: Dada, Situationism, Improvisation, the Delta Blues... Whether these movements say it out loud or not, all of them have made a claim for how to engage with, act against or oppose the dominant cultural forms of their time. This claim can be, in every case, boiled down to a central tenet: a new, core idea, a way in which to engage with the world or a way in which to take some kind of stance - a core idea that everybody following it understands and can use to decide about something that is otherwise undecidable.

Musicians or artists, if true to such a radical core idea, are sort of then put in process: they are obliged to make art or music in a certain way, if they are to remain true to this idea. We could therefore say that the only way to measure the success of a music is whether it's produced in fidelity to the radical concept that put it in process. This seems to me to be more useful than saying whether something was good or bad, or some other vague and undemonstrable personal statement of taste.

We could say that noise music, for example, made a core appeal to an idea, that could be aimed at everybody: maybe it went something like: "we can focus on the unwanted in a situation, we can exceed restrictive societal norms, we can celebrate excess, we can overflow our own subjectivity". Initially, in response to this core idea, people were obliged to make music that involved extreme volume, bodily peril and behaviour that was unacceptable to society at the time.

4.

A Useful Musical Claim.

Now, let's suppose that you agree with this first simple claim: that music makes an appeal to ideas, in response to the situation. You would be right in now saying that of course there can be bad ideas as well as good ones. How do we distinguish? One question we could ask is: whether this radical core concept that is proposed is for everybody (we could say, universal), or just for some? If it were understood as a tool, could we all benefit, or do you want to keep it to yourself?

5.

Fidelity.

For the sake of our argument, let's start by saying that something happens which allows us to identify some core radical concept or proposal, the product of social interaction within a political, cultural, philosophical situation. And that this radical concept proposes a change for the better in the way we engage with the world (as we perceive it, but importantly as it is addressed to everybody).

Questions:

- a. How do we try or fail to stay true to this?
- b. Can we follow this obligation: how do we maintain it?
- c. And can we think of some examples of succeeding and failing if we were to think in these terms about music?

I hereby submit that it is all too fucking easy to identify failures and sadly tricky to point to any meaningful fidelities... so maybe let's work backwards from these failures, of which there are a few types....

6.

A Reactive Subject .

Here's one way things go wrong. Suppose we take Pierre Schaeffer and his radical proposal for reduced listening, which is at the heart of his system of *musique concrète*. Schaeffer boldly said that any sound could be considered music (or, more poetically you could say: music is anything we listen to with the intention of listening to music), and that because of new technology (basically tape recorders – this was the 1940's) we could listen more closely than we ever had before, and in doing so become more fully aware: we could record sound, remove it from any reference to what caused it, and appreciate it more fully for what it was.

In making this claim Schaeffer was heavily indebted to the predominant social and philosophical systems of thought of his time and place (the 1940's in France), which was

undoubtedly the school of Phenomenology. Phenomenology is primarily concerned with the systematic reflection on and analysis of the structures of consciousness, and the phenomena which appear in acts of consciousness. This reflection was to take place from a highly modified "first person" viewpoint, studying phenomena not as they appear to "my" consciousness, but to any consciousness whatsoever. Which of course, if you swapped the word phenomena in that last sentence for sound (of course a phenomena in-itself), or even better, for 'sound object', you would have a working definition of musique concrète as well. All of this of course sounds pretty political as well (in a broad sense - because it tries to affect the collective conditions of existence - which I think is a nice and simple definition of politics). And it's universally aimed - it wanted to affect the conditions for everybody. It is also deeply flawed, but that's another matter.

Anyway, back to the point: Because; I would like to say that the majority of followers of Schaeffer have failed to act as his core ideas oblige them to. Contemporary musique concrète has become an entrenched academic renunciation and outright denial of Schaeffer's radical proposition as being for everyone. It's a sorry normalization and reintegration into the mainstream of academic elitism. In this way it's just like reactionary politics. Which is to say - a kind of conservatism that incorporates new ideas by divesting them of their political content so that they palatably reinforce the status quo.

We might agree to call the kind of subject produced by this sorry recuperation into the elitist mainstream a Reactive Subject.

7.

An Obscure Subject.

Here's another way things go wrong. Lets, for the sake of argument, take noise music, which we mentioned earlier. What we'd like to excavate from noise music is that it suggests a reason to and process of focusing on the unwanted in any situation, and that in this unwanted excess there is the possibility to disrupt established codes, orders, discourses, habits and expectations, aesthetics and moralities. By the way, we don't have a problem with identifying or naming this now, from my point of view. We don't feel like this had to be stated at the outset of noise music for it to be true for noise music.

But so and anyway: this isn't what noise music seems to do, at least not any more. Instead of a fidelity to this radical proposition, noise music has ossified around a deluded and obscurantist mystification of that proposition, and a now homogenised set of stylistic gestures: extreme volume, macho posturing, a standardised sound and in the worst cases the lazy conflation of shock tactics with the celebration of transgression dressed up as an investigation of taboos.

This isn't a fidelity to the original radical proposition; it is its occultation and mystification. It is a total enforcing without moderation: it takes a proposition aimed at everybody, and applies it only to the individual: it reduces that idea to a matter of taste, and as a way to distinguish the individual from others. Which is to say that it shares a lot with racism, fascism and obscurantism.

It is not the trace of an idea: it is the ghost of that idea.

8.

A Faithful Subject.

All of this is definitely not to say that we have given up on the radical propositions made by reduced listening, or noise music. And nor, we would argue, should you. But in order to have some kind of fidelity to them, it is important that we resurrect and renew them. True fidelity is only possible in the form of repetition, or a return to the core ideas originally proposed: we have to rethink them today, in relation to our own situation. We have to allow them purchase on the here and now: on our widest context and situation. We have to think them afresh, and therefore oblige ourselves to act in fidelity to them now.

Here's an example: We are often taught that music is organised sound. What if, instead, we think about a process of organised listening? Perhaps then we can do a few things.

Firstly: We can refocus music not as being concerned with sounds per se, but instead as being a process of listening (to sounds). This then allows us to ask: what sounds do we want to listen to? Who else should hear these sounds? Which sounds can we hear but wish we didn't? And which can we not hear, but wish we could?

Secondly: we can ask ourselves, what if we address ourselves to the wider political implication of the word organised. Who is organising, and what are we organising about, for or against? Could a process of listening be useful in a political understanding of organising? Doesn't organising imply collective action? So does organised listening require collective listening, and does this mean negotiation, conflict, or dialectical synthesis? And could the incredible tools developed around listening in the experimental music of the 20th Century have any use here?

These are the questions (paraphrased clunkily by us) the activist sound collective Ultra-red ask themselves and, for over 15 years, have tried to put into everyday political organising and practice as tools used by the larger groups they are members of and who are together investigating issues of migration, AIDS, housing, poverty, community representation and racism.

We think their work is one example of a fidelity to a musical concept, developed primarily out of musique concrète. But instead of being turned into a dull academic and elitist school of thought (which musique concrète most certainly is in the main today), they find in Schaeffer's ideas (and specifically in his focus on the listening encounter) the means for him to deconstruct and exceed the Phenomenological limitations of his project: to find a way to universalise Schaeffer's ideas, as a means to produce, (in collectivity) the dangerously porous tapestry of hearing with the ear of the other.

9.

A Prescription to Combat Corruptions.

And of course, this kind of process seems to require us to make a music unlike what is now commonly thought of as experimental music, as noise music, as improvisation, musique concrète or conceptual music, or whatever radical system of thought in sound you have an investment in....which might get you laughed at, derided or generally ignored. (But then, we imagine noise, improvisation etc didn't seem much like music at the time either.)

So but: in doing all of this, we have to avoid the mistakes of others, and we have to act with:

- a. Discernment: We have to distinguish between false/ true fidelity.
- b. Courage & endurance: Keep going!
- c. Moderation: and probably with restraint.

10.

A Question.

So then: what would be an experimental music procedure that is not just a ghost of its conceptual core, but a process of fidelity to a radical proposition for how we all engage with the world?

Talk: B
Duration: 12 mins
Title: What is uncreativity?

1.

Taste.

Can we please move beyond ways of making and talking about music that glorify individual taste? So and so has "an exquisite sense of timing", somebody else "an impeccably ability to blend sounds". Musicians express a unique vision, there is something intangible about why their music is simply better than that of others...

I despair. I really do.

You simply cannot have a music that claims to be somehow in opposition to the mainstream while still embodying ideas of individual taste, for at least two blatant reasons.

The first of which being of course that the very core injunction and the route pernicious instruction of mainstream of society today is: be all you can be, live your life to the full, cultivate a sense of distinction, enjoy!

I don't even agree that this is any enjoyment at all, anyway. We have long since moved from the permission to enjoy to a deranged obligation to enjoy. Of course, this constant haranguing sabotages (via guilt) any chance of real enjoyment what so ever. (As an aside, this is why I find any notion of freedom in music to be either willfully naïve - (it's not the definition of freedom I understand) or spiteful - (free from whom?).

2.

Social Status.

Ehm, so but secondly: the seeking of social status involves practices which emphasize and exhibit cultural distinctions and differences (I am this and you are not) which are a crucial feature of all social stratification...individual taste is really, at route, a means to make lifestyle choices; a means to positively define yourself within the totality of cultural practices (how you dress or speak, your outlook and bodily dispositions...). While status is about political entitlement and legal location within civil society, status also involves and to a certain extent is, style. Taste arises out of struggles for social recognition or status.

All of which is to say that taste is a sociological locus and practice of consumption for the production of status: how culture is used and to what ends it is put, by whom, in order to

create and defend cultural categories. To perceive something aesthetically in a certain way, is something you learn, depending on all kinds of social characteristics.

So, and I insist on this - Make no mistake: to say that you appreciate something as being tasteful is to declare that you positively define yourself against others, you appreciate the world in a way others don't, or that you are seeking to raise yourself above either whoever you are speaking to or some other shared foe.

Moreover, and above any other person, the artist plays a sorry role in this charade: charged with the role of being both arbiter and enforcer of a hierarchical taste.

Shame on you.

3.

Self-Expression.

I am sick to the back teeth of music, and conversations about music, that focus on notions of creativity or any appeal to some kind of unique expressive subject. I would like to argue that self-expression was only a separable issue for a very brief time in history in the arts or anywhere else. Some of you here might identify this time as being the last 300 years, or more to the point, since the rise of the bourgeoisie. I hereby submit that: That time is just about over; especially given (amongst many other convincing arguments across science and philosophy) that modern neuroscience and the philosophy of consciousness is so close to proving that no such thing as the self ever has, or will ever exist.

4.

I hereby put it to *you*, that there is no such *thing* as the *self*, anyway.

More to the point: how do you even know what you like? According to neuroscientist and philosopher Thomas Metzinger, no such things as selves exist in the world: nobody ever had or was a self. All that exists are phenomenal selves, which is also to say - a process that appears in conscious experience. From this we could easily argue (if we had more time) towards the conclusion that the 'unique expressive self' (Wordsworth, Barry Esson, and so on...) is constructed.

But so, we might deduce together, having thrashed it out a bit: if the self is constructed, we might say that such a construction is the product of certain environmental, as well as chemical or neurobiological factors: we could ask: "hey, Barry: did you notice that your self is conditioned by its context."

Now, we could also say (and I don't think we'd have many objections to this) that if there is a normative or dominant ideology and status quo then there must be a normative production of cultural intellect, informed by this status quo.

So we might agree then that: Both the notion and the content of the self is at least to some degree a product of the dominant social situation: which we can call Capitalism for now.

So let's be clear: it's safe to say that there is no room for self-expression in a radical art. Rather, we might ask: how could a radical art produce some other kind of subjectivity?

5.

Uncreativity.

What would be an art or a music uncontaminated by compulsive proprietary misapplied artistry, the editing, the purposeful pointing out of things, the insistence on interpreting for others? Are there strategies we could adopt so that we obstinately make no claims on originality? Ones that, on the contrary, employ intentionally self and ego effacing tactics using: maybe these tactics would have to include all kinds of illegitimate or frowned upon actions that seem to lack in any artistry whatsoever: uncreativity, unoriginality, illegibility, appropriation, plagiarism, fraud, theft, and falsification as your art or your own province and precepts; information management, databasing, and extreme process as methodologies; and boredom, valuelessness, and nutritionlessness as an ethos.

Because: Don't you think there is enough material in the world already? Why do you think you should add anything more? Isn't it enough to recognize that we don't give meaning to objects by us paying attention to them or by imposing our self upon them, but rather object reach out to us; they force us to think.

So, if this is the case, then maybe we could make a fairly simple statement: it seems there are at least some decent starting points from which to follow up on our ability to choose not to take part in the production of creative selves as commodities.

6.

Desubjectification.

So maybe ours should be a process of attempting to desubjectify: to move away from the subjects produced by the standardising and homogenising processes of global capitalism/ mass media/ hierarchical taste. A call to become actively involved in various strategies and practices that will allow us to produce/transform, go beyond, reject our habitual selves.

And we can reasonably ask: if we are to move beyond the self - how do we construct and determine ourselves in the radically last instant, not on an individual basis, but as individuals within a multiplicity, or a collectivity.

And could we imagine a music or art of similar concerns or as part of this process: one governed by a kind of rule that orientates us away from the false notions self-expression, and away from the pernicious nature of individual choice, towards the exploration of rational collective obligation (sorry to throw that word obligation in there right at the end of this talk).

Anyway, I was saying something like: can we follow a way of thinking that does not demand anything, that simply proposes the possibility that you have the courage to assume the decision and the consequences of your own acts, without protecting yourself in the imperatives of an ideology, a religion, or an authority, which convert you into an irresponsible person, first in regard to yourself, and then in regard to society. But where the only freedom available is measured by the potential failure to do what one is rationally obliged to (there's that word obliged again).

Talk: C
Duration: 16 mins
Title: What is to be done?

1.

A Recapitulation.

In the first two talks I've tried to outline (perhaps shakily) our problems with contemporary musical and artistic activity: here's a kind of emergency compendium of what I've passed off as my own so far...

Talk 1.

- 1) Music is about more than just music: it is always the product of rich and complex social, philosophical, political factors.
- 2) Much experimental music thinks that it's inherently political (in a good way), as if just 'improvising' (for example), is somehow noble in and of itself!
- 3) This is never the case, without thinking through the foundational radical thought or proposal at the heart of any system of thought or action, and asking:
 - a) Is applicable to everyone?
 - b) Does it oblige us to act (in a specific way)?
 - c) How do we remain true to that obligation?
 - d) How do we resist mystifying or occulting it?
 - e) How do we resist reactively recuperating it back into the mainstream, or making it elitist?
- 4) What would be an experimental music that is not just a ghost of its conceptual core, but a process of fidelity to a radical proposition for how to engage with the world?

Talk 2.

- 1) Both the enacting of taste based decisions, and their favourable reception, stratifies society and allows those involved to define themselves against others.
 - a) As such, taste is nothing other than lifestyle choice.
- 2) Self-expression is a hackneyed and embarrassing cultural hang-up:
 - a) we could say that the "self" (how do you do inverted commas in a talk?) is produced by, serves and in return produces the status quo.
- 3) Any music based on, involving or received via notions of taste, creativity or self-expression should be rejected as outdated, outmoded and pernicious.
- 4) Instead, how about
 - a) We cultivate processes of uncreativity so as to guard against the production of selves as commodities, and
 - b) We embrace a notion of desubjectification and collective practices so that we can imagine (amongst other things) a music or art governed by a kind of rule that

orientates us away from the false notions self expression, and the spiteful nature of individual choice, towards the exploration of rational collective obligation.

2.

A Different Step.

Now that we're up to speed, let's continue by saying: that we would rather promote a qualitatively different process to the dominant mode of artistic production within experimental music today.

Instead: can we refuse to do what is asked of us (to consolidate anything into a value) and subtract ourselves from the distribution of prefabricated sensations, habits and judgements and prejudices which are crystalised in tastes. To not just add a few more empty styles, but to do something of consequence.

We might argue about a notion of *consequence* for a long time, but I'd always start by saying that art in the UK today runs a country mile the very minute it looks like it might actually start to have any of the consequences for social benefit or radical action that it so often claims for itself. How could we have some kind of real world and positive consequence?

Maybe by a process that recognises and names a force of thought at the core of music, even after the fact. That excavates radical ideas, sees them as coming from and offering something back to our wider social situation and asks how we can think them now, and how doing that might require us to act.

We consider this an act of fidelity, a process led by rational obligation to an idea, which (handily, you might say) allows us to clearly measure success in stark terms (rather than a vague language of the arts today), in direct relation between how we actually act and how we were obliged to.

3.

Consequence.

If the word art is used to indicate something extraordinary, an exalted entity created by humans, then the stipulation is likely to be included that art should not have anything to do with everyday mundane situations, that it must remain untouched by reality, just as it leaves real circumstances untouched.

But and however and you could even say by contrast: there have been efforts since the beginning of the twentieth century to develop another understanding of art. Since then

actions, ideas or processes that involve themselves in the circumstances under which we live have also (sometimes) been considered art. I will now essay a demonstration of how.

4.

Material.

In traditional art, a great diversity of materials were formed and manipulated. Marble, canvas, pigments and other materials were the point of departure for every creation of form. They helped the artist's imagination take on tangible shape. In activist or sociopolitical art, as it's developed in the last 30 years or so, relationships have taken the place of these material substances. Like the old materials that were given formal shape, they are the substance that is manipulated. As with marble or the painting surface, this substance is not arbitrarily formable. In order to transform existing circumstances, the limits of variability must be recognized, just as they must be in traditional art. This means that the hurdle - the envisioned transformation - must not be set too high. It must be high enough that one can speak of a noticeable change while still being low enough to be jumped over. The art is in aiming for a recognizable and sensible change and then bringing it about.

Here's an example: an artist could take it upon herself to get a one-way traffic regulation for her street repealed because she had recognized the senselessness of the regulation - the Glaswegian drivers among you may feel some twinge of sympathy with out imagined artist here. She would then make an effort and do everything possible to realize her plan, just as the Baroque master made an effort to realize his plan for a ceiling fresco in a cathedral, (whether he personally put his hand to the task or not is of no matter here).

5.

Claiming something as art, or as music.

Just as traditional artworks, material objects, whether they're paintings or bottle drying racks, cannot initially be art per se. Instead they're awarded this status, although I'm trying not to use the word status, so let's say appellation, anyway: they are awarded this appellation through special sanctioning. The bottle drying rack becomes art, because Duchamp says it is, and other people agree.

So maybe perfectly normal actions or socio-political interventions can be given this appellation too. If they are presented within the context of art, and if they are accepted as art, these actions mutate and suddenly: they are art.

6.

A similar claim for music.

We would like to make a similar claim for music: which is:

- 1) The core radical ideas that establish music as a means to gain purchase on reality, can be applied in similar expanded ways.
 - a) Which is to say that: there are a set of radical ideas at the heart of music, and if we hold true to them, they require us to act in certain ways.
 - b) This is because many of those core ideas, once identified, can be seen to make appeals to and have uses within ways of making, acting and doing that are not just musical, but instead are part of our wider context.
- 2) So these ways of acting can be applied to our wider context of social situations and social interactions as much as they can to notes, or instruments, or groups of musicians.
 - a) This maybe doesn't seem musical at first (at least not to everybody): undoubtedly it's not the ways in which music currently departs itself.

But, importantly...

- 3) But, such practices, such ways of living, such social interactions, can be thought of as musical, if and when the core concept at their heart is itself musical, and really importantly if and when we claim them to be musical, and others agree with us that they are.

7.

An example.

Can we agree that Ultra-red's work, as mentioned in Talk A, point 8 (A Faithful Subject), is an example of such a practice?

8.

Political messages are not the point.

For the avoidance of all doubt, I, personally, have little interest in communicating a political point in a piece of art. Rather, I am more interested in how music already activates us socially, sexually, intellectually, aesthetically. I see all these modes of being - structures of feeling if you will - as having political currency. It is not the case that our politics merely reproduce our modes of being. Rather, it is through these that the conditions for our politics are reproduced. If our art insists on the disavowal of politics, then we get the politics that disavowal makes possible.

9.

A Final Question.

I'd like to end by asking: what might other similar examples look like? Could we envisage a similar application of the core ideas of noise music, or of improvisation? Of the social and communitarian proposal of folk music not as a way of playing the fiddle or of singing, but as a practice of oral tradition, of re-enacting social bonds and shared history, or sharing collective learning and community building?

So, the question is: if we've had enough consumption and enough genuflection; then what is to be done?

If you think it makes any difference as to who once said what, whether those proclamations could be said to be theirs and where exactly such and such is appropriated in the above text; we're happy to tell you or anybody else who asks...