WMO Orchestra: Structure, Perception, and Listening Without Authority

An essay accompanying an experimental five-movement work

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January 2026

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Abstract

WMO Orchestra is a five-movement experimental work that investigates how structure can be perceived without central authority, narrative development, or expressive intention. Built from minimal musical material and realised through phase displacement, temporal divergence, pitch drift, structural erosion through compression, and contextual response, the work stages a sequence of perceptual conditions under which coherence emerges, weakens, and persists without being enforced.

Rather than proposing a new musical language or formal system, the work functions as an enacted inquiry into listening itself. Each movement isolates and recombines constraints that are typically stabilised in Western music, identity, time, harmony, presence, and resolution, allowing their perceptual roles to be examined independently and in combination.

The accompanying essay does not treat the work as an illustration of theory. Instead, it reconstructs a set of aesthetic and philosophical problems that become unavoidable once the work is experienced. Through sustained dialogue with key figures in aesthetic thought, the essay clarifies how *WMO Orchestra* exposes the limits of form-based judgement, resolution-driven meaning, and authority-centred organisation.

Taken together, the work and its reflection propose a mode of aesthetic inquiry in which structure is not imposed, argued, or symbolised, but perceived under constraint. Meaning, where it persists, does so not through enforcement or closure, but through attention, memory, and residue.

Preface

This work did not begin as a theoretical project.

WMO Orchestra was assembled using minimal tools and minimal deliberation. The initial material was entered manually, note by note, using the basic piano interface available in GarageBand. Instrument assignments were made pragmatically, often based on what was readily available rather than on timbral intention. More advanced tools were deliberately not employed.

There was no attempt to optimise the result, no effort to refine expression, and no concern for polish. The procedures that shaped the work were simple and followed without aesthetic negotiation. Decisions were made quickly and, at times, indifferently.

The initial motifs themselves were also kept deliberately *non-ideal*. They often do not carry a clear tonal centre, may feel slightly "out of tune" or frictional, and may sit inside tempos that are not treated as sacred or perfectly behaved. This is not an accident of amateur production: it is part of the constraint. If the seed is too clean, it functions as a hidden authority. If the seed is slightly careless, identity can no longer rely on perfection; it must emerge through relational persistence, overlap, and listening under uncertainty.

What was unexpected was not that a piece resulted, but that the result remained compelling to listen to.

Despite the absence of expressive intent, the work does not register as careless, provisional, or merely technical. Nor does it feel autobiographical or stylistically personal. Repeated listening does not exhaust it. Instead, it invites continued attention, often in ways that exceed the composer's original interest in the act of making it.

This produced a tension that could not be ignored: the work was made by hand, yet it does not feel owned. It was assembled deliberately, yet it does not feel governed by authorial intention in the usual sense.

The essay that follows is not an attempt to justify the work after the fact, nor to elevate it through theory. It is an attempt to understand why this tension exists at all, and what it reveals about perception, structure, and listening.

I. Movement I: Phase, identity, and recognition before form

The first movement presents the listener with an immediate difficulty: something is recognisable before it is identifiable. A minimal pattern is distributed across multiple overlapping entries, each beginning at a different point in the cycle and never aligning metrically with the others. At no moment is the pattern presented in full, nor is it framed as a stable object.

Yet after some time, the listener begins to recognise that "the same thing" is occurring. This recognition does not arise from repetition in isolation, nor from thematic statement, but from recurrence across displacement. Identity is not heard *as an object* but *as a relation*.

This experience unsettles a deeply embedded aesthetic assumption: that identity requires presentation. In much of Western musical and aesthetic thought, recognition is presumed to depend on the availability of a form that can be grasped, compared, and recalled. Even when variation is present, there is usually a privileged statement that anchors identity. Movement I withholds this anchor entirely.

The listener is therefore placed in a situation where recognition precedes clarity. One senses continuity without being able to point to it. The question that arises is not "what is the motif?", but "how do I know that something is the same when I have never heard it whole?"

This problem has a clear analogue in classical aesthetic theory. In the tradition most clearly articulated by **Immanuel Kant**, aesthetic judgement presupposes the apprehension of form. Even though such judgement is subjective and reflective rather than determinate, it nonetheless relies on the availability of a form that can be contemplated as an object of experience. Recognition and judgement operate *after* form has appeared.

Movement I reverses this order. Judgement is forced to operate without a stable form. The listener cannot rely on presentation, because presentation never occurs. Instead, judgement becomes an

activity of inference under constraint. Identity is not given; it is assembled perceptually from partial, displaced instances.

Crucially, the movement does not argue that form is unnecessary. It demonstrates that form can be **distributed** rather than **centralised**. What persists across the movement is not a sound-object but a relational structure, audible only through its multiple, offset manifestations.

This is where the work departs from both classical formalism and much modernist abstraction. The form is neither clearly presented nor deliberately obscured. It is simply never made available as a whole. The listener must therefore learn to recognise identity as something that emerges from overlap rather than from statement.

The aesthetic consequence is significant. Recognition is no longer a passive response to presentation; it becomes an active, temporally extended process. The listener does not "receive" identity but gradually constructs it, often without being able to articulate how.

When the movement stops, it does so without cadence or resolution. There is no sense of completion, only the persistence of a newly acquired mode of listening. What remains is not the pattern itself, but the listener's altered expectation of how identity might appear.

The movement thus leaves a remainder that theory alone cannot settle:if identity can be recognised without ever being presented, then aesthetic judgement may not depend on form in the way it has traditionally been assumed to. Movement I does not answer this question. It renders it unavoidable.

II. Movement II: Temporal plurality and the failure of shared time

The second movement confronts the listener with a different, but equally destabilising difficulty: motion is clearly present, yet it cannot be tracked. Rather than transforming the material of the previous movement, Movement II introduces a newly instantiated minimal pattern operating under the same compositional constraints, and under the same refusal of polish. The relationship between movements is not genealogical but structural: each pattern is independently defined, slightly imperfect in its own way, yet governed by an identical rule-set. There is no dramatic acceleration or deceleration, no overt rhythmic disruption. And yet, the sense of temporal coherence begins to fracture.

What the listener encounters is a form of temporal plurality. Change is undeniable, but no single rhythmic framework accounts for it. The ear searches for a pulse, a metric centre, or a temporal reference point that can organise experience, and fails to find one that holds. Time is felt, but it is not shared.

This experience destabilises a foundational assumption in both musical practice and aesthetic theory: that time functions as a common ordering principle. In most musical contexts, even when rhythms are complex or layered, there is an implicit agreement that all events occur within a shared temporal grid. This grid allows motion to be measured, synchronised, and understood as progression.

Movement II preserves the appearance of such a grid formally, the global tempo does not change, but undermines it perceptually. Each layer experiences time locally. The listener cannot appeal to a single temporal framework to make sense of what is happening, because no such framework is perceptually adequate.

The result is not chaos, but a new form of coherence that does not depend on synchronisation. Temporal order is no longer imposed from above; it emerges from interference between concurrent durations.

This problem has long occupied philosophical discussions of time and experience. Even when time is treated as subjectively perceived rather than objectively measured, it is often assumed that experience unfolds within a unified temporal horizon. Events are meaningful because they can be placed relative to one another within that horizon.

Movement II renders this assumption unusable. The listener is placed in a situation where multiple temporal horizons coexist without collapsing into a single frame. There is no privileged "now" that organises all events. Instead, temporal experience becomes layered and relational.

Importantly, the movement does not dramatise this condition. There is no expressive emphasis on fragmentation or disruption. The sensation of temporal multiplicity arises precisely because nothing overtly signals it. The listener gradually realises that the familiar tools for tracking time no longer apply.

This is where the work enacts, rather than describes, a critical distinction: the difference between time as an abstract ordering principle and time as a lived, local phenomenon. Movement II does not claim that shared time is illusory or invalid. It demonstrates that temporal coherence can persist without it.

The aesthetic consequence is subtle but profound. Motion is experienced without direction. Change occurs without progression. The listener is no longer oriented toward a future resolution or a past reference point. Attention is held in a continuous present that is internally differentiated but not unified.

When the movement ends, it does so without rhythmic closure. There is no cadence to mark completion, no return to a stable pulse. What remains is an altered sensitivity to temporal experience, an awareness that time may be something one inhabits unevenly rather than something one follows.

The movement leaves open a question that theoretical accounts of time often struggle to resolve: If temporal coherence can be perceived without a shared temporal frame, then what, exactly, is time organising? Movement II does not answer this question. It places the listener inside it. Continuity is therefore not carried by musical material itself, but by the constraints under which material is permitted to appear.

III. Movement III: Pitch, harmony, and the suspension of arrival

The third movement presents the listener with a difficulty that is at once familiar and disorienting: harmony appears, but it does not arrive.

Pitch displacement occurs as discrete re-instantiation events, not as continuous modulation; each layer preserves its internal motion while occupying a newly indexed position in pitch space. In practical terms, this is realised by duplicating the same material at systematically shifted transpositions (visible as semitone-offset layers), so that "the same thing" persists while its pitch-identity refuses to remain fixed.

Familiar intervals emerge momentarily. Resonances suggest possible harmonic anchors. But these implications are never confirmed. As layers overlap across different registers, harmonic relationships form only to dissolve again, replaced by others that are equally provisional.

The listener thus encounters a situation in which pitch is clearly organised, yet refuses to organise itself hierarchically. There is structure, but no settlement.

This experience destabilises a long-standing assumption in musical aesthetics: that harmony functions as a directional system. In much of Western music, harmonic relations are meaningful because they imply movement toward stability, whether through resolution, return, or confirmation of a tonal centre. Even in highly chromatic or extended harmonic languages, the listener is often oriented toward some form of arrival, however delayed or obscured.

Movement III withholds this orientation entirely. Pitch relations are present only as local events. They do not accumulate toward a goal, nor do they retrospectively clarify what has already occurred. Harmony is not denied, but its role is fundamentally altered.

What the listener experiences instead is pitch as a **relational field**. Intervals do not function as steps along a path, but as temporary configurations within a larger space. No single voice carries harmonic authority. The sense of coherence arises from the consistency of relational spacing rather than from progression.

This shift has a clear theoretical analogue in critiques of teleological harmony, where the assumption that musical meaning depends on directed movement is called into question. However, where theory typically approaches this problem by negating tonal function or replacing it with alternative systems, Movement III does something more restrained. It leaves tonal implication intact, but deprives it of finality.

The listener is not confronted with dissonance as opposition, nor with atonality as rejection. Instead, they are placed in a situation where harmonic expectations are continuously generated and continuously left unfulfilled. The effect is not tension seeking release, but motion without destination.

Aesthetic judgement must therefore operate without arrival. The listener cannot evaluate the movement in terms of resolution or closure, because none is forthcoming. Meaning is located in passage rather than endpoint.

This has a significant consequence for how harmony is experienced. Rather than serving as a framework that organises time, harmony becomes something that occurs *within* time, briefly and contingently. It is no longer the force that drives the music forward, but one of several dimensions that interact locally.

When the movement stops, it does so without harmonic closure. There is no cadence, no final chord that retrospectively orders what has been heard. What remains is a heightened sensitivity to harmonic implication itself, an awareness of how quickly expectations form, and how little they need to be satisfied in order to be meaningful.

The unresolved question the movement leaves behind is not whether harmony still matters, but whether arrival has ever been as essential to musical meaning as it is often assumed to be. Movement III does not answer this question. It renders it experientially unavoidable.

IV. Movement IV: Erosion, absence, and the persistence of meaning

The fourth movement introduces a change that is immediately perceptible, even if its mechanism is not. Unlike the earlier movements, which withhold completion through displacement, suspension, or divergence, this movement alters the conditions under which the pattern can be articulated at all.

Material is not removed explicitly. Instead, successive lines are anchored to fixed points, causing the pattern to fold back onto itself.

As layers accumulate, notes begin to overlap around fixed anchoring points, interfering with and obscuring one another. What appears as loss is not the result of subtraction, but of compression. The pattern remains present, yet its ability to be fully stated progressively diminishes. No voice ever articulates the material in its entirety, not because elements are missing, but because articulation itself becomes constrained.

The listener is therefore placed in a situation where erosion is neither expressive nor accidental. Nothing is removed for effect, and nothing is withheld symbolically. The material consumes its own capacity for presentation. Yet the perceptual consequence is not simple depletion. Paradoxically, recognisability briefly intensifies.

As articulation becomes more difficult, perception sharpens. The listener becomes more attentive, not to what is present, but to what is no longer fully available. Recognition shifts away from direct auditory confirmation toward anticipation. Meaning begins to depend less on what is heard and more on what is expected to occur but does not quite arrive.

This experience challenges a deeply rooted aesthetic assumption: that meaning depends primarily on presence. Much aesthetic theory treats the artwork as a repository of perceptible content, even when fragmentation or silence is employed. In such cases, absence often functions symbolically or expressively, pointing beyond itself or standing in for something lost.

Movement IV does neither. Absence here does not signify, negate, or allude. It does not operate allegorically, nor does it invite interpretation of what has been removed. The erosion is structural rather than representational. What disappears is not material, but availability.

Mechanically, this movement treats rendering itself as a compositional operation. The chordal field is not developed through variation or thematic transformation, but repeatedly passed through a constraining process in which articulation becomes progressively less available. Information is not removed discretely; instead, overlapping anchoring points and sustained density force the material to consume its own capacity for presentation. The form is therefore produced through controlled disappearance, an imposed vulnerability in which the medium's lossiness functions as musical grammar.

The listener is not asked to interpret loss, but to continue recognising structure under conditions where full articulation is no longer possible. This decisively relocates the locus of coherence. Structure persists, but it does so through memory and anticipation rather than through direct presentation.

Theoretical discussions of absence often frame it as lack, negation, or critique. The experience of this movement suggests a different possibility: absence as a condition for intensified perception. What becomes active is not what is missing, but the listener's learned capacity to expect it.

Importantly, the movement does not collapse into indeterminacy. The underlying relational structure remains stable throughout. What changes is the degree to which that structure can be perceptually accessed. The listener's task is not to guess arbitrarily, but to recognise partially and persistently.

When the movement ends, it does so without resolution or compensation. There is no return of full articulation, no confirmation of what has been obscured. What remains is a recalibrated sense of how meaning can persist under constraint.

The question this movement leaves unresolved is fundamental: if structure can persist when its capacity for articulation is progressively eroded, then presence may not be the primary carrier of meaning. Movement IV does not answer this question. It relocates it from theory into experience.

V. Movement V: Residual coherence and response without authority

The fifth movement does not extend the procedural logic by which the earlier movements operate. Instead, it alters the conditions under which the work proceeds at all. Material is no longer introduced according to a fixed sequence of transformations, nor does it follow a progression extrapolated from earlier movements. What had previously operated as rule now gives way to response: additions occur not because a procedure demands them, but because existing relations have rendered further articulation perceptible.

The listener encounters a longer underlying sequence whose internal relations are less immediately intelligible. When heard in isolation, this material resists coherence. It does not sound "incorrect" so much as unanchored. There is no immediate basis for recognition, no clear point of entry, and no privileged configuration that asserts itself as a reference.

Coherence does not appear through clarification, but becomes perceptible only as interference persists over time. Layers overlap, decay interacts with density, and relations become perceptible not because they are clarified, but because they are sustained. The listener is no longer learning how to recognise a structure; they are recognising the conditions under which structure becomes perceptible.

This marks a decisive shift in the work. Earlier movements establish conditions under which identity, time, pitch, and absence can be perceived without central authority. In this movement, those conditions are no longer demonstrated individually. They coexist, and their interaction determines what becomes audible.

Crucially, the introduction of new material is no longer blind. It occurs in response to what has already formed. The system does not advance because a rule demands it; it advances only once accumulated sound becomes perceptually legible. Action follows context.

This has significant aesthetic consequences. Correctness is no longer a meaningful category. The question is not whether a relation conforms to an underlying structure, but whether it fits within what has already emerged. Coherence is no longer imposed or withheld; it is negotiated.

The listener's role shifts accordingly. Recognition no longer consists in tracking a pattern or anticipating a return. Instead, it consists in sensing when something belongs, when a relation stabilises not by confirmation, but by persistence.

When the instruments stop, the movement does not resolve. There is no gesture of closure, no return, no final statement. What follows is a brief silence. This silence is not an absence waiting to be filled, nor a pause that promises continuation. It is the final condition of the work.

What remains after the sound withdraws is not a theme, not a structure, and not a memory of a completed form. It is residue: the persistence of perceptual organisation after material support has ceased. *Structure* has not disappeared, but it is no longer externalised. It exists only as carried attention.

The unresolved question left by this movement is not how coherence was achieved, but whether coherence requires achievement at all. If structure can arise through context, persist through erosion, and remain perceptible after sound has ceased, then authority may never have been essential to meaning.

VI. What this work is not

Clarifying what *WMO Orchestra* is not is necessary, not as a gesture of exclusion, but as a condition for intelligibility. The work operates close to several established aesthetic and musical traditions, yet it does not belong fully to any of them. Without careful distinction, it risks being misclassified in ways that obscure its actual contribution.

The following clarifications are therefore structural rather than rhetorical.

Not expressive music

This work does not aim to express emotion, narrative, or subjective interiority. While affective responses may arise in the listener, they are not encoded, guided, or stabilised by the composition.

There is no expressive arc, no climactic release, and no intended emotional trajectory. Any sense of tension, calm, or intensity emerges as a by-product of perceptual conditions rather than as a communicative goal.

The work therefore should not be interpreted as conveying feeling, commentary, or psychological content.

Not narrative or developmental form

The five movements do not constitute a narrative progression. Although they are ordered and cumulative in effect, they do not develop material toward a resolution, synthesis, or conclusion.

Each movement establishes a distinct perceptual condition. Later movements do not complete earlier ones, nor do they retrospectively explain them. The sequence is non-teleological: nothing is fulfilled, redeemed, or resolved.

The final silence is not a conclusion in the narrative sense. It is a residue, not an ending.

Not symphonic or dialectical logic

Despite its orchestral scope, the work does not follow symphonic principles. There is no exposition, development, recapitulation, or return. There is no dialectical struggle between ideas, nor a hierarchy of themes.

Multiplicity is neither governed nor reconciled. Identity does not triumph, and opposition does not resolve. The absence of a conductor is not symbolic; it reflects the absence of an organising authority at every structural level.

Not process music

Although early movements may resemble process-based approaches, the work is not driven by transparent or self-sufficient mechanisms. The listener is not meant to grasp a rule and then hear it unfold predictably.

This distinction becomes decisive in the final movement, where material is introduced in response to accumulated conditions rather than according to a pre-declared process. The work does not reveal its mechanism as an aesthetic object.

Process is present, but it is subordinate to context.

Not indeterminate or aleatoric

The work does not rely on chance, improvisation, or performer choice. Material, relations, and constraints are fixed.

What varies is not what can happen, but when coherence becomes perceptible. The openness of the work lies in perception, not in composition.

The listener's experience is not shaped by randomness, but by sustained interaction with stable constraints.

Not minimalism (in the stylistic sense)

While the work employs minimal material, it does not pursue the stylistic aims typically associated with minimalism, such as steady pulse, repetition as surface, or hypnotic continuity.

Repetition here is not an aesthetic end. It is a condition under which perception is tested. Density, erosion, and response replace pulse and stasis as organising forces.

Minimal material does not result in minimal experience.

Not spectralism or timbral formalism

The work does not derive its structure from acoustic analysis or spectral properties, nor does it foreground timbre as the primary organising principle.

While resonance and colour play perceptual roles, they are secondary to relational structure. Timbre does not substitute for harmony, nor does sound colour become the main carrier of form.

Not symbolic or allegorical

Absence, erosion, and silence do not function symbolically. They do not stand for loss, negation, critique, or transcendence.

What is removed is not meant to be interpreted. It is meant to be perceived as missing.

Meaning does not arise through representation, but through sustained attention under constraint.

Not an illustration of theory

Finally, and critically, this work is not an application or illustration of any theoretical framework. While it enters into dialogue with philosophical and aesthetic thought, it does not seek to demonstrate or validate existing positions.

The work operates autonomously. Theory may clarify certain aspects of the experience, but it does not ground the work's legitimacy.

Closing clarification

These exclusions are not claims of novelty or opposition. They are boundary conditions. By clarifying what the work does not do, it becomes possible to describe more precisely what it *does*: establish situations in which structure, perception, and meaning interact without being enforced.

Only once these boundaries are clear can the work be placed meaningfully in dialogue with existing aesthetic and philosophical thought.

VII. How this work enters into theoretical dialogue

Having established the movements as aesthetic conditions, and having clarified what this work is not, it becomes possible to place *WMO Orchestra* in dialogue with existing aesthetic and philosophical thought without misrepresentation.

This dialogue does not proceed by analogy, illustration, or application. The work does not exemplify theories, nor does it seek confirmation from them. Instead, it **enacts perceptual situations that many theoretical traditions have attempted to describe discursively**.

The question guiding the sections that follow is therefore not: *Which theory explains this work?* but rather: *Which theoretical problems become unavoidable once one has experienced the work as it unfolds?*

Each movement introduces a specific perceptual tension:

- recognition without presentation,
- time without a shared frame,
- harmony without arrival,
- meaning without presence,
- coherence without authority.

These tensions correspond to long-standing fault lines in aesthetic and philosophical thought. However, theory typically approaches them by argument, distinction, or critique. The work approaches them by **forcing the listener to inhabit them**.

The role of theory here is thus secondary and reflective. It provides language for problems that the work has already rendered experiential. Where theory proposes distinctions, the work tests their limits. Where philosophy abstracts, the music constrains.

For this reason, the theoretical sections that follow will not be organised as a survey of influences or schools. Each section will instead:

1. Identify a specific conceptual assumption within a given tradition.
2. Show how that assumption becomes unstable when confronted with a particular movement.
3. Clarify what the work makes perceptible that the theory can only partially articulate.

This approach avoids two common errors. It does not reduce the work to a case study, nor does it treat theory as an external authority. Instead, both are allowed to operate within their respective domains: theory as discursive clarification, and the work as enacted situation.

What follows, then, is not an attempt to situate *WMO Orchestra* within a lineage for the sake of classification. It is an attempt to show how the work participates in ongoing aesthetic questions by **producing conditions that theory has historically struggled to stabilise**.

Only with this grounding in place can the dialogue proceed without collapsing either the work into theory or theory into commentary.

VIII. Aesthetic judgement without stable form: revisiting Kant through enactment

A central assumption in classical aesthetic theory, articulated most rigorously by **Immanuel Kant**, is that aesthetic judgement presupposes the apprehension of form. Even though such judgement is reflective rather than determinate, and even though it does not rely on concepts, it nonetheless operates on something that can be presented, contemplated, and held together as an object of experience.

Form, in this account, need not be simple or stable, but it must be *available*. Judgement occurs after presentation.

The difficulty introduced by *WMO Orchestra* is that this condition is systematically undermined. Across the work, and especially in Movements I and IV, form is never fully presented as an object. Yet aesthetic judgement not only remains possible, it becomes more active and, at times, more acute.

The first movement places the listener in a situation where identity is recognised before it can be identified. A minimal pattern recurs across many displaced entries, but it is never stated in isolation. There is no privileged presentation to which subsequent instances can be compared. Nevertheless, the listener begins to recognise sameness.

This experience immediately destabilises the Kantian sequence of presentation followed by judgement. Recognition occurs without prior availability of form. The listener is forced to judge *under conditions of insufficiency*. Form is inferred rather than apprehended.

Kant allows for free play between imagination and understanding, but this play still assumes something presented that imagination can range over. In Movement I, imagination must operate without such a presentation. What is grasped is not a form, but a **relational persistence** distributed across time.

The fourth movement intensifies this difficulty by introducing systematic erosion. Here, form does not merely fail to present itself fully; it is progressively withdrawn. Elements are removed in a consistent manner, and no line ever contains a complete statement. Recognition becomes dependent on memory and anticipation rather than on perception alone.

Judgement, in this context, no longer reflects on form as given, but on form as *partially absent*. The listener continues to recognise structure precisely because it is missing. Absence becomes operative.

This presents a further challenge to Kantian aesthetics. While Kant acknowledges that aesthetic judgement is not cognitive knowledge, he nonetheless treats the object of judgement as present. The experience staged by Movement IV suggests that aesthetic judgement can persist even when the object is no longer fully available, that judgement can operate on **expectation and residue**, not just on perception.

Importantly, the work does not refute Kant's account by contradiction. It does not claim that form is irrelevant, nor that judgement is arbitrary. Instead, it reveals a boundary condition of the theory: a situation in which judgement remains active even when the theory's presupposition of presentable form is no longer satisfied.

What the work enacts, then, is not an alternative aesthetic theory, but a **stress test** of aesthetic judgement. It shows that judgement can occur without stable form, without complete presentation, and without closure. In doing so, it shifts attention from form as object to form as **relational continuity under constraint**.

The unresolved question left by this encounter is not whether Kant was wrong, but whether aesthetic judgement may be less dependent on presentation than classical theory assumed. If recognition can precede identification, and if judgement can persist through erosion, then form may function not as a prerequisite for aesthetic experience, but as one of several conditions under which it becomes possible.

IX. Non-resolution without negation: Adorno and the refusal of reconciliation

In modern aesthetic theory, **Theodor W. Adorno** occupies a central position in articulating the role of non-resolution. For Adorno, the refusal of reconciliation is not merely a stylistic choice; it is an ethical and historical necessity. Modern artworks resist closure because closure would falsely affirm a world that remains unreconciled. Non-resolution functions, therefore, as critique.

This position establishes a strong link between aesthetic form and negation. Art gains its truth by *not* resolving tensions, by refusing harmony, synthesis, or affirmation. The unresolved artwork stands in opposition to the conditions that produced it.

At first glance, *WMO Orchestra* appears adjacent to this position. Across its movements, resolution is consistently withheld. There are no cadences, no returns, no final confirmations. Multiplicity is not reconciled, and identity never asserts dominance. Yet the resemblance begins to break down once the listener attends closely to how non-resolution operates in the work.

In Adorno's account, non-resolution is legible as resistance. Tension remains visible as tension. Fracture is maintained as fracture. The artwork insists on its negativity. In *WMO Orchestra*, by contrast, non-resolution is not foregrounded as refusal. It is not presented as opposition, nor is it framed as critique.

Consider Movement III, where harmonic implication is continuously generated and continuously left unfulfilled. The listener experiences motion without arrival, but this lack of arrival is not felt as denial or antagonism. There is no sense that resolution has been promised and then withheld. Instead, the work never establishes arrival as a governing expectation in the first place.

Similarly, in Movement IV, erosion removes material progressively, but the effect is not one of expressive loss or protest. Absence does not stand as negation. It operates structurally, sharpening perception rather than staging critique. The listener is not confronted with a refusal of meaning, but with a relocation of where meaning persists.

This distinction becomes decisive in Movement V. Here, coherence arises through response and accumulation rather than through synthesis or resolution. Relations stabilise contextually, not dialectically. There is no moment in which tension demands release, nor any gesture that could be read as a refusal to provide it. Coherence is negotiated, not denied.

What the work thus enacts is a form of non-resolution **without negation**. It withholds closure without positioning itself against closure. There is no expressive "no," no critical stance that demands interpretation as resistance. The absence of resolution is structural rather than oppositional.

This places *WMO Orchestra* in a position adjacent to, but distinct from, Adorno's framework. Where Adorno treats non-resolution as a mode of critique, this work treats non-resolution as a **condition of perception**. The listener is not asked to confront *contradiction*, but to operate without guarantees.

The aesthetic consequence of this difference is significant. Non-resolution no longer functions as a sign of truth-through-negativity. Instead, it becomes a way of sustaining attention without recourse to reconciliation. Meaning persists, not because conflict remains unresolved, but because coherence is never promised.

The question that emerges from this encounter is therefore not whether art must resist reconciliation, but whether resistance is necessary for non-resolution to be meaningful at all. If coherence can arise and persist without resolution, and without negation, then the critical force of non-resolution may lie less in opposition than in **non-enforcement**.

It could be that the gap between these positions cannot be bridged by argument. It can only be experienced by listening.

X. Fragment, constellation, and residue: Benjamin beyond representation

A recurring problem in aesthetic and philosophical thought concerns how meaning persists when unity is no longer available. **Walter Benjamin** approached this problem through the notion of *constellation*: meaning does not reside in an essential object, but emerges from the relations among fragments. Insight arises not through synthesis, but through arrangement.

Benjamin's concern was historical and critical. Fragments, in his account, retain traces of what has been lost, and their juxtaposition produces understanding without restoring totality. Meaning persists, but it does so without closure.

WMO Orchestra stages a related problem perceptually rather than discursively. In Movements IV and V, material is not fragmented symbolically or representationally. It is fragmented structurally. Elements are removed, relations persist, and coherence becomes dependent on how fragments interact over time.

Movement IV introduces erosion in a systematic manner. Successive lines are anchored at fixed points, causing articulation to compress and fold rather than subtracting material directly. The listener is not confronted with isolated fragments arranged for interpretation, but with a structure that continues to operate despite material loss. The fragments do not stand for something else; they function directly within the perceptual field.

This distinction matters. In Benjamin's work, fragments often invite interpretation as historical traces or allegorical remains. In *WMO Orchestra*, fragments do not point beyond themselves. They are not signs. Their significance lies entirely in how they continue to participate in a relational structure.

As erosion progresses, recognition becomes increasingly dependent on expectation and memory. The listener carries forward what is no longer present. Meaning is not reconstructed retrospectively; it is sustained prospectively. This shifts the role of the fragment from representational unit to **operative residue**.

Movement V extends this condition further. Here, the work no longer removes material according to a fixed scheme. Instead, new material enters in response to accumulated interference. Coherence

emerges contextually, not through restoration or synthesis. The longer underlying sequence resists immediate intelligibility, and stability arises only when relations persist long enough to be perceived.

This produces a situation in which meaning is no longer anchored in objects, fragments, or their arrangement, but in **residual organisation**. Structure exists as a condition that continues after material support has been partially or fully withdrawn.

The brief silence following the final movement is crucial in this regard. It is not a pause that frames the work, nor a void that demands interpretation. It is the point at which residue becomes fully perceptual. The listener continues to organise experience even in the absence of sound.

Benjamin's notion of constellation allows for meaning without totality, but it often remains tied to interpretation. The work enacted here goes further by eliminating the need for interpretive mediation. The listener does not read fragments as signs; they experience organisation persisting beyond presentation.

What this encounter reveals is a boundary of Benjamin's framework. Constellation explains how meaning can arise from fragments, but it presupposes that fragments are *given*. *WMO Orchestra* demonstrates that meaning can persist even when fragments themselves begin to disappear.

The unresolved question that remains is whether meaning depends on fragments at all, or whether it can subsist purely as **residual perceptual organisation**. Benjamin articulates the problem historically. The work stages it temporally.

XI. Listening without indeterminacy: Cage and the limits of openness

Few figures have more decisively reoriented modern listening than **John Cage**. Cage's work displaced expressive intention and compositional authority, asking listeners to attend to sound as it occurs rather than as it signifies. Indeterminacy, chance procedures, and the refusal of hierarchy were not merely compositional techniques, but ethical commitments: a withdrawal of control in favour of openness.

At first encounter, *WMO Orchestra* may appear to share this orientation. Across its movements, no single voice governs the whole, no expressive arc is imposed, and listening becomes the primary site where coherence is negotiated. Yet this proximity conceals a decisive difference.

Cage's openness depends on indeterminacy. By relinquishing control over outcomes, the work invites any sound to matter equally. Meaning arises from attention rather than from structure. The listener is asked to accept contingency as a condition of experience.

WMO Orchestra does not operate in this way. Nothing in the work is left to chance. Material, relations, and constraints are fixed. What is open is not what can happen, but **when coherence becomes perceptible**. The listener's task is not to accept unpredictability, but to sustain attention under constraint.

This difference becomes clear when considering the role of listening. In Cage, listening is receptive and non-preferential. One listens without expectation, allowing events to occur as they will. In *WMO Orchestra*, listening is necessarily active and discriminating. The listener must track persistence across phase displacement, temporal divergence, pitch drift, and erosion. Attention is trained rather than neutralised.

Movement I requires recognition without presentation. Movement II demands orientation without a shared temporal frame. Movement III suspends harmonic arrival. Movement IV transfers responsibility for coherence to memory and expectation. Movement V removes rule-based progression altogether, replacing it with contextual response. At no point is structure abandoned; it simply ceases to announce itself.

This marks the limit of Cagean openness. Where Cage sought to remove intention so that sound could be heard as sound, *WMO Orchestra* removes authority so that structure can be perceived as emergent rather than imposed. These are adjacent but incompatible gestures.

The work therefore proposes a different model of listening: one in which openness arises not from indeterminacy, but from **non-enforcement**. Structure is present, but it does not command. Coherence appears, but it is not guaranteed.

The unresolved question that follows is whether the ethical and aesthetic force of listening truly depends on chance at all. If attention can be intensified through constraint, erosion, and residue, then openness may be achieved not by abandoning structure, but by withdrawing its authority.

Conclusion and reflections

One of the most persistent surprises of *WMO Orchestra* is that it remains enjoyable to listen to, despite the absence of care traditionally associated with composition. The work was not laboured over. It was not refined, defended, or protected. And yet, it does not feel disposable. Across the work, musical identity is not preserved through material continuity but through constraint continuity; recurrence is rule-based rather than thematic.

This challenges a deeply held assumption about authorship and value: that care, intention, and personal investment are necessary conditions for meaningful aesthetic experience. In this case, meaning appears to arise not from expressive commitment, but from constraint, persistence, and relational stability.

Equally unexpected is the distance the work maintains from its maker. Although it was constructed manually and deliberately, it does not register as personal expression. It feels other than the self that assembled it. This is not alienation in a negative sense, but a form of autonomy: the work seems to operate according to conditions that exceed individual intention.

This distance has practical consequences. The work can be revisited without preciousness. It can be listened to repeatedly without the need to defend it. Interest in it does not stem from attachment, but from curiosity. It invites further listening not because it demands affirmation, but because it continues to organise perception in ways that remain active.

The theoretical sections of this essay should be read in this light. They are not claims of alignment or authority. They function as a form of questioning, almost a conversational appeal, directed at thinkers who have grappled seriously with similar problems. The engagement with aesthetic theory is motivated less by confidence than by respect: an acknowledgement that these questions have been approached rigorously before, and that the present work touches the same fault lines through a different medium.

In this sense, the essay is not a conclusion to the work, but a continuation of its inquiry. It does not explain the work away, nor does it stabilise its meaning. Instead, it reflects the same posture the work itself adopts: attentiveness without enforcement, curiosity without resolution.

If *WMO Orchestra* demonstrates anything, it is that structure does not require authority, meaning does not require closure, and listening does not require intention to be profound. What remains, after sound withdraws and theory exhausts itself, is not an answer, but a condition worth returning to.

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