

Coco Klockner

Body-Music

‘You would think it odd, would you not?’ Orlo Williams wrote in 1923, describing the strange scenario of stumbling upon a friend listening to music *alone*, of all things, a mode of listening only recently made possible through the proliferation of the phonograph record. ‘You would look twice to see whether some other person were not hidden in some corner of the room, and if you found no such one would painfully blush, as if you had discovered your friend sniffing cocaine, emptying a bottle of whisky, or plaiting straws in [their] hair.’

I love this dopey quote.

I imagine Williams clutching a humongous rack of pearls barely supported by his neck as he walks in on his buddy Joe bopping along to Billy Jones’ 1923 release *Yes! We Have No Bananas*. Joe freezes like a deer in headlights, begging a scandalized Orlo to not tell anyone.

Music changed when it became repeatable in this way, when it turned into something in which its players lost their bodies, when its sound could play to an empty room. Eventually, this led to the normalization of the cinematic soundtrack. Now, it’s something so ingrained in my ability to parse the world that I can barely point to where it starts or ends. It’s a mode of listening that is the only way anyone I’ve ever met has primarily understood what music is.

In cinema, the term *diegetic* describes sounds that occur within the depicted space, while extra-diegetic sounds are heard only by the ears of those in some unseen audience. It bleeds into my life and its emotional landscape very easily: *Do I really know if a pivotal life decision is a good one if Céline Dion’s 1996 single It’s All Coming Back To Me Now is NOT playing over my meditation?* If extra-diegetic affect is what emerges when feeling is projected onto a scene without the knowledge of its subject, such a description has become a foundational framework for how I understand emotion in general.

In this sense, the automobile was the most cinematic tool in the world for a period of time: it was a natural framing device with an ideal, built-in sound system that merely pretended it was built for transportation. It perfectly simulated an affect through a machine that also just happened to run a mile a minute. By chance: if its engine was humming at 1440 RPM, the rotation would perfectly match the standard cinematic frame rate of 24 FPS, a latent synchronicity of sorts.

That title for most effective cinematic object shifted when the Sony Walkman was released in 1979 and enabled a studio album to fit in a pocket. It’s worth noting that, when music reached this level of mobility, one of the first advertisements for the portable cassette player illustrated its cinematic consequences by depicting a listener stepping from black and white footage into a world filled with technicolor.

Now that bluetooth headphones are actually good enough to be reliable, extra-diegetic affect is accessible wherever I still have battery life left. The absence of wires, of extra weight, and of shared experience each transform my listening into something new: my emotion is most real when I am my own audience.

A scene:

I jog down Clay Street. Sunlight streams through the trees.

The air is muggy.

My running gait is self-conscious, proprioceptive down to the positioning of each finger as my spine remains stiff, celestially-angled and rigid with intention.

The trap beat plays at 75 BPM. It runs a deep low-end under distorted, cicada-chirp hi-hats. An auto-tuned voice arcs over everything, lyrics navigating an aural, non-syntactic, logic of sorts.

I feel deeply embodied and abject at the same time. I feel dumb. My running rhythm aligns with the beat.

A wave of emotion rises up, emerging from beneath my skin through raised hair follicles, sensitive to the air as if poked by needles. I slow down, winded.

I don't want to talk about it.

Coco Klockner (b. 1991, Cleveland, OH, USA) is an artist and writer currently working in New York City. Their most recent text, K-Y, was published by Genderfail Press in 2019. They love being bad.